



**LEMURIA RESEARCH FORUM (LRF) KANYAKUMARI**

**MUSLIM ARTS COLLEGE**

Thiruvithancode, Kanyakumari, Tamilnadu, India.

**THIRD INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE**



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This is to certify that *Dr/Mr/Mrs/MS* .. **Dr.A. SHAHILA**..... **BANU, Assst. Professor** of **MUSLIM ARTS COLLEGE**..... participated in the Third International Conference of Lemuria

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..... **THE OLDEST INSCRIPTION AT MANGULAM**.....

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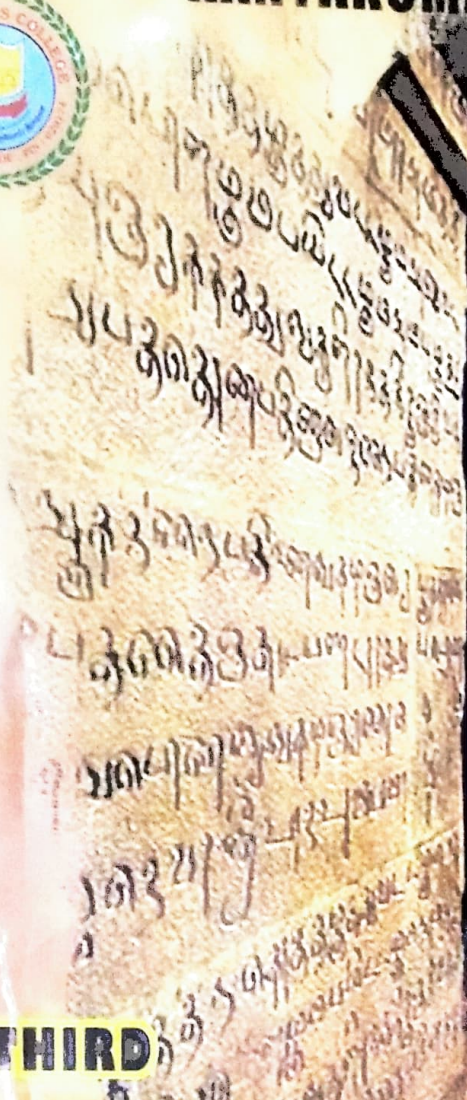
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REVELATIONS OF  
EPIGRAPHIC  
EXCAVATIONS



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## THE OLDEST INSCRIPTION AT MANGULAM

(Paper Presented to the 3<sup>rd</sup> International seminar organized by the LRF Kanyakumari, Muslim Arts College, Thiruvithancode entitled 'The Oldest Inscription at Mangulam' held on 28<sup>th</sup> August, 2023)

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### Abstract

Mangulam or Mangulam is a village in Madurai district, Tamilnadu, India. It is located 25 kilometres from Madurai. The inscriptions discovered in the region are the earliest Tamil-Brahmi inscriptions. A hill in the region which is known as Mangulam hill or Kalugumalai (eagle hill) or Ovamalai, is where Tamil Jain monks lived in the caves during when their religion flourishing in the ancient Tamil country. They converted the caves into their palli (monastery) and lived here untill the 9<sup>th</sup> century CE. Mangulam inscriptions were discovered by Robert Sewell in the caves of the hill in 1882. This was the earliest finding of such kind of inscriptions. In 1906, Indian epigraphist V. Venkayya tried to read the inscriptions and found that it similar to the Brahmi Script in Ashokan edicts, he thought that the inscriptions were in pali language. In 1919, epigraphist H. Krishna Sastri identified few Tamil words in the inscriptions. In 1924, K.V. Subrahmanya Aiyar dicovered that inscriptions are in Tamil with some prakrit loan words in the Brahmi Script and concluded that script is Tamil Brahmi. In 1965 Iravatham Mahadevan recorded the inscriptions in the caves and dated it to the late 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE. It is one of the protected monuments in Tamilnadu by the Archaeological survey of India. Archaeologists found sherds, sling stones and an ancient burial site during the excavation in the region. In 2007, Tamilnadu Archaeology Department excavated the ruins of the Jain prayer halls of Sangam period.

