



Yanaimalai

Yanaimalai is located ten kilometers east of Madurai on trunk road leading to Thiruchirappalli. It is one of the cultural monuments representing the great tradition of Madurai. Yanaimalai has been historically important with its historical monuments and other sources of cultural ethos since the Sangam age, which is about one thousand and eight hundred years old. This hill is fondly called by the people as Yanaimalai (elephant hill), from very early period, as it looks like an elephant. The nearby village was once called as Narasingampatti. Now it is shortly named as Narasingam. The hill is the historical source as it has early caves with epigraphical records and sculptures and inscriptions of the Early Pandya, Later Pandya, Chola and Vijayanagar -Nayak rulers. The top of the hill has Tamil Brahmi inscriptions of the 1st century A.D.

This historic hill was sung by one of the three great Saiva Nayanmars, Thirugnanasambandar, as the dwelling place of the Jains. Paranjothimuni, in his Thiruvilaiyadal purana, mentions that this hill was originally an elephant incited by the Jains to destroy Madurai. When Lord Siva threw an arrow at it, it became a stone elephant and thus is called Yanaimalai. The Jains believe that the Saints who authored one of the Sangam classics, Naladiyar, lived in this hill. The Jains reverentially consider Yanaimalai as one of the eight Jain centers located around Madurai. Though the Jains, Vaishnavites and Saivites were competing each other to promote their respective religions in this region, in due course, they seem to have maintained toleration to each other. This is evident from the records available at Yanaimalai. It has the credit of accommodating the following historical monuments.

1. Natural Jain Cavern - 1st century A.D.

There is a natural cavern of the Jains located at the top of the hill's southern side (Nose of the hill). It was established in the 1st century A.D. for the dwelling of the Jain monks. A Tamil Brahmi inscription of this period found here mentions that it was set up along with rock beds by one Eri Aarithan Aththuvayi Arattakasibhan.

2 .Jain Sculptural Cave – 9th-10th century A.D.

The bas-relief sculptural panels of the Jain Thirthankaras, Yakshi and Yaksha are seen at the façade of a natural cavern located on the western side of the hill at a medium height. They belong to the 9th-10th century A.D. The names of the donors of these sculptures are engraved in Vatteluttu script under the images. These sculptures also show early paintings on them.

3.Narasinga Perumal Cave temple – A.D. 770.

The Narasinga Perumal Cave temple was excavated by Maran Kari and Maran Eyinan, the chief ministers of the Early Pandyas. On the two sides of the cave door way there are Tamil Vatteluttu and Grantha (Sanskrit) inscriptions indicating the excavation of the cave. The Mandapa in front of the cave was constructed by the officials of the Vijayanagar ruler Krishnadevaraya. In addition to the Early Pandya records, there are also the epigraphs of Later Pandyas, Cholas and Vijayanagar-Nayak found in this temple.

4. Murugan Cave temple (Ladan Koil) 8th century A.D.

To the south of the Narasinga Perumal temple there is a cave temple dedicated to Murugan (Lord Karthikeya). It was excavated in the 8th century A.D. , as per the Vatteluttu inscription found here, by one Vattakkurichi Nambiran Pattasomaji. Murugan is seen seated along with his consort Devayanai in the sanctum sanctorium.

5. Veda Narayana Perumal temple 13th century A.D.

Veda Narayana Perumal temple is located at northern most corner of the Yanaimalai hill. It belongs to the 13th century A.D. This area is called Thungavanam. There is a lotus tank called Brahmatirtha. A thirteenth century epigraph (Kulasekara Pandya, A.D. 1288) engraved on the rock by the side of the tank mentions about the existence of a temple garden in the name of Alagiyamanavalan. It was here during hunting festival Kalamega perumal used to visit this place and took part in the celebration.

-- Dr.V.Vedachalam