

## Jains Yaksa Worships in Tamil Nadu

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### ABSTRAC

Lakshmi's form and worship emanates from a former Yakshi worship". In almost every century of their existence in Tamil Nadu, at least one event seems to show bias against the community. When she saw him approaching them in the forest, afraid that he might harm her, she killed herself, leaving her children and thus became a Yakshi. When the children saw her in this form, they were frightened. She told them she would assume the human form when visiting them. The story of the Jaina Yakshi or Ambica and her antecedents first appears in the Sripuranam. Incidentally, her story almost lives in the narratives of the Tamil Jain women. After Seivakacinatamani, this is the most famous Jain story among Tamil Jains. Now Ambica was the wife of a Brahmin named Somasarama from north Girinagara, who had two sons and a woman who helped Avon in the house. She visits her children. Thus, Somasarana asks her how Yakshi forms. Ambica is also called Dharmadevi, and incidentally, she has a shrine dedicated to her in the Jain temple Jaina Kanchi. The Jain believes this image was originally part of the Kamaksi temple complex at Kanchipuram which they believe was originally a Jain temple converted during the time of Adi Sankara. Ambica is portrayed as holding a mango leaf, a child, and a staff member. She is supposed to be a powerful deity in her own right and a giver of boons.

### Introduction

The Tamil Jains Yaksa initially worshipped "village goddesses, later incorporated by major religions as guardian deities or protection deities to attract communities to their religion through their nature of worship. Lakshmi's form and worship emanates from a former Yakshi worship". Almost in every century of their existence in Tamil Nadu, there seems to be at least one event that shows bias against the community in some form or the other, even if there is, simultaneously, support from various quarters<sup>1</sup>. Marginalization of a community and its traditions happened over a period, gradually, at subtle and apparent levels. The Tamil Jain strongly expresses this sense of marginalization. There was a statue of Mahavira at the temple entrance, and it seemed to be in worship. He was struck and asked an old Mantra about the old man who regarded the deity as Ammansvami, their original family deity Kuladevathai. He narrated the story of their clan and their organs. Their ancestors came from South Arcot, Manjakuppam. A king asked for a girl's hand to groom their community in marriage. They were not interested in the clan leader's house. They tied a dog to a post, left a note for the ruler on a Plam leaf that village that night, and settled near Madurai<sup>2</sup>. The similarity is in the story of the Jain tradition. Even at the metaphorical level, it is in anguish that this story does not have any mention in the works on Jaina remember, recount. One tries to locate the story within the question of the Tamil Jain identity under threat and their perception of the other community closest to them in attitudes and perceptions on certain day habits, the nir- puci saiva Vellalars. Or perhaps this story has more to it than the persecution of Jain. In that sense, it needs to be located within the Nayaka rule and changes in that period. So, they see everything through a mirror of being victimized and persecuted, or it may also be seen as something that political and economic conditions added to the social attitude towards the Jain by the Nayaks ruler who was closer to the Saiva tradition<sup>3</sup>. There have been times in history when economics and political excises combined with social prejudices and bias against a section, caste, or community. The conflict within the agrarian order is also economic and political excises combined with social prejudices and bias in a financial context in which one wishes to place the Tamil Jain agriculturists. Indeed, it is not merely in terms of the Jain religion that the Tamil Jain related to the broader society. There are economic and other communities; one's contention is that these aspects are missing from Jain's studies not to see the contesting for economic, political, or other benefits<sup>4</sup>. Persecution must

be seen as a Phenomenon layered against all these levels of dissatisfaction as a community. One's contention is that these aspects are missing from Jain's studies, and one should not see them contesting for economic, political, or other benefits. And continue to date their identity as an independent community. In terms of looking are economic and other factors symbolizing marginalization of the community, it may help to mention a few stories that Mayilai Sini Venkataswamy refers to. "A story in the Periyapuranam talks about Tiruvottiyur. A Saiva planted a male toddy tree<sup>5</sup>. A few Jains questioned him if this male tree could transform into a female tree. They questioned Gnansambandar, who Sang a Patikam, and before dawn, the tree transformed into a female tree. The Jains fled that village. The Tiruvottiyir Siva temple had frescoes showing the impeachment of Jains" Again, Tiruvarur Tirukkolam is a tank feeding 18 acres. The Periyapuranam mentions that the Tandiatikal tank was small, surrounded by Jain land and river banks. This Saiva wanted to make it bigger by becoming the Jain settlements. Sekkilar mentions that Siva appeared in the king's dream to command the destruction of the Jain settlements at this place"<sup>6</sup>. Kolamas and Agraharamas cluster settlements are rare and very few. This kind of cluster around temples, irrigated land and tank networks was limited and revolved around the temple of Bhakti worship. Who victimized the Tamil Jain? When a community is amid pressure and cannot confront it, it is perhaps easier to succumb. The conversion of Jains to Saivism, going by the nir puce national story, may have been partly one of fear and partly to protect their interests and to be part of a tradition that promised to promote their interests or protect them.<sup>7</sup>

