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## THE CONTRIBUTION OF JAINS TO TAMIL LITERATURE

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### ABSTRACT

Jains emphasize the commandment of ahimsa (non-violence) in their literary works. All their works centre around virtuous living, control of the senses, avoidance of carnal pleasures and aiming for liberation from the cycle of birth and death. Jain literature in general is set in a didactic tone and Jain authors, a majority of them ascetics, always took care that their writings were accessible to a considerable mass of people. The following account though brief, is meant to help assess the part the Jains [samanars] played in the literary history of the Tamil country.

The contribution of Jains to Tamil begins with their gift of script to the Tamil language. The unassailable proof of this is the occurrence of a number of Jain Tamil-Brahmi and Vattezhththu inscriptions. The antiquity of the relationship between Jainism and Tamil provides valuable data for the study of the early phase of Jainism in the Tamil country, apart from being important sources for the early history of Tamil society and language. The classical dignity and literary superiority which the Tamil language has reached are due to the pioneering work of Jain authors. The contribution made by Jains to Tamil literature is illustrated briefly below.



**KEYWORDS :** Jains emphasize , Tamil country , classical dignity and literary superiority.

### INTRODUCTION

Jains emphasize the commandment of ahimsa (non-violence) in their literary works. All their works centre around virtuous living, control of the senses, avoidance of carnal pleasures and aiming for liberation from the cycle of birth and death. Jain literature in general is set in a didactic tone and Jain authors, a majority of them ascetics, always took care that their writings were accessible to a considerable mass of people. The following account though brief, is meant to help assess the part the Jains [samanars] played in the literary history of the Tamil country.<sup>1</sup>

The contribution of Jains to Tamil begins with their gift of script to the Tamil language. The unassailable proof of this is the occurrence of a number of Jain Tamil-Brahmi and Vattezhththu inscriptions. The antiquity of the relationship between Jainism and Tamil provides valuable data for the study of the early phase of Jainism in the Tamil country, apart from being important sources for the early history of Tamil society and language. The classical dignity and literary superiority which the Tamil language has reached are due to the pioneering work of Jain authors. The contribution made by Jains to Tamil literature is illustrated briefly below.<sup>2</sup>

### 1. SILAPPATHIKARAM :

Silappathikaram is an important Tamil classic. Its author, Illangoadigal, a Jain ascetic, was originally a Chera prince. As a literary work, Silappathikaram is held in high esteem by the lovers of Tamil. Although

written by a Jain ascetic, the work keeps a balanced approach to all religious faiths with a moralistic undertone pointing to Jainism.

Regarded as one of the greatest achievements of the Tamil genius, *Silappathikaram* is a poetic rendition with details of Tamil culture, varied religions, and the arts of dance and music. The epic vividly describes the Tamil society of the period, its cities, the people's religious and folk traditions and their gods.

This chapter contains 7 cantos and each of them is made up of several sub-divisions called *kaathais* [narrative sections of the chapters]. Thus the story involves the three Tamil kingdoms of the ancient era, which were ruled by the Chola, Pandyan and Chera dynasties.

Through his immortal *Silappathikaram*, *Ilango Adigal* conveys three messages to the reader; The truth in itself will punish even the king, a woman with high moral and intellect will be respected by all, and one has to pay one's acts past and present; one's acts will certainly yield their results on oneself.<sup>3</sup>

## 2. SEEVAKASINTHAMANI:

The epic *Seevakasinthamani* is considered one of the greatest Tamil literary monuments and one of the most important contributions made by Jains to Tamil literature. Its author was the Jain ascetic *Thiruththakadevar*. This monumental poetic work is the first built with 13 sections or *illambagams* containing 3147 verses in *viruththammetre*. *Sivakasinthamani* is also known as *Mananool* or "Book of marriages" since *Jeevakan*, the hero of the epic, marries eight princesses under different circumstances. The story revolves around the hero *Seevakan* who through his valour and virtues, rises to become King, only to renounce his kingdom to attain eternal bliss by contemplation on the teachings of the *Jinas*.

## 3. VALAIYAPATHI:

*Valaiyapathi* is a Tamil Jain work placed in the category of the five major epics, along with *Silappathikaram*, *Manimegalai*, *Seevakasinthamani* and *Kundalakesi*. It is not available in full but some of its verses, quoted in other literary works and commentaries, have survived. Currently 72 stanzas of the epic have been recovered from various secondary sources. The principles of Jainism such as rejection of sensual pleasures, embracing asceticism, disapproval of meat eating, etc., are found in these verses. *Valaiyapathi* is dated to the 9<sup>th</sup> century BC.<sup>4</sup>

## 4. SOOLAMANI:

*Soolamani* is authored by the Jain ascetic *Tholamozhidevar* who lived in the late 9<sup>th</sup> and early 10<sup>th</sup> century BC. Even a cursory analysis of the literary quality, style and poetic excellence of the *Soolamani* leads one to consider it on par with the *Seevakasinthamani*. *Soolamani* fulfills all the requirements of a great epic, although it is traditionally classified among the major epics. It comprises 12 cantos containing 2131 quatrains of different types of *vritta* meter. It is based on the life of the first *Vasudeva*, *Thivittan* [*Triprstha* in Sanskrit], one of the previous births of *Mahavira* as described in the "Mahapurana of *Acharya Jinasena*, and also in the "Sreyamsanthapurana" in the *Sripuranam*. Though the author has chosen the main story from the Jain text, *Soolamani* is considered as an important source book on various aspects of Jain philosophy.

