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A STUDY ON CEILING PAINTINGS OF THIRUPARUTHIKUNDRAM TEMPLE

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ABSTRACT

Thiruparuthikundram, historically known as Jain Kanchi, this area is a testament to the glory of Jainism. The main deity in this temple is Lord Mahavira, Dharmadevi is seen on the left side of Mahavira. Jain Kanchi is located on the right bank of the Vegavathi River, within the city limits of Kanchipuram. This Jain temple is evidence of the presence of Jainism in Kanchipuram in ancient times. This temple is known by other names like TrailokyaNatha Temple, Vardhmana and Jeenaswamy, and dates belong to the 8th and 9th centuries. Thiruparuthikundram is one of the four educational institutions for Digambara Jains in India, the other three being in Delhi, Kolhapur and Penukonda. Jain paintings based on the lives of the Tirthankaras and other stories depicted on the ceiling of the Sangita Mandapam are painted.

Keywords: Jain Kanchi, Bagavata, Siddachakara, Decorative Quality, Fresco-Secco

1. INTRODUCTION

Kanchipuram was ruled by the Pallavas, the Medieval Cholas, the Later Cholas, then the Pandyas and the Vijayanagara Empire. Kanchipuram is a divine place, a place of education and knowledge. The Pallava period, Hinduism and Jainism has spread to Kanchipuram. Jains seem to have settled in Kanchipuram since ancient times and the area where they lived was called "Jain Kanchi" or that part of Kanchi occupied by Jains Jain influence is still visible. Here beautiful temples Trilokyanadha temple and the smaller Chandraprabha temple those two Jain temples. The Chandraprabha temple built by Nandivarma-II pallava in the 8th century CE and temple built by pallava king Simha Varma-III in ancient times it was known as the Jain Kanchi and Trilokyanadha Temple. Inscriptions also available in Archeology

survey of India. (Here People are calling some other names of Mahavira Trilokyanadha, Vardhamana and Jeenaswamy. Vardhamana Mahavira was born in 599 B.C. at Kundagrama near Vaishali. In the thirteenth year of his asceticism, he acquired the highest knowledge and came to be known as Jaina means the conqueror and Mahavira means great hero. Jainism is about simple living and nonviolence (ahimsa). Jainism is a way of life based on the teachings of 24 Tirthankaras, the last and most prominent of whom is Lord Mahavira. The first Tirthankara was Rishabha and the last or twenty-third was Parsvanatha. The word Tirthankara refers to the founder of a pilgrimage, which means a path that can cross the ocean of endless births and deaths (known as samsara). Tirthankaras are variously called "Teaching Gods", "Ford-Makers", "Crossing Makers" and Makers of the River-Crossing. Gandhimathi and Arul (2021) The architectural features of this temple are similar to those of a Dravidian style Hindu temple, such as the Gopuram, Dhvaja stamba, Mandapam, and Balipetam. It is an east-facing Gopuram. Irugappa and Bukka Raya - II were two dynamic Vijayanagara kings. Who built the temple. Inside the temple granite base are Tamil inscriptions written in Granth script dating back to the reign of Emperor Krishnadevaraya, which record the sale of land for the purpose of this temple. There are five separate temples. From the front, it is difficult to tell that these temples have separate planes, as the temple structures appear to be intertwined. Since it is difficult to tell from the front that the statues have separate vimanas, the structures of the statues appear to be merged. The Vardhamana and Pushpadanta temples have an apsidal vimana. The Dharma Devi temple is the smallest with a narrow vimana, front of a Vimana reveals elaborate Kirti Mukhas, crouching lions, gatekeepers, Tirthankaras with attendants and floral motifs. The temple has Dravidian style features and is therefore reminiscent of the temples of the Pallava and Chola period. Another part of the temple complex is called Trikuta Basti and it has two separate sanctuaries dedicated to the 6th Tirthankara Padmaprabha and the 12th Tirthankara Vasupujya. A small statue of Parsyanatha is also located in a small alcove in the wall Pritam (2021)