Modern scholarship writing as representatives of Tamil Jain tradition, the issues of Jains with a rightful share, as participants and partakers of the standard history of Tamilakam is essential. It is not just about the history of religions, literature, language, and political history. This scholarship comes from nationalistic and political history. This scholarship comes from nationalistic, at times, liberal, enlightened discourse and a sense of belonging to a larger universal Tamil Tradition and Culture; Sripal seems to tackle the Jain identity question both by resorting to editing and publishing books keeping an acute sense of the trends in Tamil Literary criticism about Jain works organizing talks and oration on Jain literary texts as well as by engaging with state and legislation<sup>8</sup>. In the colonial period, it was getting the colonial administration to pan copies of a supposedly abusive record on Jain, while post-independence, it is to companion for the legislation on banning animal sacrifice in temples of Tamil Nadu. However, the discourse on sacrifice was very different from the Saivite and Brahmanical discourse. It resolved around the opinion that these rituals were instruments of oppression created by the Brahmins, misleading the lower castes, and were, in the first place, part of a system that helped create and sustain the interests of a particular caste. This entire campaign focused on the Hindu temples in several villages in TamilNadu.<sup>9</sup>

#### **Status of Women in Jainism**

The story of the Jaina Yaksi or Ambica and her antecedents first appears in the Sripuranam. Incidentally, her story almost lives in the narratives of the Tamil Jain women. After Seivakacinatamani, this is the most famous Jain story among Tamil Jains. Now Ambica was the wife of a Brahmin named Somasarama from north Girinagara, who had two sons and a woman who helped Avon in the house. One day, during the death ceremony, he took a bath in the river with his relatives. In the meantime, a Jain monk passed by his house and Ambica gave him some food.<sup>65</sup> When Somasarama returned and learnt of this, he was furious and called her unchaste. Significantly rejected at this, she left the house and sought refuge with the Jain mendicant in the forest with her two children<sup>10</sup>. Meanwhile, Somasarama, repentant of his action, went looking for her. When she saw him approaching them in the forest, afraid that he might harm her, she killed herself, leaving her children and thus became a Yaksi. When the children saw her in this form, they were frightened. She told them she would assume the human form when visiting them. One day, when she is visiting her children thus, Somasarana asks her how Yaksi forms. When she does, he is so terrified that he kills himself. He is reborn as the lion that becomes Ambica's vehicle. She goes on to become the protective deity of Neminaatha Tirthankara.<sup>11</sup> Ambica is also called Dharmadevi, and incidentally, she has a shrine dedicated to her in the Jain temple Jaina Kanchi. The Jain believes this image was originally part of the Kamaksi temple complex at Kanchipuram, which they believe was originally a Jain temple converted during the time of Adi Sankara. Ambica is portrayed as holding a mango leaf, as well as a child and a staff member. She is supposed to be a powerful deity in her own right and a giver of boons. Karaikkal Ammaiyyar, the Saiva saint has an almost similar tale. Her story is narrated in Sekkilar's Periyapuranam in Tiruniraccarukkam.<sup>12</sup> She belonged to a merchant family, and she was called Punitavati. She married Aramadattan, the son of a judge in Nagapattinam. Her friends once gave him two mangoes. Meanwhile, a Saiva saint passed by their house, and Punitavati gave him one of the Mangoes. Paramadattan came home for dinner and ate the one mango that was left. Grinding it sweet, he asked her for another mango. Paramadattan found this even more delicious than the first one. He asked for another, and she produced the mango

using the same method. Now, he was terrified as he thought she possessed supernatural divine powers. Hence, he abandoned her and married another woman. Punitavati rejected and yearned to become a Pey, went to Kailasa, and Siva gave her the name Ammaiyyar.<sup>13</sup>

Now, in the above two stories, what is interesting is that both the housewives turn into supernatural beings, Yaksi and Pay; in both cases, the women treat a person from the social and religious order. Punitavati, a Jain to a Saiva saint, and Ambica, a Brahmin, a Jain monk. In both cases, this association is with divinity at some level. In the case of Karaikal, the concept is expected in the Villuppattu genre, especially in what black burn called "death stories", where the woman, after death, usually "goes to Kailasa, receives boons from Siva, returns to earth as a defined figure."<sup>14</sup>

In highlighting these cases, one is directing attention to the basic standard folk layer these stories take from, only to assume a meaning different from what may have been originally intended. The standard layer is significant. Women were wrong in the same way in their domestic lives, assuming a form above normal, almost nearing godhood, or a state of higher existence, which seems to be the standard larger narrative of the period. Organized religions were talking about these wandering prevalent tales<sup>15</sup>. The Saiva tradition gave bhakti to the Punitavati story; Nilakeci would be ordained into the proselytizing mission of the Jain Ambica, become the protecting deity of Nemi Tirthankara, and so on. If there is something unresolved, however, in all these stories, it is the question, perhaps, of sexuality.