## 5. NEELAKESI:

*Neelakesi* is one of the five minor Tamil epics. More precisely, it is in the nature of a treatise on logic. Its author is a Jain but his name is not known. This epic revolves around a lady Jain ascetic *Neelakesi* involved in philosophical debates with disputants of other creeds. The author has adopted the method of philosophical discourse, dialogue and debate to upload the tenets of Jainism. The epic is made up of 10 chapters and 894 stanzas. It has been dated to the second half of the 10<sup>th</sup> century BC. Although the name of the author of this work is not known, an excellent commentary by the highly venerable *Jinakanchi Jain Acharya Mallisenavamana* is available.<sup>5</sup>

**6.UDHAYANAKUMARAKAVIYAM:**

Udhayanakumarakaviyam vividly describes the story of Udayanan, the King of Kausambi, capital of the Vatsa Kingdom and his son Naravahanathaththan .its Jain author is not known . The invocation verses praise the 22<sup>nd</sup>JinaNeminatha. The work has 369 verses assigned in 6 larger sections. The first part narrates the storyofUdayanan and second part naravahanathan’s a series of political, military, magical, and romantic adventures. With the help of Udayanakumaarakaviyam the grand old tamil laureate U.Ve. Swaminathalyer published the full story of Udayanan called Udayanansaritham.

**7. NAGAKUMARAKAVIYAM:**

Nagakumarakaviyam consists of 5 sargas and 170 verses. The story describes the birth, heroic deeds, love affairs and eventual renunciation and liberation of Nagakumaran. The story is simple and interesting. It was told by the chief preceptor Gauthama to the king of MagathaSrinika, the foremost lay disciple of the JinaMahavira.<sup>6</sup>

**8.THIRUKURAL:**

The immortal Jain literary work Thirukural is said to be two thousand years old [around the first century BC.] and is sometimes ascribed by Jains to the great Jain teacher Kundakunda. But the historical ground for this is rather weak, to say the least. Thirukkural is an exposition of the fundamental principle of Jainism, Ahimsa, in its implications, ethical, social and economic.Different views have been expressed, claims are made regarding the religion of its author. But the opening chapter of invocation to the first Thirthankara, Adinatha, and important Jain doctrines relating to religion and ethics that constitute the basis for various chapters unambiguously demonstrate that Thirukkural is the priceless gift of Jainism to mankind. Containing 133 chapters in three parts, Aram, porul, inbam, the Thirukkural has a panacea for all ills of human society.<sup>7</sup>

**9. PAZHAMOZHI NAANOORU:**

PazhamozhiNanooru, a book of proverbs written by Munduraiyaraiyanar, a Jain king and feudatory of the Pandyan ruler, is another didactic compilation that was in vogue during the last Sangam period. The last line of each of its 400 venbasends with a proverb. For example, ‘the frog brings its own destruction by its croaking’. The book attempts to bring about a drastic change in man’s attitude and perception of life, from the interest in war and love, to ethical matters and contemplation. The proverbs contained in PazhamozhiNanooru help in understanding the ancient Tamil civilization.

**10. JIVA-SAMBODHANAI:**

.Jiva- Sambodhanai [Address to the soul] by DevendraMunivar is a metrical Tamil version of a Jain Sanskrit treatise. It contains answers by Ganadhara Gautama, Mahavira’ s chief disciple, to the questions of Srenika, the foremost follower of VardhamanaThirthankara and King of the Magadha Empire , on the twelve cardinal topics of repeated recollection. It contains 550 verses, mostly in venba meter and some in Viruththappa, Kalippa and Agavalpaa meters. Some parts are also in prose from in Manipravala. As this work preaches the twelve contemplation which are essential for emancipation of the life Principle, it is called JivaSambodhanai.<sup>8</sup>

**11.THIRIKADUGAM:**

Thirikadugam was composed by Nallathanar and contains 100 verses. In each verse, the author points out importance of the three virtuous principles for a happy life, like the three important ingredients which in the combination from a good medicine for health; ginger, pepper , and thippili [long pepper] .

**12. NEELAKESI:**

Neelakesi, one of the five minor Tamil epics, is the only Tamil literary work which can be called treatise on logic. It is named after the lady Jain ascetic Neelakesi, who is the character in the work. Neelakesi employs in a splendid way in philosophical debates with disputants of other philosophical systems. The author of the work is a Jain but his name is not known; an excellent commentary by the highly venerable Jinakanchi Jain Acharya MallisenaVamana [14<sup>th</sup> century] is available. The author of Neelakesi has adopted the method of philosophical discourse, dialogue and debate to uphold the tenets of Jainism.<sup>9</sup>

**13. THIRUNUTRANTHATHI:**

Thirunutranthathi, author by Avirothiazhvar, is a work of devotional literature in the prabhandham style. The anthathi is a form of poetic composition where the last word in the previous stanza becomes the first and the leading word in the next stanza. Anthathi means 'the end and the beginning'. Thirunutranthathi contains 100 verses and is a soul-stirring work addressed to the 22<sup>nd</sup> Thirthankara Neminatha of Mylapur. In ancient times a Jain temple dedicated to Neminatha known as the Arugan temple used to stand near the beach at Mylapur. It is no longer in existence.

**14. THIRUKALAMBAGAM:**

Thirukalambagam is a devotional work by a Jain ascetic, Uthicithevar. It emphasizes the importance of right belief, right knowledge and right conduct [the three gems] for an individual's spiritual emancipation leading to total liberation from the unending cycle of birth and death. The description of the 12 repeated contemplations in lucid verses is a notable feature of Thirukalambagam.<sup>10</sup>

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