

I SITTANNAVASAL

**UN*edited version*



S u d h a r s a n a m

A centre for Arts and Culture
2 Palace nagar, Pudukkottai

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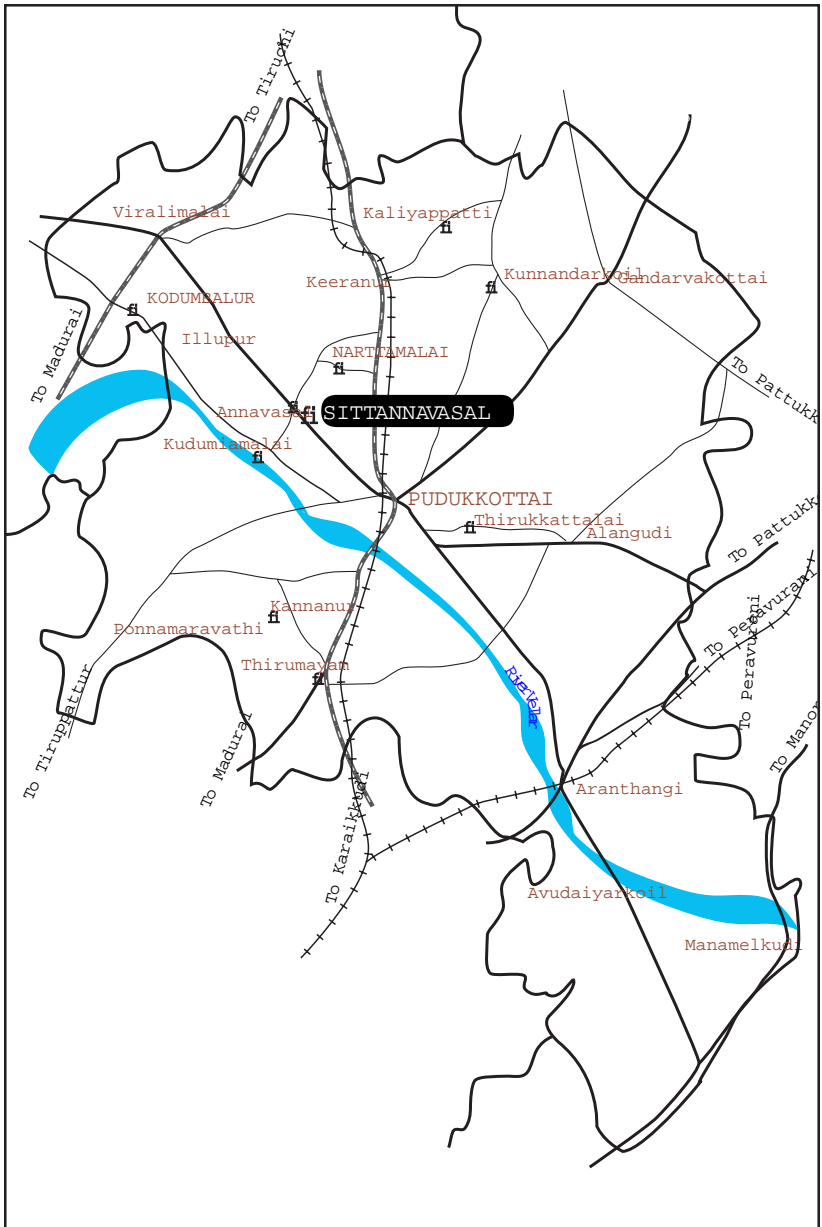
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1. INTRODUCTION

Sittannavasal† is a small village in Pudukkottai† district and is world famous for its fresco paintings in the rock-cut Jaina cave temple.

Sittannavasal† has an important place in the history of Tamilnadu. The megalithic monuments such as stone-circles, urn burials and cists spread in the plains of this village testify that this area was inhabited by pre-historic man. Sittannavasal† is known primarily for its mural paintings in the Jaina rock-cut cave temple called Arivar-koil†. These paintings are second only in importance after Ajanta paintings in the art history of India. There is a natural cavern, called Ezhadippattam†, with polished rock beds of Jaina ascetics. These rock beds contain Tamil inscriptions. The oldest is a Tamil Brahmi inscription, the oldest in the district, and was being considered till recently as belonging to the 3rd century BC. According to the recent study by Iravatham Mahadevan, it is dated to the 1st century BC. Sittannavasal† is perhaps the only place where you can find inscriptions in Tamil from the 1st century BC to the 10th century AD. The Navach-chunai†, with its submerged cave temple, would interest those who are adventurous.

There are a number of explanations or interpretations about the derivation of the name. One of such explanations says that Sittannavasal† is a corruption of *ChiR-Ran-nal-vaa-yil†* (abode-of-great-saints). Another explanation says that this hill, once a part of a suburb of Annalvayil†, could have come to be called *Chirrannal-vaayil* (*ChiRu-annal-vaayil* – ‘smaller-Annal-Vaayil’). Yet another version interprets that the name could be a derivation from *Siddhaanaam-vaasah†*, a word of northern origin, becoming



Sittannavasal- location

Siddhannavaasah† and then Sittannavasal† †. In the Tamil Brahmi inscription mentioned before, the name of this place is mentioned as ‘ChiRu-posil’†.

APPROACH

The Sittannavasal† village is 12 kilometers north-west of Pudukkottai†, in the Pudukkottai†– Annavasal† route. One can reach the village and the monuments by taking a diversion from the Pudukkottai-Annavasal road, 2 km before Annavasal to the right. An arch put up by the Government welcomes the visitors to the village.



*The diversion road to Sittannavasal
from the main road*

A WARNING

Sittannavasalt monuments, particularly the Jaina cave temple, are well known. The cave temple is of great importance because of its paintings.

But those who visit the cave temple with high hopes are likely to be somewhat disappointed.

The main reason is that precious little of the paintings remain. This should sadden anyone. Further, the cave temple itself is rather small, particularly when compared with those at Ajanta, with which the paintings of Sittannavasalt are often compared.

The glory of Sittannavasalt is not in its extent, but the exquisite style that can be seen even in whatever that remains.

Perhaps Sittannavasalt reminds us of the past glory and of our present insensitivity to our heritage.

2. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Sittannavasal† is one of the oldest inhabited sites in the District, perhaps the oldest. Megalithic burial sites in this village testify that the areas around the hillock having been inhabited by iron-age men.

