

BUDDHISM AS REVEALED IN THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND TAMIL LITERARY SOURCES

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Abstract

Subsequent to the establishment of Buddhism in the 6th century BCE by Gautama Buddha, it began to spread throughout the world. It is almost an accepted as well as proved that Buddhism had spread in Tamil Nadu during the 3rd century BCE during the period of Asoka, a great Mauryan emperor. These are all not only proved by the physical sources but also attested by the different types of sources such as archaeological sources and contemporary literary works. Buddhism is one of the popular religions of the world. It was propagated during the rule of Asoka and other early kings of India. It was preached and introduced by the missionaries in Tamil Nadu from its beginning. It left many imprints in history. One such imprint is its literature. Buddhism and its teachings were made popular in the Tamil literary works as well as by the foreigners' records. Due to the emergence of the Bhakti movement revivalism of Saivism and Vaishnavism happened in the Tamil region caused the decline of Buddhism and its centres. The loss of royal patronage was also the reason for its decline. The literature of Buddhism is of high value in understanding the political, social, cultural and religious situation of yesteryears. Hence, there is a need for protecting these sources without any religious or social abhorrence. This article gives a brief account on the archaeological and literary sources about Buddhism.

Keywords: Buddhism, Mauryan, Pali, *Dhamma*, *Yukas*, *Pradesikas*, Brahmi, *Bhikkuni*, *Sangam*, Viharas, *Palli*, Bodhi

Introduction

After the establishment of Buddhism in the 6th century BCE by Gautama Buddha, it began to spread throughout the world. It is almost an accepted as well as proved that Buddhism had spread in Tamil Nadu during the 3rd century BCE during the period of Asoka, a great Mauryan emperor. These are all not only proved by the physical sources but also attested by the different types of sources such as archaeological sources and contemporary literary works. These pieces of evidence proved that Buddhism had its foothold in Tamil Nadu during 3rd century BCE and continued to hold its influence till the 9th and the 10th centuries CE. This article gives a brief account on the archaeological and literary sources about Buddhism.

Initiatives undertaken to the spread of Buddhism

The history of Buddhism which is one of the ancient religions of the world arose in the northern part of India and rooted in Southeast Asian countries. It can be considered the first

reform movement later on converted into a religion of India. The personality of Buddha and his way of preaching the doctrine of his religion in Pali or Magadhi language to deliver his teachings to the folks is one of the main reasons for the spread of Buddhism. Buddha spread his message in the simple language of the masses.

After two hundred years of Buddha's death, it is well known that the third Buddhist Council held at Pataliputra in India contributed much to the spread of Buddhism throughout India and in other countries. In particular, the Third Buddhist council convened by the patronage of a king the Mauryan Emperor Asoka, the great (304-232 BCE) who ruled from 268 to 232 BCE who delegated various Arahants with the task of a leading mission to selected lands. Both in the time of the Buddha and in subsequent times Buddhist monks went about from village to village spreading the word of their Master.

Those who went to South India had to take up the challenge from Jain and Hindu opponents and engage themselves in a debate with them, apart from struggling against other difficulties and obstacles. The monks thus endeavouring to spread the Dhamma met with encouragement and support from kings, wealthy merchants, and noblemen. As a result of this, they went out to each and every village and city of South India and propagated the Buddha Dhamma, building monasteries and erecting centres of Buddhist learning. Some of the monks residing in the monasteries became skilled medical practitioners. They provided free medical service. They got the people to assemble at the monastery premises and preached Jataka tales, the life of the Buddha, read Suttas from the Buddhist scriptures, and thus increased the knowledge of the Dhamma by explaining and clarifying what the people could not understand. With the help of kings and rich men, they maintained alms-halls for the benefit of the blind, deaf, and maimed. Thus on account of their social services and devoted work in the propagation of the Dhamma, Buddhism spread rapidly in South India.

Another point in their favour was that these monks ignored caste differences and this was a great relief to the masses of depressed classes who suffered acutely on account of caste discrimination. The oppressed classes found their emancipation in Buddhism. Opposition to the rigid and inhuman caste system was one of the major reasons for the popularity of Buddhism.

