

# BUDDHA AND JAINA RELIGS IN TRAVANCORE

By "A Wanderer"

ALTHOUGH according to the Census of 1941 there are in Travancore only 62 Jains and 16 Buddhists, there was a time when in common with the rest of South India, Travancore too came under the influence of Buddhism and Jainism and there are to be found even to-day a number of relics, in different parts of the State, reminding one of those far-off days when the faiths of Gautama Buddha and Vardhamana Mahavira were living ones practised by countless numbers of men and women.

The most well-known Buddhist relic, but realized by few to be such, is the familiar image of Karumadi Kuttan. Journeying by boat from Alleppey to Quilon, one passes by the little village of Karumadi (about ten miles from Alleppey), and here one has one's attention drawn to a black stone image, about three feet in height and with its left arm missing, set on a masonry pedestal, a little away from the canal bank. They call it Karumadi Kuttan, and travellers and boatmen go ashore to make offerings of coconuts to the image.

Archaeologists have established that Karumadi Kuttan is an image of the Buddha seated in the yogasana posture. They point to the *Ushnisha* and *Jwala* on the head of the image and traces of the upper cloth passing over the chest as distinguishing marks of Buddha images according to Buddhist iconography.

Karumadi Kuttan, however, is not by any means the only image of Buddha found in Travancore. The labours of the State Department of Archaeology have been rewarded by the discovery of four more Buddha images.

One of these is at Mavelikara, in the compound of a private gentleman, where it is worshipped by the local people by lighting lamps in front of it and breaking coconuts.

Another elegantly executed figure of the Buddha was come upon at Bharanikavu, five miles to the north-west of Mavelikara. A third image but with the head missing was recovered from Pallikkal, 7½ miles from Adur in the Kunnattur Taluk. The fourth image, and a very fine one, was found on the bank of a tank at Marudukulangara in Karunagapalli taluk. The last two images are kept on view in the Museum at Trivandrum.

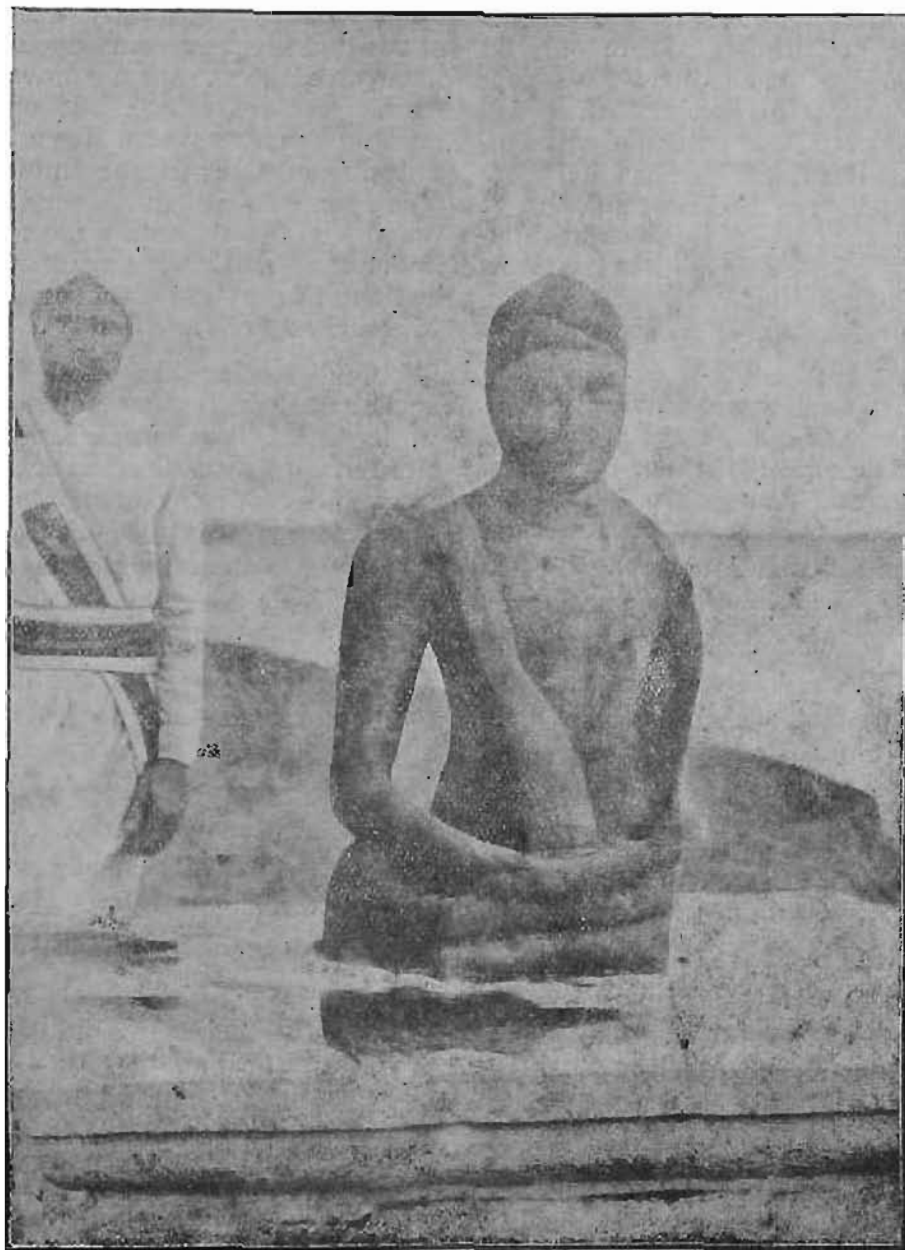
One peculiar thing noticed in this connection is that all these images were found in localities in Central Travancore. The late Mr. Gopinatha Rao has argued from this as well as other circumstances that the famous Buddha temple of Srimulavasam on the Malabar Coast, which is said to have been washed away by the encroaching sea, must have been situated somewhere near Ambalapuzha, that the Buddha images found at various places in the Mavelikara, Kunnattur, Karunagapally and Ambalapuzha taluks very likely point to the fact that Buddha temples existed at these places and that Buddhism had its stronghold in Central Travancore.