Just before the beginning of the Christian era, this was a flourishing centre of Jaina influence, where Jainism flourished for over 1000 years, from 1st century BC to 10th century AD. During 7th – 9th centuries, the Arivar-koil†, the rock-cut cave temple, had been excavated.

There is nothing much known after that.

3. THE MONUMENTS

Sittannavasal† is a world famous site in the district. In the village is a large rocky hillock which is about 200 feet in height and run north to south. There are four interesting monuments on and around this rocky hill.



The rocky hillock - a panoramic view

1. The Arivar-koil†

On the western side of the hill, in the northern side, is the celebrated Jaina rock-cut cave temple called, Arivar-koil† (temple-of-the-Arhat-s). It has relics of paintings of 9th century AD. These paintings are second only in importance after Ajanta paintings and have an important place in the Indian art history.

2. The Ezhadippattam†

On the eastern side is the natural cavern called Ezhadippattam† with polished rock beds where Jaina ascetics practiced severest penance, for more than a thousand years since 1st century BC. It contains a 1st century BC Brahmi inscription and innumerable other Tamil inscription.

3. The Megalithic burial sites

There are megalithic monuments like urn-burials, stone circles and cists in plenty, near to the hillock.



4. The Navach-chunai†

To the north of the natural cavern, on the eastern slope of the rock is a small rock-cut temple submerged in a tarn, called *Navach-chunai*†. It requires some amount of rock-climbing and trekking to reach there.

Presently, the Jaina cave temple, the natural cavern called Ezhadippattam†, and the megalithic burial sites are protected monuments and are under Archaeological Survey of India (ASI).

There are ASI staff available in the Jaina cave temple and Ezhadippattam†. There is an entry of Rs. 5 for an Indian citizen and Rs. 100 (US \$2.00) for foreigners, for both the monuments. The monuments will be open during 9AM to 5PM.

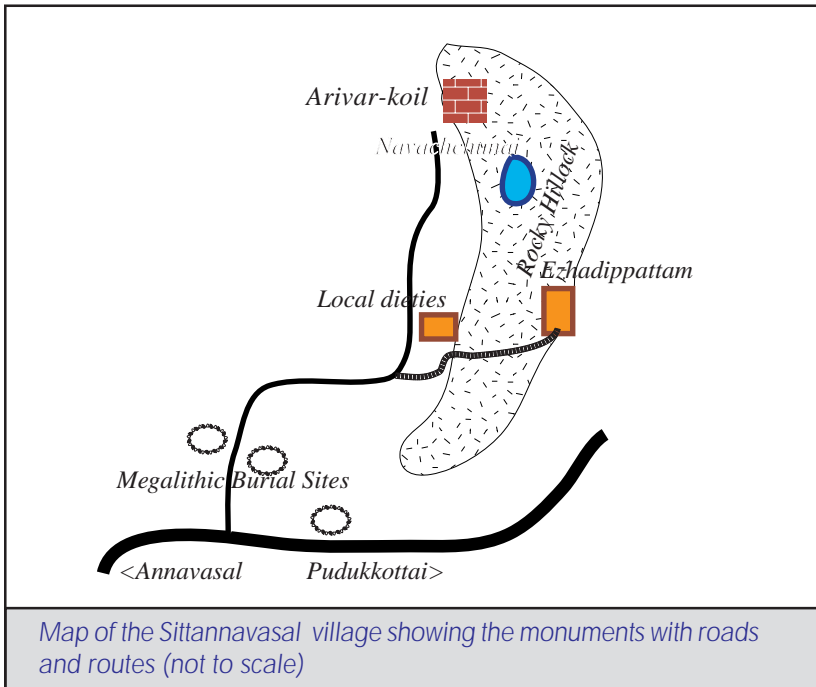
REACHING THE MONUMENTS

On the road before one takes a turn to enter Sittannaval† and on the roads leading to the monuments, there are remains of megalithic burial sites.

Following this road, off the main road, one reaches the foothills of the hillock at which the road takes a left turn. It is from here one starts the climb to the Jaina caverns containing stone beds.

Further traveling on the road would take you to the western slope of the central hillock. From here one makes a short climb of some steps to reach the Jaina cave temple, and its world famous mural paintings.

Visitors are suggested to start with the Arivar-koil† and then visit the Ezhadippattam†.



4. THE ARIVAR-KOIL (THE JAINA CAVE TEMPLE)

The Arivar-koil†, a Jaina cave temple, with its mural paintings belonging to the 9th century AD, is one of the best-known monuments in the district.



The front view of the Arivar-koil, the Jaina cave temple.

There is still some uncertainty regarding the origin of this temple. The temple in its architectural style resembles the cave temples built by the Pallava† king, Mahendra-varman† (600 – 630 AD). It is claimed that Mahendra-varman's territory did not extend beyond Tiruchi, and Lalitankura-Pallavesvara-griha† on the Rock Fort in

Tiruchi is the southern most temple he had excavated. It is also known that there are cave temples of this period and of similar style in the Pandya country where the Pallava power was unknown. One such cave temple, dedicated to Siva, with relics of paintings, perhaps belonging to the same period as that of Sittannavasal†, is at Tirumalai-puram, near Tirunelveli.

In the absence of any foundation inscription it would not be possible to ascertain the builder of this temple.

From an inscription dated 9th century, which refers to repair and extension on the temple, one can surmise that this cave temple is anterior to this date.

THE SITTANNAVASAL PAINTINGS

This Jaina cave temple is world famous primarily for its mural paintings. The ceiling of the sanctum and *ardha-mandapam*† of this cave temple contain beautiful paintings. These paintings are of the classical or Ajanta† style with variations in the handling of the materials by the artists. They furnish a connected link between the Ajanta† paintings (4th – 6th century AD) and the Chozha† paintings of 11th century at Thanjavur. The sculpture and the matchless paintings of the cave are worth studying in detail.

Originally the entire cave temple, including the sculptures was covered with plaster and painted. The paintings are now found on the ceiling, top part of the pillars and the beam above the pillars. All these paintings, which would rank among the great paintings of India, are barely visible now, mainly due to vandalism with in the last 50-60 years.

These paintings include, as its subject matter, the Jaina *Samava-sarana*†, and in it the *k h a t i k a - b h u m i* † including a lotus tank, flowers, animals, *bhavya*† -s and dancing *Apsara*† -s, a royal couple and *hamsa*† -s.