One can gain a good idea of the popularity of Buddhism in South India by reading the *Silappadhikaram* (The Book of the Anklet) by the Jain poet Ilango Adigal, the *Manimegalai* by the Buddhist poet Sattanar, the *Thevaram* hymns of the Hindus saints such as Appar, Sundarar, and Tirugnanasambandar. All these poets lived in the 2nd to 7th century CE. Further, the works of the Vaishnavite saints of the 8th and 9th century, extolling the virtues of their god, and the *Periyapuram* by the 12th century poet Sekillar, and the *Nilakesi* written by the Jains against Buddhism, give a clear picture of the popular place Buddhism held for several centuries in Tamil Nadu. Buddhism flourished in Tamil Nadu from the 3rd century CE, began to decline gradually from about the 7th century for several reasons. In Thondamandalam, the northernmost part of Tamil Nadu Kancheepuram, Poompuhar (Kaverippoompattinam), Buthamangalam, in Cheras Vanchi are the places where Buddhism was very much influenced.

It is proven from works of literature and historians that Buddhist Viharas and temples, stone beds were established in Tamil Nadu up to the 13th century. Today Buddha's stone

statues are being found in many places. The sixty icons of Buddha are found in the Cholas country mentioned by B. Jambulingam in his research paper.

Archaeological Sources in relation to Buddhism

There are various testimonials about Buddhism in various periods in Tamil Nadu, especially in Cholas Country. These Sources show the developments of Buddhism from the 3rd Century CE.

Asoka's Edicts

The 13th rock edict of Asoka conforms that after Mahinda and his disciples stayed at Thanjavur in some period, they reached to Sri Lanka.¹ Asoka was the greatest ruler in the Maurya dynasty. His edicts (CE 273-232) on pillars inscribe about Tamil Nadu and the spread of Buddhism.²

Asoka's Girnar rock edicts II

The rock edicts found at Girnar in Saurashtra are especially helpful. In the second edict inscribed that "Devanampiya Piyadassi (Asoka) beloved of the gods merciful and God-fearing Ruler Asoka established medical facilities for humans and animals throughout his empire with two types of the medical centre.³ In the Rock edict, it provides for care for man and animals, describes recipients as the Cholas, Pandyas, Satyapura (Athyamans, Kongu Nadu)⁴ and Keralaputra kingdoms of South India and the Greek king Antiochus II and his neighbors.



Asoka's Girnar rock edicts II

"The merciful Emperor, endowed with favours from the gods, has arranged for medical facilities to be provided to men and beasts, in Chola, Chera, Pandya, Tamraparani (Sri Lanka) and in the kingdom of the Greek king Antiochus"⁵

From this, it is clear that the king Asoka indicated medical facilities in the kingdoms of South India. Nothing is mentioned here about the spread of Buddhism.⁶

¹ Kannan Selloor, **Indiya Ilangai Uravum Sangath Tamizhagamum**, Sri Kamala Books Publishers, Chennai, First Edition, 2017, p. 46.

² Mayilai Seeni Venkatasamy, **Bauthamum Thamizhum**, Pawai Publications, First Edition, Chennai, Nov 2007, p. 24.

³ Nickam, N.A, Ricard Mckeon (Translation in Tamil by T.S. Kupppanna Sastri), **The Edicts of Asoka**, Publications of National Book Trust India, New Delhi, August 1967, p. 74.

⁴ M. Neelakandan, **Buddhism in Kongu Mandalam Historical Study**, Kanishka Book House, Chennai, First Edition, Nov 2018, p. 94.

⁵ Pandit Hisselle Dhammaratana Mahathera, **Buddhism in South India**, Buddhist Publication Society, Kandy Sri Lanka, 2008, p. 3.

⁶ S. Murugesan, **Asokar**, Vincent A. Smith (Tamil Translation), Sandhya Publications, Chennai, First Edition, 2009, pp. 123-125.