### INTRODUCTION

Madurai, is one of the ancient cities in India that enjoyed a continuity in the history from Pre-historic times. Due to its cultural prominence, Madurai is described as "The Athens of South India". It is also well known as a great centre for learning from very early times. As the seat of the Tamil academy called the Sangam, it wielded great influence in the literary and cultural fields. During the glorious rule of Pandyas, Madurai had overseas connections for both commercial and cultural activities. Some tools were collected by Robert Bruce Foote, on the left bank of the river Vaigai, immediately north of Madurai city and also a single Paeolithic tool from Aviyur, about 20Kms south of Madurai. The archeological explorations revealed about ten sites belonging to the late stone age

and neolithic antiquities. ! About 60 sites with megalithic cultural materials have been identified in Madurai district.'

### Jainism in Madurai

It is stated that Jainism spread to South India by the migration of Jaina followers under the leadership of saint Bhadrabahu who settled at Sravana Belagola in Karnataka. The subsequent movement to the Tamil area is believed to have been led by one Vishakacarya. The team headed by Vishakacarya might have reached deep south up to Madurai through Kongu region. Madurai and its surroundings were very suitable for the jains for their secluded life and practices. They selected natural rock shelters for their stay around Madurai. Atleast fourteen such centers around Madurai were located® in which polished rock

beds were carved. All these rock caverns have early Tamil (Tamil -Brahmi) inscriptions which may be dated to 300B.C. to 300 A.D. The earliest among them is at Mankulam village which have five natural caves and six inscriptions.

### Importance of Mankulam

Madurai is a fertile village, full of paddy fields irrigated by river Periyar channels. This village is well connected by buses from Madurai. At the outskirts of this village, there is a hillock called Kalugmalai also called as Ovamalai. At the terrace of this hill in the five natural caves the early Tamil rock bed inscriptions (சுமண்புருக்கை) of Jain settlers are noticed. The local people refer to this as Pancha Pandavar padukkai.

Some cave inscriptions at Mankulam were first noticed in 1882 by Robert Sewell. Later during 1906 these inscription sites were revisited by Francis and K.V. Subramanya Iyer. Some more inscriptions were observed at Mankulam in the year 1906 and 1964. So, totally six early Tamil-Brahmi inscriptions from four different caves were discovered at this hill. These inscriptions are considered as the earliest epigraphical findings of Tamilnadu and dated back to 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C. which provide much valuable informations about the Sangam period Pandyas.

The first inscription engraved on the brow of the upper southern cave known is as the 'kitchen' on the Kalugumalai hill. It is a noteworthy record running as a single line - length of 564 cm.

### Reading of the 1st Inscription

The above epigraph mentions - a charity given to Nanta-Srikuvan, the kani (a Jain monk). The hermitage was made by Katalan Valuti, the servant of Netunceliyan. This record may be dated to 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C.

### Reading of the 2nd Inscription

This inscription narrates about the charity given to Nanta

Srikuvan, the kani. The hermitage was made by Catikan the father of [lancatikan, Netincaliyan's sister-in-law's husband.

### Reading of the 3rd Inscription

It means that one Antai Assutan the pearl merchant who received the title Kaviti at the merchant guild of Vellarai, made donation of the Jain bed to Nanta Srikuvan, the Kani.

The above mentioned three inscriptions may be included in a single group. In all these three inscriptions the name Kani Nanta Srikuvan is being mentioned. Kani is a transformed word from Prakrit and Sanskrit Gani, meaning, a senior Jain monk, who was head of a group of monks known as Gana. Nanta Srikuvan, was the recipient of the gift of the hermitages recorded in these inscriptions. Nanta Sri appears to be the monastic name assumed by the monk and Kuvan, his original Tamil name before his assumption of the monkhood or possibly the clan name, indicating his Tamil origin.

The name, Netunceliyan is referred in two inscriptions. He was most probably the reigning king of the then Pandyas though the dynastic name Pandya is not mentioned in the inscriptions. This may be confirmed as the name Netunceliyan belongs to only the Pandya dynasty and that one of the donors, probably a vassal or Kinsman, is named Valuti, another characteristic dynastic name of the Pandyas. The proximity of Mankulam to Madurai, the capital city of the Pandya kingdom, makes it also a proof of certainty of these records belonging to the Pandya king of that time. Two Pandya kings in the name of Netunceliyan are referred in the Sangam literature.