A scene from the Sittannavasal paintings

THE SAMAVA-SARANA IN JAINA TRADITION

Jainism is one of the oldest living religions of the world. The ultimate goal of every Jain is the attainment of *nirvana*† or liberation of soul from the bondage of *karma*†-s.

Even though there is no emphasis on worship of Gods in Jainism, it teaches the worship of all liberated souls, which have advanced in their spiritual journey irrespective of the level of their achievement. So the worship of the great souls or heroes occupies an important place in the life of Jain-s.

According to the Jaina tradition there are 63 *Salaka-purusha*†-s ('Great-Souls'). It includes 24 Tirthankara†-s, 12 emperors (*Chakravarti*†) and 27 other heroes. Of these the Tirthankara†-s occupy the most prominent place and are venerated as *Devadi-deva*†-s ('God-of-Gods'). They are in a sense the religious prophets of the Jain-s.

A soul attains the position of a Tirthankara† after doing good actions. Every Tirthankara†, before getting his enlightenment had to go through numerous births in different forms.

Five important events in the life of a Tirthankara† are important, and are depicted in the temples and narrated in *Puranam*† works. They are the birth, the renunciation, the realisation (attaining *kevala-gnana*†), the first sermon and *nirvana*† (liberation of soul). The Tirthankara† after obtaining *Kevala-gnana*† delivers a sermon in a specially designed audience hall called *Samava-sarana*†. Gods and goddesses, human beings, birds and beasts come to witness the grand scene of the Lord's discourse. The parallel in Saivism to this hall is called as *devasiriya-mandapam*† as can be seen in the Thiruvapur temple.

Samava-sarana†, the most attractive heavenly pavilion, is a favourite motif for representation in the Jaina temples. *Bhavya*†-s are those fortunate people who become entitled to attend the divine discourse in the *Samava-sarana*† structure. They have to pass through

seven *bhumi*†-s or regions before they occupy their seat to hear the divine discourse. Among these, the second *bhumi*† is called the *khatika-bhumi*† (region-of-the-tank). It is a delightful tank with fishes, birds, animals and men frolicking in it or playing in it. The *bhavya*†-s are said to get down into the tank, wash their feet and please themselves by gathering lotus flowers, while animals such as elephants, buffaloes and birds and fishes are frolicking about and pleasing themselves too as best as they can. This tank is the one painted on the ceilings of the cave temple.

THE DISCOVERY

This Jaina site and its paintings were first noticed by S. Radhakrishna Iyer, a local historian, and were recorded in his book 'General History of the Pudukkottai State' (1916). The impact of Radhakrishna Iyer's reference to the Sittannavasal† cave temple and its murals was, however, inhibited by the comparatively regional character of his book and its readership. He himself was not likely to have realised the full importance of Sittannavasal† while describing it. The publication in 1920 of Jouveau-Dubreuil's monograph on Sittannavasal† was, as a result, accorded the status of a 'discovery'. While Iyer's notice predates the Dubreuil's, it is the latter that received attention beyond the educated and ruling circles of the erstwhile State. To Dubreuil and the renowned iconographer Gopinatha Rao who collaborated with him in Sittannavasal† during the years 1918 to 1920 must be given the credit of placing Sittannavasal† before the archaeological world.

In 1942, Dr. S. Paramasivan and K. R. Srinivasan were engaged in cleaning the paintings. They noticed a patch of old painting representing conventional carpet design, over which a new layer of painting was superimposed. This superimposed layer was probably the work of Ilan-Gautaman†, mentioned in the inscription. The new layer spread into the *garbha-griham*† and all over the ceiling of the *ardha-mandapam*†, the pillars, the corbels and the beams. This new layer is laid over a ground of plaster over which the paintings that we see today and admire are put up.

THE PAINTING TRADITION

The Sittannavasal† paintings carry on the tradition of the well known Ajanta† frescoes (2nd century BC-6th century AD), Srilanka's Sigiriya (Srigiri) frescoes of the fifth century AD and the Bagh frescoes in Madhya Pradesh of the sixth and seventh centuries AD. Sittannavasal† is, therefore, an early example of the post- Ajanta period, and in merit it compares well with Ajanta† and Sigiriya. We may safely say that Sittannavasal† is one among the earliest frescoes so far known in South India, and that they are the only example of early Jaina frescoes.

The technique employed is what is known as *fresco-secco*, that is, the painting is done on a dry wall. (In the Europe mural paintings are done on a moist wall and are called fresco-buono). In this process the surface to be painted is first covered with lime plaster, then coated with lime-wash and the painting done on it.

According to Dr. S. Paramasivan, who had made thorough analysis of the techniques of Sittannavasal† paintings, the following pigments have been employed: lime for white, lamp black for black, ochres for yellow and red, *terre verte* for green, etc. Thus mineral colours, which are of a permanent nature, have been employed. But the information-board put up by the ASI states that vegetable dyes have been employed for the paintings.

In 1937-39, Maharaja of Pudukkottai† had the paintings cleaned. After cleaning the paintings, they applied a preservative coating, and strengthened the painted plaster wherever it was loose, by injecting suitable cementing material without retouching any part of the paintings.

THE CAVE TEMPLE - A GENERAL DESCRIPTION

The cave temple lies on the west face of the hillock. It stands beneath an enormous scarp, which seems likely to fall down upon it. There is an air of somber forlornness about it, altogether appropriate for the severe religion of ultimate mortification of which it has been a centre from ancient times.

From the road, a walk of about hundred feet over the sloping rock takes the visitor to the cave temple.