Asoka's Peshawar Rock edicts

In edict number XIII found near Peshawar yet, it inscribed according to Asoka's policy to battle and kill many and the Dhamma victory over as his desire. It directs the source of the Buddhist missions of Asoka to Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka. As this mission to Sri Lanka had to come by way of Tamil Nadu, the spread of Buddhism in Sri Lanka and Tamil Nadu should be considered contemporary events.⁷ He had conveyed his ambition as such to his sons and grandsons.⁸ Dhamma victory is a set of edicts that formed a policy of the Mauryan Emperor Asoka. Asoka's policy of Dhamma made him defeat within his kingdom and kings of far off places like Andeyogas Andegonas, Tallami, Andegonas son Alexander in the southern region Cholas, Pandiya Tambiraparani (Sri Lanka).⁹



Asoka's Peshawar Rock edict

This edict was written in CE 258 and inscribes that Asoka using his policy of Dhamma preached Buddhism in Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka. The actual object is Asoka sent his ambassadors to Tamil Nadu, Sri Lanka, and many countries to spread Buddhism.¹⁰ It mentioned that the Yukas (Subordinate Officers) and Pradesikas (District Heads) along with Rajukas (Rural Officers) shall go to all areas of the kingdom every five years and spread the Dhamma Policy of Asoka. The above mentioned two edicts are proved the history of the spread of Buddhism in Tamil Nadu.

Inscriptional Sources

After the effort of Asoka to spread of Buddhism, the Brahmi script had influenced the whole of India. The saints of Buddhism and Jainism were engraved Brahmi-inscription in their places and also in the entrances of the caves.¹¹ Like the same in the compound walls of Tamil Nadu temples, inscriptions were engraved. As no inscriptions are found in the orthodox temples before the Pallava period proves that Buddhism was spread in Tamil Nadu very old edicts related to Orthodox Religion were engraved in inscriptions. The proof is the copper

⁷ Romila Thapar, **Asoka and the Decline of the Mauryas**, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, Second Edition, 1997, pp. 162-167.

⁸ Nickam. N.A, Ricard Mckeon (Translation in Tamil by T.S. Kupppanna Sastri), **The Edicts of Asoka**, pp.67-68.

⁹ Irfan Habib, Vivekanand Jha, **Mauryan India**, Tulika Books Publication, New Delhi, Fifth Edition, 2011, pp 60-63.

¹⁰ M. Iraasamaanickannar, **Kalvettugalum Thamizh Samooga Varalaarum**, New Century Book House Pvt Ltd Publication, Chennai, First Edition, December 2008, p. 5.

¹¹ K. Neduncheliyan, **Indiya Panpattil Tamizhum Tamilagamum**, Manitham Pathipagam, Tiruchirappalli, First Edition, 1989, p. 38.

plates engraved on royal grants are found in Tamil Nadu. But the very old scripts engraved on stones are all related to Jainism and Buddhist places.

Buddhism entered in Tamil Nadu in the 3rd Century B.C.E. The Bhikkhus sent by Asoka spread the Tamil-Brahmi script. Hence the script is also known as ‘Asoka Brahmi’.¹² There is no information about the condition of Jainism and Buddhism in the Sangam Literature but the Tamil-Brahmi inscriptions emphasized Buddhism and Jainism which had influenced Tamil Nadu in the 4th c. B.C.E¹³

In South India and Tamil Nadu, the Buddhist monks spread Buddhism and also the Brahmi letters. The main reason for Buddhism to spread quickly is the missionaries spread the religion in the mother tongue of the local people. The important principle of Buddhism and Jainism is that religion should be preached in the mother tongue of the countries themselves. They developed the religion not in Pali and Prakrit but also in the Tamil Language. So both the religions spread quickly in Tamil Nadu.¹⁴