2. THE STORY OF THIRUPARUTHRIKUNDRAM CEILING PAINTINGS

The temple was originally built during the Pallava period, but was later renovated during the Chola period and the Vijayanagara period. It has a mandapa built by Irugappa, a 14th-century general of Harihara-II. Harini (2005) This mandapam has beautiful ceiling paintings. Here Some date back to the sixteenth century, others, more recent, to the seventeenth century - the time of the Nayaks. Scenes from the life of Rishabh deva, the first Tirthankara, Vardhaman, the cousin of Neminath, Krishna, as well as from the life of Neminath, are graphically depicted in a long series with elaborate labels painted in Tamil, clearly explaining each event.) Sivaramamurti (1985)

This mandapam appears rectangular in shape and has 24 pillars, about 60 feet in length, it is called the Sangita Mandapam. Figure 1 Mandapam has four rows in the front and one row on the south side, making a total of five rows from east to west. The vegetable dyes used in the paintings have earthy tones and each painting looks unique. The theme is chosen from the life of the Vardhamana.

The paintings are arranged in convenient groups: two runs from north to south on the roof of the music hall and two from east to west, while another group of paintings runs from north to south on the roof of the face hall. They are compressed into rows of panels one after the other, with a narrow band running between every two rows, which serve as labels to describe the events depicted in the frescoes.) Saletore (1982).

Figure 1



Figure 1 Jain Temple (Digambara-Sangita Mandapam) Photo by Surya - 2025

I have chosen the second row of the ceiling in the music hall on the north side, with five panels telling the story of their artwork.

- 1) Panel 1:(left to right) King Mahabala of Vidyadhara and his wife listening to the words of their minister, Swayambuddha, Mahabala, along with his minister, is performing the Ashtanhika-vrata in the Siddhakuta-chaitya temple.
- **2) Panel-2:** (left to right) The deva, Lalitanga and his wife Swayam Prabha, King Vajrajamgha and his wife Smriti, King Vajrajamgha and Smriti, along with their minister, priest, army chief, and treasurer, were hearing about their past lives from the sage Charana. *Four animals, a tiger, monkey, boar and mongoose also listen.*
- **3) Panel-3** (left to right) A king and queen were born as a couple in the land of highest bliss, listening to the Dharma from the Charana sages. The four animals from the previous birth, the tiger, monkey, boar and mongoose, are now born as Aryans and are listening to the Dharma from the same sages.
- **4) Panel-4** (left to right) the god Sridhara and his wife; King Suvidhi and his wife Manorama; Suvidhi, disgusted with worldly life, receives initiation from a sage.
- **5) Panel-5**(left to right) Achchutendra and his wife; King Vajranabhi and his queens. Ramachandran (2011)

Figure 2



Figure 2 Wall Paintings of the vardhamana Temple, Nayaka, 17th Century, Old Photo by C. Sivarammurti-2011-New Photo by Author-2025

The north side third row of the ceiling painting in the sangita mandapam. In this panel

- **1) Upper panel:** (left to right) Scene from the life of Rishabhadeva: Saudharmendra dances at the sight of Samavasarana.
- **2) Middle panel:** (left to right) Scenes from the live broadcast of Vardhamana, (Mahavira. King Siddhartha and his wife Priyakarin: Priyakarin is dreaming (left) and telling her husband (right) the dream.
- **3) Lower panel:** (left to right) Saudharmendra's wife Sachi takes the child (Vardhamanadu for the Janmabhishekam. Ramachandran (2011)

Figure 3



Figure 3 Wall Paintings of the Wardhamana Temple, Lord Krishna's Story, Nayaka, Old Photo by C. Sivarammurti 2011, New Photo by Author-2025

The fourth row of the ceiling in the music hall on the south side, with three panels telling the story of their artwork.

- 1) Upper panel: Scene from the life of Krishna, the cousin of Neminatha (from right to left): Baladeva carrying a child from the birthing chamber, Vasudeva holding an umbrella over the child, the presiding deity of the city (in the form of a bull) showing Baladeva the way. The city gate opened of its own accord, the Jumna River parted to make way for him, Baladeva entrusted the child to the care of Nanda Gopa, and his wife took the child from her husband.
- 2) Middle panel: The sports of the child Krishna and the extermination of the seven evil spirits sent by Kamsa (from left to right): One of the evil spirits in the form of a wheel. Two other evil spirits in the form of trees stand in his way as he pulls the mortar to which his foster mother has tied him. Three more evil spirits appeared in the form of a palm tree, a horse, and a donkey, the seventh evil spirit, appearing as a woman, offered milk from her breasts to Krishna, who had been poisoned. The subduing of the inauspicious god who had come in the form of a bull to test Krishna's strength. Devaki, Baladeva and Vasudeva arriving just then, Devaki as a mother worship her son with love, milk flows effortlessly from her breasts.
- 3) Lower panel: (Right to left)

Krishna lifting the Govardhana Mountain: Krishna performing the Trivikrama, Nanda fleeing the village with his cattle and herds in fear of Kamsa.

