

KAZHUGUMALAI - A HERITAGE SITE

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Abstract

This paper deals with heritage tourism with special reference to Kazhugumalai. Heritage tourism or a study is commonly regarded by tourists in a space where historic artifacts are presented. Heritage tourism is based upon the concept that each community has a story to tell. ¹ This is a rapidly growing market that is directed towards experiencing the local customs, traditions, arts, history, sites and culture that authentically represent a particular place.

Key Words: *Heritage, Tourism, Jain Sculptures, Culture, Architecture.*

Introduction

Man, being a gregarious and social animal was much fascinated in undertaking tours and travels from time immemorial. ²Tourism is a smokeless industry which attained significance because of the desire of people for visiting varied places of their likes. Tourism serves a window to look into the life and culture of a region of a nation.

Kazhugumalai as Heritage Site (Southern Ellora)

Kazhugumalai, as a heritage site depicts monolithic rock cut Jaina architecture of universal value. Kazhugumalai means hill inhabited by eagles, located 56 kms north of Thirunelveli. It is a treasure trove of indescribably beautiful Jaina sculptures. ³ There are ponds on either side of the hill and the hilltop offers a breathtaking view of paddy fields interspersed with Palmyra trees. Several Jain carvings are seen on the hill, which has made this place an important Jain pilgrim center.

Historical Background of Kazhugumalai

Kazhugumalai is a panchayat town in Kovilpatti taluk of Thoothukudi district. Thoothukudi or Tuticorin is a Port City located on South East of Tamilnadu State. This was known by the name 'Thirumanthiranagar' in the ancient times. Tuticorin is well known as a centre for sea trading, pearl fishing and ship building for over a century.

Kazhugumalai is located in between Kovilpatti and Sankarankovil and served as ancient trade route from Kovilpatti to Courtallam and Sengottai. The village has two parts Kottai Kazhugumalai and South Kazhugumalai. (Hill of the Vulture). Earlier it was known as Araimalai or Thirumalai. Even before that it was referred as Nechchuram and Tirunescuram. Some was a palace for the pandya official called Ettimannan. Kazhugumalai has been revered by the Thirupugazh music composer Muthuswamy Deekshitar has sung in praise of this shrine. ⁴

This heritage site Kazhugumalai is a unique and one of the ancient Murugan temples in Tamilnadu known for its monolithic rock cut architecture. There are three main temples in Kazhugumalai.

1. Jaina Abode

There are many relief sculptures dating to the 8th - 9th century A.D. in the area, including the rock cut image of Bhagawan Parashwanatha flanked by two Yaksha, as well as many other rock cut images of other thithankaras.⁵ The area is known for the Jain cave temple and architecture. There is a number of Jain images with labels in vattezhuthu script. The epigraphs mention the name of the donors, of the figures, of the provisions made for the offerings, etc. The main deity of the hill was called Araimalai Alwar. The sculpture was caused to be made in memory of the departed souls. There are approximately one hundred and fifty relief sculptures.

On the rock surface, frozen in time, was a superbly sculpted Jaina Tirthankara seated in the Ardhapariyanakasana pose on a lion pedestal, with a triple umbrella above his head. Around the enlightened one were celestial maidens, dancing inside coils of creepers or playing the flute or percussion instrument. Their merry abandon signified the occasion of his attaining Kevalagnanna, or enlightenment. On either side was a Chowrie (flywhisk) - bearer. Below them, two devotees stood with flowers in their hands. The sculpted panel also had two fish - headed makaras, with a warrior coming forth from the mouth of each. Other warriors, on horseback, were there to see the great soul attain enlightenment. On top were the carvings of Surya and Chandra, and Indra on his elephant Airavatham, below this bas-relief was an inscription in Tamil Vatteluttu (a rounded script).⁶ Every image in this sculpture is rich in details.

The sculptures and the epigraphs are to be assigned to the reign of Pandya, Paranthaka Nedunjadaiya (A.D. 768 - 800). From various inscriptions it is found that they belong to different eras and the place became extinct after 13th century due to loss of patronage after Pandya kings.

2. Vettuvan Koil

Vettuvan koil is a Hindu temple built between the 8th and 9th century. Kazhugumalai is a priceless unfinished Pandyan monolith cave temple, part of the iconographic richness that helped chronicle the burgeoning richness of the Tamil culture, traditions, and sacred centres containing religious art. About 7.5 meter of the mountain is excavated in a rectangular fashion and in the middle the temple is sculpted from a single piece of rock. The carvings reflect the southern temple style of the Pandya era. Only the top portion of the temple is completed. The temple has an entrance and centre hall for the main deity. In the later days Ganesha's idol is kept and worshipped. At the top of the temple beautiful

sculpture of Uma Maheswarar, Dakshinamoorthy, Vishnu and Brahma can be found. This temple is of same style of Kailasnath temple in Ellora, structural shrines at Pattadakal in Bijapur, monolithic temples of Pallavas at Mamallapuram showing the close political relationship between Pallavas, Chalukyas and Rashtrakutas.⁷ There are around 122 sculptures in the rock cut temple.

3. Kazhugasalamoorthy temple

The main deity of this temple is Murugan. The main deity hall and entrance hall is excavated inside the foot hills of kazhugumalai in the south western corner of the hill and with external structural additions. The temple has many aesthetic sculptures. The temple dates to 18th century. The main deity is Lord Murugan with his wife Deivanai. The temple complex also has shrines of Shiva, Akilandeswari, Vinayakar and many lesser deities. Other than these temples there is Vinayaga temple at the top of the Kaluzhumalai hill and Ayyanar temple on the way to Jaina Abode.

According to V.Vedachalam, Retired Senior Epigraphist, Tamilnadu Archaeology Department, "Kazhugumalai was an active centre of Jaina learning for 300 years from the 8th century A.D. It was a place of worship, a monastery and a college. Jains from Tirucharanam and Kottaru (Both in present day Kanyakumari district in Tamil Nadu) came to Kazhugumalai to teach and learn."⁸

Festivals

Six worship services are carried out each day here. Skandasashti is celebrated with great splendor. Thai Poosam, Panguni Uttram and Vaikasi Visakam are the annual festivals celebrated here.⁹ Cattle fairs in the vicinity coincide with Thaipooam and Panguniuttram.

Steps taken to Improve the Site - Kazhugumalai

1. A community based action is in progress to promote the status of site.
2. Sculptors are looking forward to a series of developmental activities to upgrade it a world renowned heritage site.
3. A 14 member tourism development committee involved in familiarizing the site¹⁰.
4. About 1500 members of women self-help groups had been involved in the task.
5. Community participation would ensure its vibrant growth.

Benefits of Heritage Tourism

Heritage tourism protects history, cultural and natural resources in towns and cities by involving people in their community. People are more often motivated to safeguard their historic resources. Heritage tourism educated residents and visitors about local and regional history and shared traditions. Through involvement and exposure to local historic sites,

residents become better informed about their history and traditions. Understanding the importance of one's heritage provides continuity and context for a community's residents and it strengthens citizenship values and improves quality of life.

End Notes

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