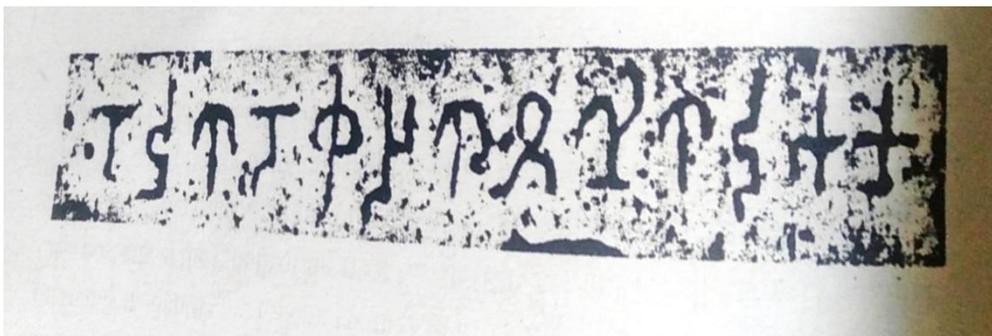
Bharhut Inscriptions

The famous Buddhist stupa at Bharhut (near Satan in Madhya Pradesh) which flourished during the 2nd and 1st centuries B.C.E., attracted pilgrims from far and wide as confirmed by the place names occurring in the donative inscriptions at the site. Luders who edited the inscriptions have devoted a section to the identifications of these places names. One of the unidentified place names is Kakamdi, which occurs once in the Bharhut Inscriptions. The inscription is engraved on a railing of the south-eastern quadrant of the stupa. The railing is now preserved in the Indian Museum, Calcutta. The text and translation of the inscription by Luders as given below:

Text: KakamdiyaSomayabhichhuniyadanam

Translation: The gift of the nun Soma from Kakamdi (Kakandi)

Scholars familiar with early Tamil literature should have no difficulty in identifying Kakandi with (Kaveripoompattinam (Puhar), the ancient Chola port city at the mouth of the river Kaveri. Manimegalai, the famous Buddhist Tamil Epic, explicitly mentions that Puhar was named Kakandi after Kakandan, an ancient Chola monarch.¹⁵



Bharhut Inscription, near Satan in Madhya Pradesh

“Kakantankattalkakantienre

¹² Bhikku Mauriyar Buddha, **Buddhist Archaeological Research in South India**, Publication of Buddhar Vazhi, Ramanathapuram, First Edition, December 2017, p. 27.

¹³ K. Rajan, **Kalvettiyal**, Mano Pathippagam, Thanjavur, First Edition, Oct 2006, pp. 6-7.

¹⁴ Mayilai Seeni Venkatasamy, **Sangakala Varalattu Aayivugal – II Part**, Vetrikarasi Publication, Chennai, First Edition, pp. 37-38.

¹⁵ G. John Samuel, **Buddhism in Tamil Nadu: Collected Papers**, Institute of Asian Studies, Chennai, First Edition, 1998, p.146.

Iyaintanamamip-patikkiuttu”

This city (Puhar) was given the appropriate name Kakandi as it was guarded by Kakandan (the Chola king) (Manimegalai-22: 37)

While scholars are not agreed on the date of Manimegalai (estimates range from the 2nd to 10th centuries C.E.), there is little doubt that the story itself is set in the Sangam Period and portrays life in the city around the turn of the Christian era. The legend of Kakandan, the Chola king, after whom the city was named Kakandi, is charmingly narrated in the epic (Manimegalai, Canto. XXII, lines 25-79).¹⁶

In the light of the evidence summarized above, there can hardly be any doubt that the place name ‘Kakandi’ (Kakandi) occurring in the Bharhut inscription of 1st century B.C.E. Prefers to Kaverippoompattinam (Puhar), the great Chola port city of the Tamil country, which flourished during the same period and was a celebrated Buddhist centre.