Krishna assures Nanda of his strength and lifts a large stone pillar on the way, allowing him to return to the village. Ramachandran (2011)

Figure 4



Figure 4 Mahavir Attaining Kaivalya Gyan, Nayaka, Old Photo by C. Siva Rammurthi 2011-New Photo by Author 2025

I have taken this picture second row of the Sangita manadapam.

- 1) **Upper panel:** *Scenes from the live of* Vardhamāna Mahāvīra (*right-to-left*): Vardhaman attains the spirit of worldly renunciation (vairagya) and the worldly people then appear before him, reminding him that the time has come for him to renounce the world and take initiation, Vardhaman was going to the forest for initiation in a palanquin.
- **2) Middle panel:** Vardhamana Mahavira (from left to right): Scenes of Vardhamana undergoing initiation, Vardhamana going out for food and worship offered by the king of the clan village, Kullu.
- 3) Lower panel: Scenes from the life of Vardhamana and Mahavira (from right to left): Vardhamana is performing penance to gain Kevala-jnana, expending all his karmas. Vardhaman becoming a mere mortal and being worshipped by the gods after the incident at Gandha Kuti. Another painting depicts the 24th final moment of Mahavira's enlightenment. Here he is shown as a monk sitting under a tree. The middle panel shows him receiving food after a long fast. After Kaivalya attained enlightenment, he is shown sitting on a throne surrounded by 10 devotees. These ceiling paintings of this mandapam are a rich depositary of the ancient traditions of the Jains. Ramachandran (2011)

I have chosen this picture from the fourth row on the east side. The mandala style decoration depicts the figure of the 24th Tirthankara Mahavira in the center. He is surrounded by 8 different layers, which are said to represent different objects such as the Ashoka tree, Dev Dundubhi (a drum-like instrument), flags, Mukut (a ceremonial headdress) and other objects. Shades of ochre, white and mustard have been artistically used to clearly bring out the different concentric layers.

Figure 5



Figure 5 The Mandala Style 24th Thirthanthkara Mahavira in the Centre (Photo by Author-2025)

This Twenty-armed figure was selected from the first row on the west side. The twenty-armed goddess with an indigo background stands as a powerful symbol of the divine feminine. A special feature of this temple is the importance given to various forms of Shakti in its idols. In the middle is another highly decorated panel with a representation of Goddess Lakshmi. The entire panel gives the effect of a jeweled temple adorned with precious gems. Pritam (2021)

Figure 6



Figure 6 Twenty-Armed Goddess Laxmi (Photo by Author-2025)

I chose this picture from the fourth row on the east side. This image represents different levels of existence in Jain art and Jain cosmology. It represents philosophical, symbolic imagery to convey spiritual liberation and deeper meanings. Especially the Jain symbol known as the "Siddhachakra" or "Jain cosmic diagram". Pritam (2021) The triangular shape in this image represents the seven layers of hell. The middle part in the middle represents the middle world and the earthly path where humanity lives. And the remaining upper part is heaven, where the gods and other deities live. The main cosmic form is the highest place for the liberated soul-the Siddhas. They live at the top. In this image, the upper part is shown as a small

white saucer-shaped space. Siddhas are called higher than gods because they are liberated from the endless cycle of rebirth.

Figure 7



Figure 7 The Iconic that Depicts Various Lokas Photo by Author 2025

The five or four Temples on the north side have an idol in each room, which is called the abode of salvation. The last room is an underground passage. Locals say that an underground passage goes from Jain Kanchi to Shiva Kanchi. Approximately 4 kilometers from here to shiva kanchi.