This could be translated as the fear element that comes along with the singleness of these women, abandoned as they are by their husbands. They are thus confined to a de-sexed image, curbed and imprisoned, as it were, to an image of the philosopher, saint (Karaikkal), Yaksi (Ambica) or a Pey-goddess (Mari)<sup>16</sup>. In the case of such women characters as Nili, they would remain wanderers, in a sense, on the fringes, and their dominion would be the stretch, which is a no man's land, both literally and metaphorically between two villages or towns and a village and so forth.

Incidentally, Yaksi worship, according to some scholars, is a contribution of Jainism to Tamil Nadu, more so because of the concept of the Yaksi as protecting the deity of a Tirthankara. However, it can also be seen as an incorporation of the local goddess cults into Jain cosmogony. Of course, the debate about what happened earlier is not one's aim here<sup>17</sup>. The worship of Yaksi or Ambica Dharumadevi is supposed to be the older of the other Yaksis propitiated in the Jain temples in Tamil Nadu, also because the Tirthankara Neminatha has more temples dedicated to him and Ambica is his Yaksi. Interestingly, this Villuppattu is also performed in the summer month in the Icakkiamman Koil at Muppandal, a village in the North Arcot district, a Jain stronghold<sup>18</sup>. One may also point out that of all the Yaksis, whose story is more popular with Tamil Jain women. This version begins with the duty to various deities, Subrahmanya, Tirumala, Mahalakshmi, Paramasivan, Parvathi, Saraswathi, and the Sages, in that order. This version is performed at the Ekambaramatha temple at Kanchipuram and is more elaborate than the Villuppattu version. In the text, there is also a movement of pay for women of this world, such as Jain nuns. If one looks at stories such as that of Karaikkal Ammaiyyar, she is still referred to as the pay of Karikkal. Being a woman and a housewife, she cannot be a poet in her everyday bearings. Giving her that pay nests to construct those eulogies to Siva<sup>19</sup> was easier. A saint poet, she would still be referred to as pay, a woman deft with words that cannot but have been defined in terms of an extraordinary, extra-normal concept. Thus, Avvaiyyar also becomes an aged woman in her prime by a miracle. Similarly, Karaikkal Ammaiyyar and her associations with hair town, shedding clothes, and walking on her head also given some fearful images. These women, who sang or wrote or had extraordinary qualities, are not perceived as being with the ordinary course of affairs. They had to be elevated and condemned to extra human attributes and associations. However, the Jaina story subverts this tendency differently.

This probably regresses to the conquest of Kali, whom Siva probably accepted as his consort as Vandarkuzhali<sup>20</sup>. At one time, the Kali temple of Pazhayannur must have been a well-known place where animal sacrifices were offered to Kali. Due to Jain influences, this Kali temple was converted into a place of worship according to the Jain doctrine of Ahimsa. This section is also essential for its most extended debate on the authorship of tradition, which distinguishes the Jain tradition from that of the Brahmanical. That textual tradition for Jain almost always Jains an author and an authorial context. Nothing is left to the sphere of ambivalence and myth-making<sup>21</sup>. The genesis of the work, or the author, is always mentioned. However, there is a kind of supremacy of the text over the author and the text highlighting the fundamentals of the Jain doctrine, and the author becomes merely the instrument for achieving this more significant purpose. In this sense, the Brahmanical tradition also gives an overwhelming position to the text or treatise over the author.<sup>22</sup>

But in the case of the Vedas, the primordality of the Vedas is the quintessence. That such a text could have

had this world, the author would have diminished the idea that became the basis for building a system of upholders and receptacles of the tradition, namely, the Brahmans, who alone could render the primordial text meaningful to ordinary men and women of this world, though an entire paraphernalia of rites and practices. The author thus both liberated and bound her, at the same time, to a life of austerity and metaphysical contemplation, elevating and desexualizing her while not worshipping her.<sup>23</sup> At the level of a text and a character within the Tamil cultural context, a figure cannot seem to fit either in the breast or tooth goddess or village cults, the latter becoming part of the Puranic complex. Here is a legend, a character, that was co-operated but into an entirely alternate scheme, the significance of which lies in interpreting a Pey into an affirmative one. However, the story's movement before its Jain encounter is equally vital in traditions such as the Villuppattu and Tevaram hymns. In re-imaging a popular idiom lays the meaning of Nilakeci within the larger historical reality of change and response to change in the Tamil Jain Community. Also, the Jaina author of this text realized they needed to incorporate a widely known and feared village, a marginal figure and acknowledge the same in propagating the Jaina faith.<sup>24</sup>