In one more statement, a woman named Soma, a Bhikkuni donated materials for Buddha Stupa which mentioned in the inscription of Bharhut. A female Buddha Bhikkuni Soma from Kaverippoompattinam (Kakandi) went to Bharhut and lived there. This Bhikkuni belonged to Kaverippoompattinam as it was called ‘Kakandi’ in those days. So Kakandi is one among the names given for Kaverippoompattinam.¹⁷

Arittapatti Kazhugu Malai Brahmi Inscription

Arittapatti is situated between Melur and Alagarmalai in the Madurai district. (The other name is Mankulam). There is a hill called Kazhugu Malai. There are five caves and in their stone beds, Brahmi letters are engraved. In ancient days the monks of Buddhism and Jainism were in meditation in these caves.

The name Arittapatti is related to Buddhist Religion. Sri Lanka King Devambha Thissans minister Arittan joined in Buddhist Religion with the influence of King Asoka’s son Mahendra and turned as a Buddhist Monk. He came to Pandiya Country and stayed in Mankulam who stayed in Arittapatti. That is named after Arittan.¹⁸ This gradually came to be known as Arittapatti.

Mangulam inscription

In the Mangulam inscriptions, the word ‘vellarai’ denotes the village Vellaraipatti. Vellarai means white coloured rock. Bhikkus and traders from have gone to Thondi through Mangulam. These inscriptions are Tamil Brahmi inscriptions. About these Tamil Brahmi inscriptions, inspector or surveyors say the following: “It is mentioned that all the Tamil Brahmi Inscriptions bearing caves were the abodes of the Buddhist Bhikkus.”

The Tamil Brahmi inscriptions are similar to the Brahmi inscriptions of Sri Lankan Buddhist monks. About the same period, Kaverippoompattinam was one of the world’s most famous maritime trade centres in Thondaimandalam. The established traders of Thondaimandalam who had depended on maritime trade centre around Poompuhar worked for the growth of religion by developing their politics and economy. Dhanushkodi in the south, Rameswaram, the places around it Ariyangkundu and Alagankulam were the

¹⁶ Ibid, p.147.

¹⁷ Aruvar, **Poompuhar**, Essay of Natana Kasinathan on Kalvettukalil Kaverippoompattinam, Publication of Tamil Nadu Government Archaeological Research Department, 1975, p. 18.

¹⁸ R. Shanmugam, S. Jeyaprakash, **Ulaga Nagarikaththil Thamilarin Pangu**, Sarvodaya Ilakkiya Pannai, Madurai, 1st edition, April 1982, p. 76.

important meeting places of Buddhist monks found in the route of a sea voyage.¹⁹ But in the 4th century, Buddhism and Jainism were flourished and it is engraved in Tamil Brahmi Inscriptions.

Foreign Traveler's Accounts

Hieun-Tsang Traveler's Account

The Chinese pilgrimage Hieun-Tsang arrived in Tamil Nadu during the period of Narasimhavarman I in 640 C.E.²⁰ Hieun-Tsang in his travelogue book name '*Dravida*'²¹ specifies that in Kancheepuram, where it is said that more than a 100 Buddhist monasteries (Sangiramas) with about 10000 Buddhist monks were lived before 7th century C.E. surroundings of Kancheepuram Ekambaranatha Temple.²² It is believed that the 1000 Buddhist monks followed the Mahayana Buddhism.²³ It would be the old habitat of Buddha. Buddha came directly to Kanchi and spread Buddhism. King Asoka raised a Stupa about 100 feet in the places where Buddha preached and in the places where the folks joined Buddhism.²⁴

The Buddhist Scholar Dharmapala who was the chief professor of Nalanda University and Anurudhar who had written Abidammathasangha are believed to have born and lived in Kancheepuram. He was the third son of the minister of the ruler of Kanchi, renounced family life after his marriage and travelled wide and learning a lot. Acharya Dinnaga was his teacher. He propagated Mahayanism far and wide. He was made the Vice-Chancellor of the famous Nalanda University. During his office, a Brahmin scholar from the Tamil country challenged him, for which he sent his disciple Seelabhadra, who won him in his contest and later succeeded Dharmapala at the Nalanda University. It was under Seelabhadra, Hieun-Tsang learnt Sanskrit. Other than Seelabhadra, he had some prominent scholars as his students. They were Viseshamitra, Jinaputra and Gnanasundara. The identification of Dharmapala with Aravana Adigal appearing in Manimegalai is ill-founded. He was the first son of the government's higher official.²⁵ He was very talented from his young age and the king wanted his daughter to get married to Dharmapala.