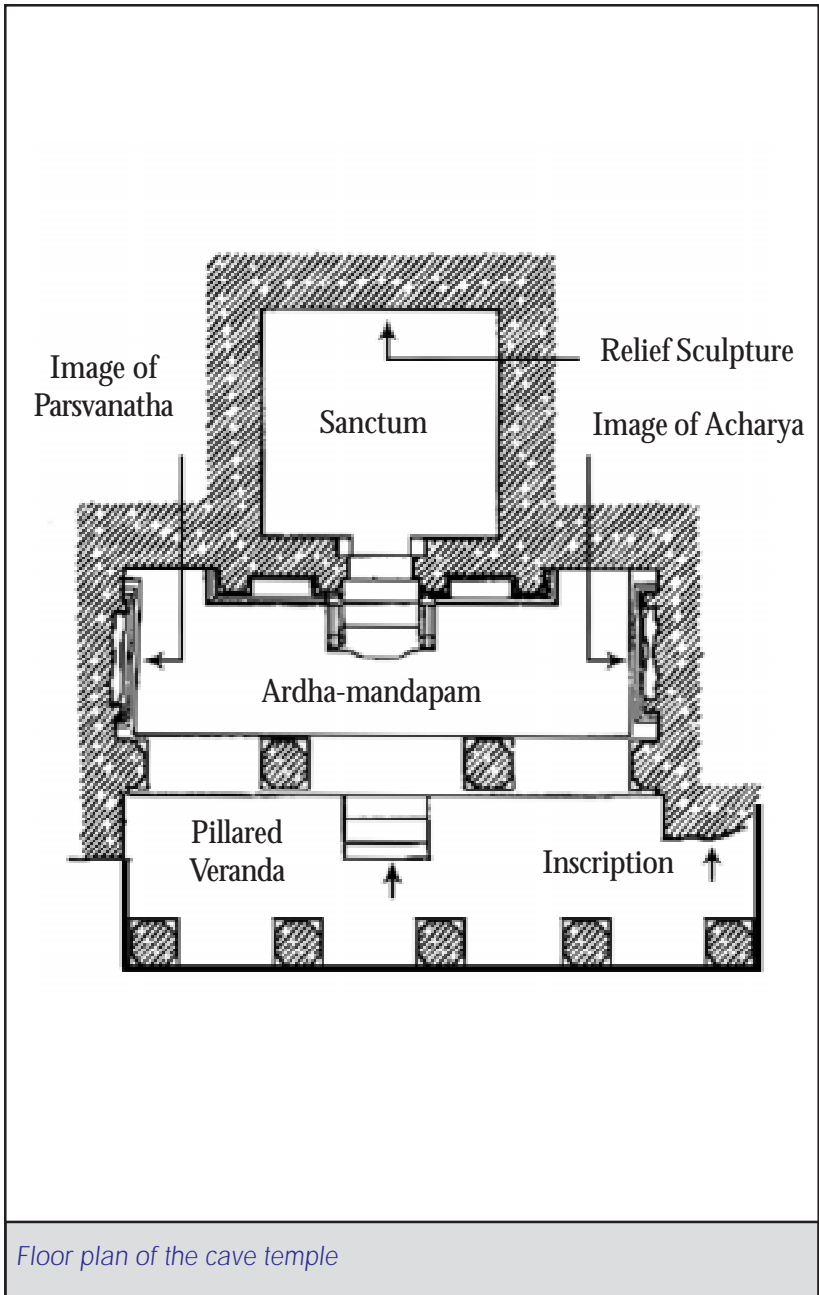
The plan and construction of the temple is simple. It resembles other rock-cut cave temples of 7th century in plan and style.

Originally it consisted of only a *garbha-griham*† and an *ardha-mandapam*† in front, facing west. Both of them are excavated from living rock. According to an inscription dated 9th century, a *mukha-mandapam*† was added during the Pandya† time. But it must have collapsed, due to neglect.

Presently, there is a pillared veranda in front of the cave. This structure is added much latter, in 20th century.



The flight of steps leading to the cave temple from the road



Floor plan of the cave temple

THE PILLARED VERANDA

Visitors enter the cave temple through a pillared veranda. This is the latter addition by the Maharaja of Pudukkottai† at the instance of Tottenham, the British administrator, in the 20th century. The pillars were brought from the ruins of the Kudumiyamalai† temple and the roof-slabs from the quarry of adjoining place called Panangudi†. The moulded plinth here is original Pandya†. It may be surmised that the *mukha-mandapam*† built by the Pandya† king must have collapsed. Some point out the debris lying about to prove this.



The pillared veranda in front of the cave.

This veranda is bereft of any detail, except for a famous inscription.

This 17-line Tamil inscription on the surface of the rock on the southern flank of this pillared veranda is of great importance giving us some clue to the dating the cave temple. It says that a Jaina acharya† named Ilan-Gautaman†, also called ‘the acharya† from Madurai’, repaired or renovated and embellished the *ardha-mandapam*† and added a *mukha-mandapam*† in front of the cave temple, which is called in the inscription ‘Arivar-koil’† (‘temple of the Arhat’) in Annalvayil† village during the reign of the Pandya King Srimaran-srivallabhan† (815-862 AD), also called Avani-pasekhara†.

A text of this inscription is given in Appendix 1

THE *ARDHA-MANDAPAM*

Crossing the front veranda one enters the rectangular *ardha-mandapam*†. It measures 22 ½ feet long, 7 ½ feet wide and 8 ½ feet high. It is slightly taller than the *garbha-griham*†.

The façade of this *ardha-mandapam*† consists of two massive pillars in the middle and two pilasters, one at either end. The pillars are squarish at the two ends and octagonal in the middle. The pilasters are also of the same design. The rock above the pillars and pilasters is carved in the form of a massive beam. All these pillars and pilasters carry large corbels (*potikai*†) with horizontal roll ornamentation or flutings, with a plain band in the centre.



A pillar of the *ardha-mantapam*.

On either side of the doorway to the *garbha-griham*† are ornamented pilasters enclosing two niches, one on either side. These pilasters are smaller but of the same type as the pillars. They have, on the upper cubical parts, lotus medallions carved in bold relief.

On the northern and southern walls of the *ardha-mandapam*† are niches. In the northern niche is a figure of a Jaina *acharya*† seated in the *dhyana*† (meditative) pose, cross-legged, with the hands placed one over the other, palms upwards, resting on the folded legs. There is a single umbrella over the head of the image, which proves that it is not that of a Tirthankara†.



The figure of the Jaina *acharya* on the northern niche.

On the southern wall, placed in a similar niche, is the figure of Parsvanatha†, the twenty-third Tirthankara†. He is also seated in the same posture, but with a five-headed serpent spreading its hood over his head instead of an umbrella.

An *acharya*† is a religious teacher and spiritual preceptor. He is the person who administers religious vows for practice by the disciple initiated by him.

Tirthankara†-s are those liberated-souls who establish and organise the *sangham*† and whom the Jain-s worship as *Devadi-deva*†-s (God of Gods). According to the Jaina tradition there are 24 Tirthankara†-s. The 23rd Tirthankara† is called Parsvanatha† and he is supposed to be lived in the 8th century BC.