1. Netunceliyan 'the conqueror of the Aryan armies',
2. Netunceliyan 'the victor of Talaiyanan kanam'

It has been suggested that Netunceliyan of the Mankulam inscription

may be identified with either of them. However, from the well established Gajabhu synchronism that Netunceliyan I was a contemporary of Ceran Cenkuttuvan of Chera dynasty and Gajabahu I of Srilanka and hence must be assigned to the 2<sup>TM</sup> century A.D. Netunceliyan II was a contemporary of Mantaran-ceral Irumporai and lived still later. The early paeleography and archaic orthographic and linguistic features of the Mankulam inscriptions indicate a much earlier date ( 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C). The proposed identification is thus unlikely. It seems more

likely that Netun celiyan of the Mankulam grants lived much earlier than his namesakes and descendants celebrated in Sangam literature.

In the third inscription Vellarai Nigama is mentioned. vellarai is a village situated just 3 kms south of Mankulam hill. Nigama means a mercantile guild. One member of this guild had been bestowed Kavithi title.

The sixth inscription reads as, 'Vel arai Nigamathor Kodior'. From the sixth inscription it is presumed that not only the kavithi, the head of this Nigama, but the whole merchant community (guild) was involved in the charity to the Jains.

The fifth inscription reads as 'Cantaritan kotupiton' which denotes that one Cantaritan, made this charity. This Cantaritan might have been a noble personage who could afford such a gift.

The fourth record acknowledges the name of the engraver 'Kaniy nattiy Kotiyavan'. In all these five rock caves about eighty stone beds were carved for the residence of the Jain monks. On the ceiling portion of the first cave, traces of pre-historic paintings are also noticed which suggest that earlier the caves were occupied by the Pre-historic people.

Alagarmalai lies at 10 kms from this Mankulam hill and was also occupied

by the early jain monks. About a dozen Tamil-Brahmi inscriptions are noticed here, wherein some of the names of the merchants are inscribed. Arittapatti, another ancient village is located at 4 km. distance to the east of Mankulam. Two early Tamil Brahmi inscriptions are discovered at this village in a natural cavern. This cave was also a hermitage of the Jain monks carved by the Pandya kings of pre Sangam age. Mankulam caves were not continuously occupied by the jains after Sangam period. However Arittapatti cave was occupied by the jains even during 9-10<sup>th</sup> century A.D. where a Vattaluthu inscription and a bas-relief sculpture of Mahavira are seen. Name of the village Arnittapatti is derived from the jain Arittanemi, a popular jain monk. But no recorded evidence for the existence of this name is so far known. During 9-10<sup>th</sup> century

A.D. this village was named as Pathirikkudi, and was visited by Accananthi, a jain monk who was responsible for the rejuvenation of Jainism, around Madurai at that time.

One early Pandya cave temple is also exquisitely carved at this viffage which is now named by the locals as Idaichi mantapam. On one of the niches, one bas-relief sculpture of Lakulisa deva is carved which is a rare specimen of \_ its kind in Tamil Nadu. During later pandya period one Siva temple was constructed. The inscription engraved on the base of this Siva temple (now completely ruined) is dated to the Jatavarman Vikrama Pandya (13<sup>th</sup> century A.D.) The name of this village is mentioned in this record as Pathirikkudi alias - innurruva peruntheru. Ainnuravar was a popular mercantile group in Tamil Nadu during the 10-13<sup>th</sup> century A.D. which also had its stronghold in Arittapatti. So, this village had continuous mercantile activities from 3<sup>rd</sup> Century B.C. to 13<sup>th</sup> century A.D. All these villages lagarmalai, Mankulam, Vellarai and Arittapatti might have been enrouted to the ancient trade route

connected with Pandya and Chola capitals Madurai and Uraiyur respectively. In between Mankulam village and Kalugumalai, one small hamlet with about fifty huts is created in recent years (about a span of 50 years) and it is named as Meenakchipuram. Just 2 kms distance from Mankulam to Meenakchipuram another small hamlet is located and is called as

Paramudaiyanpatty. In this village on a natural rock, an early Pandya rock cut temple is carved and left unfinished. Only the mukhamantapa, with two pillars and two pilasters is carved just like the caves at Arittapatti and Anaimalai, but garbhagraha is not carved. The date of this unfinished rock cut temple may be fixed safely 8-9" century A.D. having similarity to the Arittapatti and Anaimalai caves. No sculptural representation or inscriptional evidence is noticed in this

unfinished work, yet it remains as an evidence for the early religious activities of the early Pandyas in this region. There is no evidence for the continuous occupation of the people in this region after 8-9" century A.D.

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