Hieun-Tsang reached Molokuta after travelling to the south of Kancheepuram Molokuta, the place which was described by Hieun-Tsang Malaikudanadu would consist of Thanjavur, Madurai, Coimbatore, Cochin, Travancore (Malainadu of those days might be the Chera country). In Malaikudanadu there are very ancient Buddha monasteries. Some monasteries were protected and very few monks live there near the capital city of Pandyas (Madurai) one Buddha Vihara was built by Asoka's brother Mahendra and towards the east, a

¹⁹ Bhikku Mouriya Buddha, Buddhist Archaeological Research in South India, **op.cit.**, p. 29.

²⁰ S. Shanmugasundaram, **Thamizh Naattu Varalaru Maa. Raa, Kalanchiyam - I**, Kaavya Publication, Chennai, Second Edition, 2012, pp. 260-261.

²¹ D.C. Ahir, Buddhism in South India, **op. cit.**, p. 18.

"This country (Dravida) is about 6000 li in circuit; the capital of the country is called Kanchipura (Kin-chi-pu-lo), and is about 30 li round.... Tathagata in olden days, when living in the world, frequented this country much; he preached the law here and converted men, and therefore Asoka-rajah built stupas over all the sacred spots where these traces exist."

²² Rajamanickanar, **Dr. Rajamanickanar Research Books-Part-II**, Tamilkudi Arasu Pathipagam, Chennai, First Edition, p. 137.

²³ M. Radhakrishnan, **Tamil Valartha Koilgal**, 1971, p. 90.

²⁴ A. Arivoli, **Kanchi Kamatchi**, Manivasakar Pathippagam, Chidambaram, First Edition, 1983, p. 129.

²⁵ K.P. Aravanan, **Cholar Kalath Tamil Makkal Varalar**, Tamilkottam Pathipagam, Chennai, January 2012, p. 274.

stupa built by Asoka was there. Now, these two were ruined completely.²⁶ Hieun –Tsang had written that Kancheepuram was the capital of Dravida kingdom and also very famous like Buddha. Buddhism was very much influenced in Kancheepuram. It was not much influenced in Pandia Country. It had been destroyed. In Tamil Nadu, both Buddhism and Jainism had great influence. During the period of the Pandya King Maravarman Harikesari (CE 640-670), Hieun- Tsang went to Pandya Country. According to Hieun- Tsang, there were remains of many old monasteries and only a small number of brethren in the Pandya country.²⁷

Sources from the Tamil Literatures

There are lots of Tamil literary sources for the spread of Buddhism in Tamil Nadu.

Sangam Literary Sources

Madurai Kanchi

Madurai Kanchi is the sixth book in Pattupattu (Ten songs). The author of the book is Mangudi Maruthanar. The hero of this book is Pandiyan Neduncheliyan. In the book, the principles and doctrines of Saivism, Vaisnavism, Buddhism and Jainism are described and the record is there that there were Buddhist Pallis in Madurai. Mangudi Maruthanar described as follows in the poem about the bravery of Pandiyan Neduncheliyan and features of the Madurai city.²⁸

One could see the principles of Buddhism in poetry.²⁹ It reveals the prosperity of the Buddhists who lived in Madurai in the Sangam age. These Buddhists who very well followed the Panchasilas maintained their Katavut Palli (the shrine of Lord Buddha) the popularity of which can be understood by the crowd portrayed by the poet in the midst of which the mothers catch the soft hands of their children for safety, carrying flowers, etc., they move towards the shrine with their husbands.³⁰ They worship and praise Buddha there. The popularity of the chaitya worship in Tamil Nadu, particularly in the capital of the Pandya Nadu is noteworthy. Nachinarkiniyar said that Madurai Kanchi was about Buddha worship.³¹ Gnana Sambandar named Bothiyar noted about Buddhism and so Ilambothiyar, the last Sangam poet was Buddhar.³²

²⁶ Puliur Kesikan, **Muth Tamil Madurai**, Publication of Tirunavukarasar, Chennai, First Edition, January 1981, p. 46.

