

Sittanavasal

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In news– With much of the art in Sittanavasal either damaged or vandalised, Archaeological Survey of India has undertaken conservation measures and also introduced digital checks to track public access.

History of Sittanavasal-

- **Sittanavasal is the name used synonymously for the hamlet and the hillock that houses the Arivar Kovil (temple of Arihats – Jains who conquered their senses), 'Ezhadipattam' (a cavern with 17 polished rock beds), megalithic burial sites and the Navachunai tarn (small mountain lake) with a submerged shrine.**
- Sittanavasal is considered by historians to be **one of the oldest inhabited areas in the district, and a major centre of Jain influence.**
- A second century Jain temple in **Sittanavasal consisted of Mahavir statue** on both sides of wall is considered as a **'Meditation Hall' or Arivar temple.**
- It is believed that it is the **only place in Tamil Nadu where one can see Pandya paintings(it also dates back to Mahendravarma Pallava).**
- **Sittanavasal's site and art was first mentioned by local historian S. Radhakrishnan Iyer in his 1916 book *General History of Pudukottai State.***
- Subsequent research by French archaeologist *Gabriel Jouveau-Dubreil* along with iconographer *T.A. Gopinatha Rao* in 1920 further highlighted the importance of the monuments.
- The **artwork on the ceiling of the sanctum** and the ardha mandapam of *Arivar Kovil* is an **early example of post-Ajanta cave paintings of the fourth to sixth centuries, done using the fresco-secco technique** (a process that dispenses with preparation of the wall with wet plaster).

- **The ceiling paintings show 'bhavyas'** (exalted souls who work to achieve moksha or spiritual liberation) enjoying themselves in a pool, full of blooming lotuses; today much of it is obscured by patchy plastering.
- Faint outlines **linger of dancing girls on the 'ardha mandapam'** pillars.
- The pillars of the *verandah* (added by the Maharaja of Pudukottai at the instance of then *Diwan Alexander Tottenham* in the 1900s), were brought from *Kudumiyanmalai*.
- The **colours are a mixture of plant dyes and mineral elements** such as lime, lamp black, and clay pigments such as ochre for yellow and terre verte for the greyish-green tints.
- The cave temples are under the control of Archaeological survey of India.
- Even though Sittanavasal is a comparatively small archaeological microcosm of Jainism in contrast to those found in Madurai and the Arcot districts, it is thought to be the **best preserved example of a Jain cave temple in Tamil Nadu**.
- As per the historians, continuous records of Jainism in the region exist from the first to 10th centuries. Of the 20 cave temples in Pudukottai district, 19 belong to Saivite and Vaishnavite streams of Hinduism; Sittanavasal is the only Jain temple with sculptures.
- There is a debate about whether Jainism's prevalence in Tamil Nadu began in the first or the third century. Nevertheless, Sittanavasal remains an important place to study the history of the religion.
- **There are inscriptions in Brahmi and 'vattaezhuthu'**, from the third century AD here, which have been discovered and recorded.
- **Early Tamil inscriptions from the ninth century AD of the Jain monk Ilan-Gautaman**, are inside the complex.