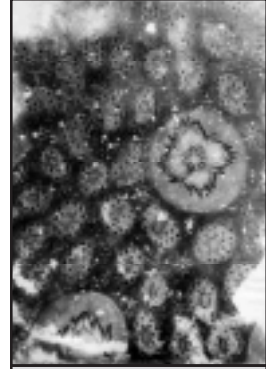
The figure of the Parsvanatha on the southern niche.

There is an inscription at the bottom (east face) of the pillar near northern figure. It contains the word '*thiruvasiriyam*'†, denoting that the figure represented is an '*asiriya*† that is *acharya*†.

It is on the ceiling, the walls, the beams, the cornice and the pillars of this *ardha-mandapam*† that the best known of the Sittannavasal† paintings are found. Those on the walls have completely perished and parts of those on the ceilings, the beams and the upper parts of the pillars alone survive.

The paintings on the ceiling

Canopies of different floral patterns are painted on the ceiling over the two images in the *ardha-mandapam*†. That over Parsvanatha† has both natural and conventional lotus flowers, the former in full blossom against a lotus-leaf background. That over the *acharya*† has only a conventional lotus-pattern.



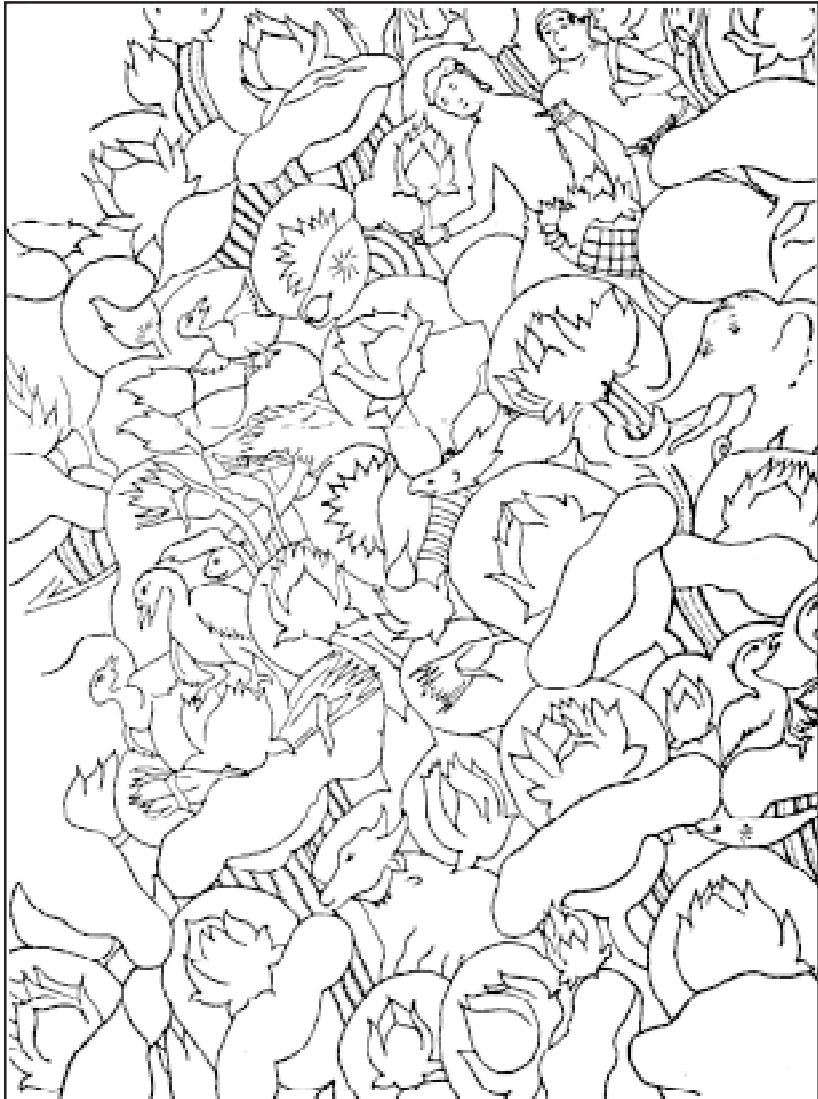
The canopy design

In the centre up to the borders of the carpet canopy is painted an exquisite composition, ‘The *Samava-sarana*’†, a lotus tank with the *Bhavya*†-s collecting flowers and animals and fish frolicking.

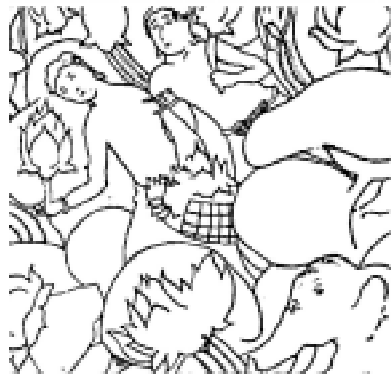
The ‘Samava-sarana’ composition

The scenes of this composition are from the *Samava-sarana*†, one of the delightful heavens of the Jain-s, explained before. The painting shows *bhavya*†-s diverting themselves in a pool, full of flowering lotuses, called *khatika-bhum*†. The flowers with their stalks and leaves, and the birds, fishes, *makara*†-s, bulls and elephants are shown with a perfect simplicity, charm and naturalness.

The pose and expression of the *bhavya*†-s shown in the picture have a charm and beauty, which compel attention. Two of them are shown together in one part of the tank (scene one in page 26). One is picking lotus flowers with his right hand and has a basket of flowers slung on the other. He is represented in a deep red colour. His companion carries a lotus in one hand, the other is bent gracefully, the fingers forming the *mrigi-mudra*† (‘deer-gesture’). His colour is orange, showing the merit of the soul. The third *bhavya*†, an extremely beautiful figure, also orange in colour, is apart from the others (scene two in page 27). He carries a bunch of lotus over his left shoulder and lily over his right. The three figures are naked except for their loin cloths. The hair is neatly arranged and the lobes of the ears are pendant.



The Samavasarana composition



The Samavasarana Composition- scene one



The Samavasarana Composition- scene two

Paintings on the pillars

The painting on the pillars also have been ruined to a large extent and only the outlines of three figures are traceable today, that too only on the upper part of the pillars.

There are portraits of dancing girls on both the pillars. These two animated figures, with their broad hips, slender waists, and elaborate ornaments, recall the beauty of the *apsara*†-s of mythology; their pose and expression suggest rhythm and dynamic movement. These portrayures of dancers in Sittannaval† must rank as one among the best in the whole of India. There is also remnant of a painting of a couple on one of the pillars.