²⁷ K.P. Aravanan, **Tamil Samudhaya Varalaru**, pp. 307-309.

²⁸ S. Umarajan, **Sangath Thamizum Samayangalum**, Karthik Pathipagam, Chennai, First Edition, pp. 78-79.

*“Vandupadappaluriyathenarthothadhup Poovumpugaiyumsaavagarpalicchi
Chenrakalamumvaruumamayamum Intrivattonriooluggamorunankunarthu
Vanamunelanuthdhamuluthunarum Santrakolkaichsayayakkai
Yanratangkarinyarserinthanarnonmaar Kalpolinthannaettuvaaiikkarannai”*
(Madurai Kanchi- 475-482)

²⁹ Mayilai Seeni Venkatasamy, **Sangakala Varalatu Aaivugal-I**, Kamalguhan Publications, Chennai, First Edition, 2007, p. 195.

³⁰ Selvarasu. N. Silampu, **Pandaiya Samugha Uruvakkamum, Silappadhigarathil Ilakkiya Arachiyalum**, Agaram Publication, Thanjavur, First Edition, September 2007, p. 93.

³¹ S. Ramakrishnan, **Samaya Valvil Vadakum Therikum**, New Century Book House Pvt Ltd, Chennai, Fourth Edition, April 2011, p. 98

*“..... perilampendir Poovinarpoogaienartholuvalarpalichi
Siranthupurankakungkadautchpalliyun Siranthavedamvilangappadi”*
(Madurai Kanchi-465-468)

³² **Ibid**, p. 99.

Silappadikaram

Silappadikaram includes many ideas and views related to Buddhism. In this book Canto 15, Madhavi after the death of Kovalan and Manimegalai her daughter Manimegalai ignored the love of Udhayakumar and joined in Buddhism and stayed in Buddha mutt in Poompuhar is mentioned clearly.³³ Kaverippoompattinam was the birthplace of different religions. Silappadikaram indicated the temples of Saivism and Vaishnava and also the Chaityas of Buddhism and Jainism.³⁴ In this epic ‘Indira Viharas’ which is called ‘Buddha Viharas’ seven were in Puhar city and it is mentioned by Ilango Adigal. In the Buddha Vihara, the Buddhist monks stayed and they have well described the principles of Buddha and it is explained in all these Viharas.³⁵ Buddhists had faith in number seven and it was their lucky number. Indiran created seven Viharas. So it is called ‘Indira Viharas’ (10:14)³⁶. The Buddhist monks who praised Buddha who enlightened glowed under the Bodhi tree also meditated like him. They are called by Buddha as such³⁷ the monks who lived in these Viharas are called “Avai Pathinmar” according to Silappadikaram.³⁸ Ilango Adigal praised Buddha and Buddhist monks.³⁹

Kovalan’s father after his son’s death donated all his properties to Buddha Sangam and became a sage. Later he joined in Buddha Sangam in Puhar Indira Vihar.⁴⁰ In Silappadikaram, it is also mentioned that Buddha arose enlightened from the bottom of the Bodhi tree and also about Aravor Palli which was also called Buddha Religion Palli. (Madurai Kandam-Adaikkalak kadai15:179)⁴¹

Silappadikaram mentioned that Buddhism which had flourished in Kaveri Poompattinam.⁴² It refers to the Mahayana deity Manimegalai who rescues a merchant, a Buddhist who practices the Pancha Silas, when he struggles in the sea. On hearing the news

³³ Arunan, **Philosophical Tradition of Tamils**, Vasantham Publications, Madurai, 2010, pp. 172-173.

³⁴ K.V. Raman, **Tholliyal Aayvugal**, New Century Book House Pvt Ltd, First edition, July 2015, p.18.