When exactly Buddhism faded out of the State cannot be said with certitude, but Jainism seems to have lived longer and it was not until comparatively recent times that it altogether disappeared. There are three well-known temples in Travancore to-day which are definitely of Jaina origin and which have in them many relics to confirm the view that they were centres where the religion of Mahavira was practised.

The most important of these is the cave temple at Chitalal, a village situated about four miles to the north-east of Kuzhithurai on the Trivandrum-Cape Comorin road. Near this village is a craggy hill on

the top of which is a cave facing west, formed by a beetling mass of rock leaning on another, and on the northern side of this overhanging rock are to be found, carved in half relief, a number of figures of

posture is the padmasana and over the head is a triple umbrella. Parsvanatha is depicted as a tall figure, straight and nude. The eyes indicate a state of deep meditation and over the head is a three-headed cobra. To



THE WELL-KNOWN IMAGE OF KARUMADI KUTTAN IDENTIFIED BY  
ARCHAEOLOGISTS AS AN IMAGE OF THE BUDDHA.

the Jain Tirthankaras, including Parsvanatha Tirthankara and also of Padmavati-devi. These figures all have the distinguishing characteristics of Jaina images of this type. The head is cropped, the ear lobes hang down, the body is nude, the

the Tirthankara's left is the graceful figure of Padmavati-devi. Inside the temple are two pretty stone images of Mahavira and Parsvanatha.

The hill on which the temple is situated is called Tiruchantumalai, a corrupted



JAINA IMAGES ON A ROCK AT CHITARAL.

form of Tirucharanattumalai, which has been interpreted as meaning the hill sacred to the Jaina ascetics. It seems to have attracted Jaina pilgrims from such distant places of South Arcot and Tanjore. It has been estimated that the conversion of the old Jaina temple into the present Bhagavati shrine must have taken place at about 1250 A. D.

The Nagaraja temple at Nagercoil also was of Jaina origin and continued to be Jaina till about 1522. Six Jaina images have been located in this temple, "three of which are seated figures of Mahavira Tirthankara, one a seated figure of Parsvanatha, another of Parsvanatha Tirthankara standing and the sixth of Padmavathidevi. One of the Mahavira images is carved on a pillar in the mandapa in front of the central shrine and two others on the central shrine itself. The images of Parsvanatha

and Padmavathidevi are sculptured on pillars standing in the same mandapa."

The third temple of Jaina origin is the Bhagavati temple at Kallil, a place eight miles from Perumpavoor in north Travancore. The shrine is a cave formed by a huge overhanging rock. Inside, on the back wall of the cave, is sculptured in half relief, the image of Mahavira Tirthankara and to its left is the stone image of Padmavathidevi now worshipped as Bhagavati. On the overhanging rock in front of the shrine is also carved a figure of Mahavira. One curious thing about this temple is that, though it belongs to the Hindus and it is a goddess of the Hindu pantheon that is worshipped therein, Bania merchants from Cochin who are of the Jaina persuasion, still visit it and make offerings, and the Hindu priest accepts them.