### **Jaina Epigraphs**

Tamil Jains, one was struck with their sense of history and their place in it. Many of the villages have a long past, and the Tamil Jaina living there also shared that long past through several generations. There was a case of the shared history of their villages. But again, not all of this history was about the oldest of the Inscriptions being found in their temple or the oldest of the temples being found in their village.<sup>25</sup> Their history was also layered. There was immediate and the usual history of the longer time spans and a hoary past. And some myths and stories defined them. They did not define themselves by invoking past recorded inscriptions. Their history was about their villages and their importance in the more extensive Tamil Jain history or literature that they also define as the history of the Tamil Jain. And these histories were not necessarily reflected in their records. However, where the inscriptional records made a difference and gave them a sense of living traditions, they invoked mention of their village in such an inscription. If it was found in their town or its vicinity.<sup>26</sup>

Before moving further, a point or two more about the general pictures that emerged from the interactions with the community, which is related to its history. It is based on rootedness and the sanction gained from rootedness, somewhere similar over a long period. Conceptually, inscriptional records are, again, rooted in a place for an extended period and gain historical sanction. The only difference is that the inscriptions were committed to visible and tangible writings. The dialogues with the community with Tamil Jain Community, more so not having that advantage of hard evidence, have the impending possibility of being seen as historical. The only point is that not all that is written in the inscriptions reveals the entire not-so-linear movement of history<sup>27</sup>. There are several questions yet to be resolved. Each village has its history, local sacred circulatory space, and sacred centres they visit. Each village perceives itself as a critical player in Tamil Jain history. Thus, within the pan, Tamil Jain is a localized history of each village associated with a spectacular event in Tamil Jain history. A continuous history in most of the Tamil Jain villages have historical records from their temples, manuscripts, inscriptions in temples showing patronage from some section of the royalty, and colonial records.<sup>28</sup> The missing part is the narratives of the community. A living community such as this needs to locate their history as an essential part of the other histories recorded through sources such as inscriptions, etc. It is rare to find a long, continuous tradition with all the records a historian could find. Yet few community narratives are used to reconstruct the history of Jainism in Tamil Nadu. Similarly, each village has its own story of it add vocation with the Matha at Cittamur mutal mariyatai concept variously, people of Peramandur, Vilukkam and Tayanur claim this mariyatai<sup>83</sup>. In each of these different versions, the common motifs would be the importance of the village firstly, as an essential factor in the Tamil Jaina history; secondly, the persecution and their role in affirming the Tamil Jaina identity; third, the notion of mutual mariyatai a very Tamil, idiom for gaining sanctity. Why focus on the Tamil Jaina essentially as a community? In writing the history of what became the overwhelming paradigm, history writing also reinforces that overwhelming paradigm.<sup>29</sup> Even when critically assessed. There is a need to look at that which was not, or could never be, or was not allowed to be a paradigm worth reckoning if it was soon silenced in a myriad ways temple, patronage. Bhakti, and later Carnatic music, make for a complete picture. Is it not only an erroneous reading of the Jaina community in the Indian historical context but also wrong historically? One has referred to the colonial records wherein the Jain returned their castes as Jain and at Jains talking recourses to the legal system to prove themselves Jain and non-Hindu. Before moving to the Tamil Jain villages, community narratives and inscriptional records were two historical sources. A brief history of early Jain in epigraphy in Tamilakam may be included here.<sup>30</sup>“In the records of the Chola regime and also the later Pandya rulers, covering the period of 9<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> centuries C.E. Palliccandam grants figure frequently

in a considerable number in almost all parts of the Tamil Country besides these Palliccandam grants of Jain ownership; there were in exits ace other specific endowments which appear to have been the exclusive property belonging to the community of the heads of the Jain ascetic orders.

### Conclusion

Tamil Jain Community uses only Tamil as a language, and the community traces its antiquity in terms of Tamil and the Brahmi script. in that sense, the importance of the Tamil Brahmi records, the Tamil Jaina seem to keep track of following closely every news associated with these records. The inscriptions of the rock-cut caves and natural caverns are somewhere more important to the community in establishing its antiquity and identity related to the language Tamil, which is Taimoli, and the temple inscriptions only figure in their narratives when it comes to establishing the nature of big-time support for their doctrine and subsequently, changes made in their doctrines.

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