On the front face of the southern pillar is a beautiful picture of a dancer, her left arm stretched-out in *lata-hasta*† pose, gracefully (figure in page 29). She has her right arm bent at the elbow, in front of her bosom with its palm presenting *pataaka*†. Her ears are adorned with *patra-kundala*† (known as *olai* in Tamil), rings set with gems, and her arms decked with bracelets and bangles.

Even more graceful is the other dancer on the front face of the northern pillar (figure in page 30). She has her left arm stretched-in *lata-hasta*† pose, while her right arm is bent at the elbow, in front of her bosom with its palm presenting *pataaka*†. The headdress and the ornaments of this dancer are very distinct. The hair is decked with flower garlands.



The dancer on the southern pillar



The dancer on the northern pillar

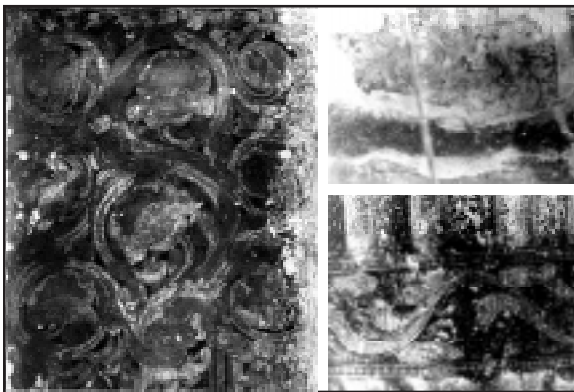
The painting on the other face of the southern pillar represents a man and a woman, possibly the builder, and his queen. The man has an elaborate *kiritam*† (diadem on the head), a *patra-kundala*† (rings set with gems) in the ear. There is also an umbrella raised over both. His demeanor and his diadem indicate his royal status. In front of these two is another figure in red, unfortunately much defaced and beyond recognition.



A royal couple on the southern pillar

Paintings on the cornice and beam

There are also paintings on the corbels, beam and cornice. On the corbel are scroll designs with lotuses. The painting on the cornice, which projects in front of the *mandapam*†, is made up of carpet designs with lotuses. The surface of the cornice in front of



The paintings of hamsa and the floral design on the cornice and beam.

each of the two pillars bears a *hamsa*† (mythical swan). On the northern wall, below the cornice on a patch of plaster, are the figures of a trident, fruits and flowers in yellow and red.

THE *GARBHA-GRIHAM*

From the *ardha-mandapam*†, a door way, 5 ½ feet by 2 ½ feet, approached by a flight of steps flanked by *surul-vyali*†-s (balustrades sculptured in the form of *vyali*†-s with curled trunks) leads to the *garbha griham*†.

The *garbha-griham*† is a square of 10 feet and 7 ½ feet high. On the back wall of the *garbha-griham*† are three images carved in relief in a row. All of them are in the same *dhyana*† (meditative) posture. The northern and central figures have ‘*mukkoda*† (triple-umbrella), indicating them to be Tirthankara†-s, while the southern has a single umbrella, and probably represents a *Chakravarti*† or an *acharya*†.

On the ceiling of the *garbha-griham*† is carved a wheel with hub and axle representing the *Dharma-chakra*† (‘Wheel-of-the-Law’).

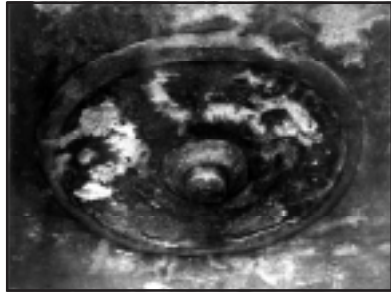
The ceiling of the *garbha-griham*† is also painted.



The door way to the *garbha-griham* from the *ardha-mantapam*



The three images in the *garbha-griham*

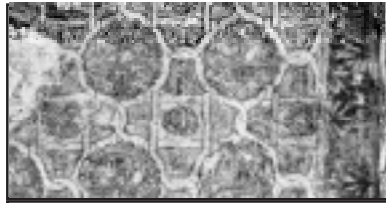


The *Dharma-chakra* on the ceiling

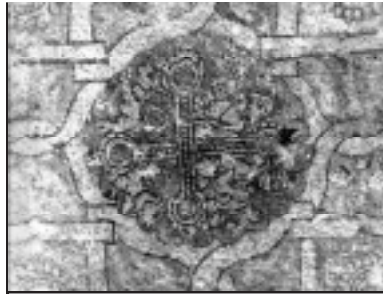
The Painting on the ceiling

The painting above the three images in the inner shrine is intended to serve as a canopy. The design suggests a carpet, with striped borders and irregular squares and circles interlinked. Within the squares are conventional lotus flowers, and inside the circles are crosses with bulbous ends. On the upper sides of the horizontal arm of the cross are human figures and on the lower sides lions.

In the rest of the area of the ceiling is the lotus pond *Samava-sarana*†, similar to that in the *ardha-mandapam*†, is painted.



The carpet design painted on the ceiling



A close-up view of the design

This completes this visit to the cave temple.

TAMIL INSCRIPTIONS NEAR THE CAVE TEMPLE

According to T. N. Ramachandran, there are four different inscriptions in Tamil characters of the 13th century AD, on the living rock to the south of the cave temple.

It is reported by Dr. A. Ekambaranathan and Dr. C. K. Sivaprakasam in their book 'Jaina Inscriptions in Tamilnadu' (1987) that there are 7 different inscriptions in Tamil characters of 7th – 10th centuries on the rock surface to the south of the cave temple.

But our team could trace only two.

All these inscriptions are unfortunately fragmentary, but appear to refer to works executed in regard to this cave temple. From these it can be surmised that the Pudukkottai† tract, in which Sittannavalai† and adjoining Narttamalai† fall, constituted a land where Jainism flourished for over 1000 years from the 1st century BC onwards.



The fragmentary inscription, south of the cave temple.

5. THE EZHADIPPATTAM

The Ezhadippattam† is the name given to a natural cavern where over more than a thousand years since 1st century BC, Jaina ascetics practiced severest penance such as *kayotsarga*† (meditation till salvation in standing posture) and *sallekhana*† (fasting unto death). There are innumerable inscriptions here. But all these inscriptions are barely visible now, due to vandalism within the last 50-60 years.



The natural cavern, Ezhadippattam.