“Amar tharukkottam, Vellaiyanaikkottam, Puharvellainaagarthamkottam, Pagalvailutchikkeelankottam, Urkkottam, Verkottam, Vanchirakottam, Puraipanaiyan Valkottam, NikkanthakKottam, Nilakkottam.....”

³⁵ A. Arumugam, **Buddharum Periyarum**, Pavendar Publication, Ariyalur, First Edition, 2013, p. 55.

“Panaiyairthongiyapasilaipbothi Anithigalnelalaravonthirumozhi”

AntharasarigalaraitanarChatrum Indiraviharameludanbodhi”

(Silappadikaram –Puharkandam-Nadukaankaathai 10:11-14)

³⁶ Azhagammai, **Silambil Makkal Valvum Vazhipadum**, Uyir Eluththu Pathippagam, Tiruchirappalli, First edition, 2012, p. 130.

³⁷ **Ibid.**, p. 31.

“Bodhi kilmadhavar (297.3) *Buddhapiiranvitirunthabodhiinai*’ panaiyairthongiyapasilaip Bodhi (10:11)

³⁸ **Ibid.**, p. 131.

³⁹ **Ibid.**, p. 131.

“Vanvazhiyangumaatralpetra (10:13) (27:93) Piravazhamperinbanilayahiya nirvana Peru yeithaththuranthavargalbuddhathuravigal (27:94:95) Anithihalneezhalaravon ;anithihalbodhiaravon”

⁴⁰ P. Saravanan, **Silappadikaram**, Sandhya Publication, Chennai, 1st ed, 2008, pp. 452-454.

“koyalannathaikoduthugaseithi Maaperunthanamavaanporuleenthangh

Indhiraviharamezhudanpukkangh Kandharacharihalaaraimpathimar

Piranthayakkaipirapparamuyandru Thuranthorthanmunruraviyeithavum”

(Vanchi Kandam-Neerppadaikaadai-27:90-95)

⁴¹ **Ibid.**, p. 281.

⁴² Dhayammal Aravanan, **Kannaki Mannil**, **op.cit**, p. 17.

“Aravorpallium Aram ompadayum

Purmlaikottampuniyaththanamum”

(Silappadikaram-5:179-180)

of her husband's death Madavi and her daughter Manimegalai joined in Buddhism and it is mentioned in Silappadikaram (15:101-116 -297, 30:24-28).⁴³

Nevertheless, Buddhism spread in Tamil Nadu in 3rd century B.C.E. The Buddhist disciples had propagated over it throughout Tamil Nadu. During the period of Kalabhras, it reached to peak. After the Bhakti Movement revitalized, it had some setback. After it reinstated in the Tamil land during the period of the medieval Cholas, Buddhism had sustained in Tamil Nadu up to 16th century C.E, for instance, anyone could know that a Buddha temple was at Elandurai near Kumbakonam of Tamil Nadu in 1580 C.E. From the foregoing evidence, one can come to the conclusion that Buddhism had influenced in Tamil Nadu.

Conclusion

Buddhism is one of the popular religions of the world. It was propagated during the rule of Asoka and other early kings of India. It was preached and introduced by the missionaries in Tamil Nadu from its beginning. It left many imprints in history. One such imprint is its literature. Buddhism and its teachings were made popular in the Tamil literary works as well as by the foreigners' records. Due to the emergence of the Bhakti movement revivalism of Saivism and Vaishnavism happened in the Tamil region caused the decline of Buddhism and its centres. The loss of royal patronage was also the reason for its decline. The literature of Buddhism is of high value in understanding the political, social, cultural and religious situation of yesteryears. Hence, there is a need for protecting these sources without any religious or social abhorrence.

⁴³Azhagammai, Silambil Makkal Valvum Vazhipadum, **op. cit.**, p. 131.
“*Matrathukettumadhavimadanthai Natraithanakkunanthirampadarken
Manimekalayaivanruyarukkum Kanihayarkolangkannathozhihena
Kothaithamamku:halodukalainthu Bodhi thanampurintharanghollavum*”
(*Manimegalai-29:103-108*)