The cavern is near the top of the centre of the hill and on its eastern side. But the only approach is from the west, over the top of the hill. It is said that, originally this path to the cavern, along a narrow ledge in which precarious footholds are cut in the rock, was difficult and dangerous. Proper steps have now been cut, and an iron railing provided.



The steps on the western side, leading to the Ezhadippattam



The way to the Ezhadippattam

Presently the ASI had installed an iron barricade at the mouth of the cavern to stop vandalism.

The cavern is roomy but low. The floor is marked out into spaces for seventeen beds, each with a sort of stone pillow. They are highly polished. Similar arrangements can be found in other parts of India like Lomas Rishi cave of Gaya, Khandagiri-Udayagiri caves of Bhuvanesvar and many places in Tamilnadu like Anamalai, Alagarmalai,

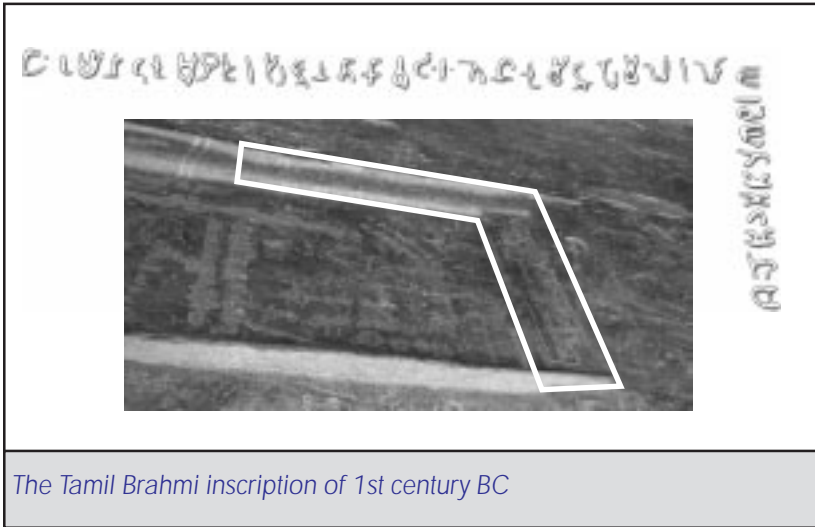
Tiruvallam, etc. In Pudukkottai itself, similar beds are there in Aluruttimalai† of Narttamalai† hills and Kudumiyamalai.



The polished stone beds.

Most of the beds here are inscribed. One of them, the largest, is perhaps the oldest since it contains an inscription in Tamil in the Tamil Brahmi script of the 1st century BC. This is one of the oldest lithic records of South India. The inscription reads as follows:

*eriminatu kumizh-ur piranta kavuti-i
tenku- cirupocil ila-
yar ceyta atit-anam*



The Tamil Brahmi inscription of 1st century BC

It mentions that one Ilaiyar† of Tenku-chiru-posil† made this seat for Kavuti† born at Kumuzhur† in Erumi-naadu†. It is believed that the Kumuzhur† in Erumi-naadu† refers to a place in the present Vellore district.

By the other beds, names of other Jaina ascetics practiced *sallekhana*† are inscribed. Thus, there are number inscriptions of 7th to 10th centuries AD. These inscriptions show that for about 1000 years from the 1st century BC this cavern was a resort of Jaina ascetics.

6. THE NAVACHCHUNAI

The Navach-chunai† is a tarn situated on the eastern slope of central part of the rocky hillock. It is about one kilometer north of the Ezhadippattam†, at a somewhat lower level than it. Reaching there requires a lot of rock-climbing and trekking and would need somebody to guide.



The Navach-chunai



The naval-maram or jambu-tree near the tarn



The submerged cave temple of Jambunatha

The pool takes its name from a *naval-maram*† or *jambu-tree*† (*Syzygium jambolanum*) close by.

Like the Talai-aruvisingam† tarn of Narttamalai† (on the Mela-malai), this contains inside, a submerged rock-cut shrine. Stylistically it is a late Pandya† temple (13th century AD). It contains a Siva *lingam*† in the centre and a narrow passage to walk round. The water is occasionally baled out, and the *lingam*† worshipped. This is locally called the Jambunatha's cave.

7. THE MEGALITHIC BURIALS

Megalithic burial is a typical mode of disposing the dead in most part of Tamilnadu in the past. Some suggest the period 3rd century BC to 1st century AD is considered to be when this was practised. It may be remembered that this period is also the period of Sangam†. Loosely called ‘dolmans’, these are stone-capped burial monuments with chambers and similar interment arrangements in stone. These monuments are found in many places in Tamilnadu like the districts of Chengalpattu†, Vellore†, Pudukkottai†, Ramanathapuram†, Salem†, Coimbatore† and Tirunelveli†.

Locally known as Pandava-kuzhi† (‘pits-of-Pandava†-s’), mandavar-kuzhi† (‘pits-of-the- dead’), kurangup-pattadai†, or kurangup-pattarai† (‘monkey’s-workshop’) and mudu-makkal-thaazhi† (‘burial-pots-of-the-old-people’). The last name is the most widely used.

BURIAL CUSTOMS IN SANGAM LITERATURE

There are mentions about the various burial customs like urn-burial in the Sangam literature. *Mani-mekhalai*†, one of the twin epics of the post-Sangam period, enumerates classes practising different modes of disposing of the dead, namely, those who cremate (Suduvor†), those who simply expose the body and leave it to decay (Iduvor†), those who bury the dead in deep graves (Thodukuzhipaduppor†), those who entomb the dead in strong low vaults (Thaazhvayin-adaippor†) and, those who inter them in urns and cover them up (Tazhiyir-kavippor†) (*Mani-mekhalai*† vi, 67-68).

Though the first mode of cremation came to be adopted under the influence of Vedic culture, the other methods were also being practised. Exposing the dead body to natural decay was in vogue till recent times. Burial is common even today in Tamilnadu.

MEGALITHIC BURIAL SITES IN PUDUKKOTTAI

The Pudukkottai† district was a home of the pre-historic man. A very large number of megalithic burial sites have been found in the district, generally near watercourses. One can see a number of burial sites even today in several places like Ambur-patti, Ammachatram, Annaval, Kizhaiyur, Melur, Mootamapatti, Narangianpatti, Perungalur, Peyal, Poyyamani, Puttambur, Sathyamangalam, Sengalur, Sittannaval†, Tayinippatti, Tekkattur, Tiruppur, Vadaguppatti, Vattanakuruchi and Vilappatti. They are easily identifiable by the appearance of a circle of laterite or granite stones and small boulders on the surface of the spot.

A few burial sites, belonging to the 1st century BC – 1st century AD, have been excavated, revealing pottery and ornaments, some of which are exhibited in the Government Museum at Pudukkottai†.

GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF THE BURIAL SITES

Excavations have revealed three types of burials in Pudukkottai† region. They are (1) grave-burials; (2) urn-burials and (3) burials in deep stone-chambers formed of stone slabs (cists).

1. Grave-burials

This mode of burial is simple, where the body interred in a horizontal posture. Some experts feel that this was adopted by the poor. There is another view that women were buried in this way and men were normally buried in urns. The finding of urn-burials side by side with these sites might have contributed to this view.

2. Urn-burials

The urns were earthen pots, large enough for a man in a sitting posture. They varied in size, the largest measuring 4 feet in height and 3 feet 6 inches in diameter.

P. T. Srinivasa Ayyangar, who was among the people who did excavations here, writes: 'The dead men were placed in a sitting posture in an earthenware pot. The pot was then let into a pit and half filled with sand and rice, and other grains on a tray were placed before the dead man. His stone tools were also inserted at the sides of the pot. The foodstuff and the tools were no doubt, intended for the use of the dead man in his post-mortem life, for they believed in life of the spirit of men after death. Then more sand was poured into the pot till it was full and the pot covered with an earthenware lid. The pit was then filled in and a stone slab placed on it. Then more sand was poured and another stone slab, this time very large and oval in shape, was placed above the grave and upright stone about a cubit long planted all round the slab....'.

Most urns did not contain any ornaments, but some did, such as bracelets made of bronze or chank shells, nose-rings, and cornelian and glass beads bored with a hole. Some times elegant bronze vessels were found. In some places iron swords, daggers, spear-heads and arrow heads with spiked or hollow handles, *valar†*-s, and other weapons were found buried round the urns with their point downwards. Less usually similar but smaller and more elegant weapons were found inside the urns themselves. The urns generally contained human bones, and two in the Pulvayal† forest contained complete skeletons, seated and holding short swords in their right hands, while the left arm rested on the thighs. In one of the Pulvayal† urns was found a sword 18 inches long with human teeth adhering to the blade which bore embossed decorations near the handle.

3. Burials in subterranean chambers formed of stone slabs (cists)

A number of burials of this type have been excavated. The main burial chamber, as large as 8 feet square and 7 feet deep, was placed at about 2 to 3 feet below floor level. In addition were elaborate smaller chambers and partitions, and access between chambers in the form of man-holes. The slabs that enclose the cists project to a height of two to three feet above the ground.

All finds of any importance were found at a depth of about four to five feet below the ground level and only in the two partitions of the main chamber. Surprisingly no traces of human bones were found, but only some baked earthenware utensils and iron weapons of different sorts. Among the findings were corroded weapons, saucer-like iron vessel about 7 ½ diameter, thin bronze plates and a stone-ball, evidently a missile.

THE MEGALITHIC BURIAL SITES IN SITTANNAVASAL

There are extensive Megalithic burial sites near the hillock in the Village. It contain both cist and urn burials.

The visitors are suggested to visit these burial sites while they are returning from the visit to the other monuments. One can locate them on both the sides of the road leading from the monuments to the main road, after about 100 meters from the Ezhadippattam†. More of such burials can be located on the left side of the main road, leading to Pudukkottai, after about 200 meters from the junction.



A megalithic burial site with stone circles

Some of these were excavated in 1934-35.

Specimens of garnet, red jasper and rock crystal have been picked up near the foot of the hill. Pieces of pottery coated inside with molten and coloured glass, and loose pieces of coloured glass have been found in the fields opposite the hill. These indicate that in olden times glass making was probably a flourishing industry in these parts.

5. OTHER INTERESTING SITES

Along the western base of the hill, and beneath the central and southern parts of it, lie a stone and brick temple of Siva in ruins, and shrines to Ayyanar†, Pidari†, and other village deities. From this one may infer that there must have been a village close to the hill on the site now covered by the dry fields.



The shrine of the village deities



The terracotta horses from this shrine

There is a Trigonometrical Survey station on the central rock, at a height of 700 feet.



The Trigonometrical survey station

THE PANDYA INSCRIPTION

The 17 line inscription of Ilan-Gautaman†, who is hailed as the acharya† from Madurai, is in Tamil verse and is found on the southern flank of the cave temple.

This 9th century inscription is inscribed during the reign of the Pandya† King Srimaran-srivallabhan† also called Avanipasekhara† (815-862 AD).

It reads as follows:

1. Svasti Sri Tiruntiya perumpugal devadarisanat taruntava munivanaip porutselvan ara
2. (niki) la(r) nilaimai Ilan Gautamanenum valankelu Tirunagar Madirai Asiriyana A(vanai)pa
3. r muludanda Pancavar Kula mudalar Keluvaivel Avanipasekaran Sirkelu sengor Siri Val
4. luvanuk kenrippalavun Kurikolinitavaion . . . tandavaniyattanpai Mudur
5. Kadivalam perukkip Pannavar koil pangura cceyvit taranap perummik kolukkavi
6. rkum puranamalai poliyavongi anda(mi)l..... vilakkir kamanan kaniyun ca
7. tti vayakkalun gunamigu Sirappin Kurittu ...(melu)kku puramoru munrumavum valukkarava
8. gaiyal valipaduvonuk karaikkaniyum amaiya nokki Annal vayil Arivar koin

9. munnal Mandagan kallal niyarrik kandor marulun Kamaru viluccirul
10. loru puramba lolimiga p(pok)ki marru mellan kurra niki Adivendar
11. aranceyalakki nirii (niruvi) . . . masar a niriit Tiruverran ceypavai ne
12. dutu n(nu)ruma. . . viragamaittunidoli vilakki nnaippuramagena
13. idai vayalode(t). . . . kuriya vagaiya nadi nangamaittu valipaduvo
14. rku nilamu(m) maraikkalol iyavagaiyar kandanane. . . (tik)kol
15. kaippala gunattoney||- Tinnilai verpa. . . irrenkanka . . .
16. npa... mi . . . manila – Sir Madirai Asiriyannal agamandaga
17. m pudukki ang Arivar koil Mukamandaga meduttan mum ||