Figure 8



Figure 8 Underground Route in Jain Kanchi-2025

3. THE GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PAINTINGS

The earliest paintings found in the Sangeetha Mandapam which are completely different style compared to later examples. They stand as an example of the painter's skill. There is economy, fluidity, and solidity in their execution. These pictures are painted on a plain background, and the subject matter is limited to the main events and characters. The artist didn't use a lot of colors, but the ones he did use were amazing and impressive. Red color was used as the background, white and yellow were used to color the bodies of the various figures, and the outlines were drawn in

black. The faces are notable for having sloping eyebrows, wide-set eyes, and a nose that extends in line with the eyebrows; none of these images have forward-looking eyes, a common feature of later Jain manuscripts and wall paintings in Tamil Nadu. For Example, the various emotions that are part of the events depicted can also be easily captured, Priyakarani's eagerness to unveil the message of her dreams, the difficulty she faces in the throes of childbirth, the natural strength of the Lord when suppressing the joy and confluence of the gods during the Janmabhishekam.

The second row of the ceiling in the music hall on the north side. In this panel first scene the Artist showed human form out line shape, with face feature nose is sharp nose, eyes are in the form of fish, totally the figures are painted with highly decorative manner, and crowns are decorated with basic geometrical form and highly decorated with small, small motifs of form. On shoulder both sides are covered with elongated and decorated patterns are represented. Dhotis wearing styles are representing resemblance of Cholas style. The Anatomy of figure and pose are represented similar style and same pose. Even trees are represented unique manner. The trees simplified trunks leaves form are decorated with uniformly. Palanquin and group of people are represented in front of Mahavir, Mahavir preaching Mudra is very unique. Colors are represented in body with mono color. The tree motifs are with Painted with similar pattern. In another figure Palanquin are painted in theatrical form and it is decorated with Dravidian architecture Style, back Side are decorated with plain background. And palanquin is decorated with plain curtains and colorful Pattern design curtain. Compositions are well Planed with sitting pose of figure one servant is standing with obedience and watching with more attention - In front of Palanquin food and fruits are placed in decorative cups /bowls. In top some are lotus flowers motif are decorated with hanging manner in order. This it shows the composition balance and richness of composition. In the last Scene Mahavir is sitting on palanquin and many people are marching in the street. In this scene two elephants marching front Side and many followers are marching behind. The Elephants are decorated with nicely decorated ornaments, on shoulder and back are decorated with Palanquin and sitting people. Some People marching with holding Umbrella for shadow. In this panel and scenes are painted with wellbalanced Composition, detailed fine line drawing, Simplified Patterns, decorated elephant dresses and its movement shows, richness for the same scene.

I have chosen the third row of the ceiling in the music hall of Thiruparuthikundram. In This panel Soudhamendra appears as pre-dance pose. Three women are dancing both side of him on the right side two men standing, one with a black body, the other one carrying a small bag over his shoulder. The background color is brownish red and the cloth hanging upside down looks like a Theater form. The queen lying down on middle of the bed, with servants standing on their both sides. The lotus flower is hanged facing downward on the background cloth. The hanging cloths are decorated with a neat design. There were three palanquins next to bed Mahavir and his wife are sitting on the palanquins. The queen told her the dream. Palanquins are decorated with plain curtain and colorful pattern designs, curtain backside decorated with plain background. The palanquins are decorated with patterned designs. In the third panel scenes are painted well balanced composition, color combination. The parade palanquin on the left side of the scene is very rich, with a side detailed fine line drawing, holding flags and decorated white an elephant, with a background color of brown, red and white. Each panel is divided by a black border with a white line and the painting is framed by a lotus design pattern drawn by the artist.

In the fourth row of the ceiling paintings south side. In the panel lord Krishna's story depicted by Artist in Sangita mandapam ceiling paintings dhoti wearing styles

are representing resemblance of chola style. The anatomy of figure and pose represented similar style on upper panel figures are elongated with flat colors. In between the picture one ox decorated with drapery, Back side of the ox decorated one tree is there, similar pattern two trees are left side. From right to left side one decorated chamber is there two women are holding child standing in opposite direction. Bala Deva represented in body color white, brown color, design pattern drapery, beside them Vasu Deva holding umbrella to child. His dress is brown pattern white dress. He has been decorated with crown. His eyes are like a fish shape, nose is very sharp, mustache is curved. Totally looks like a king. That umbrella also decorated with geometrical pattern and left side of the ox one rectangle pattern is there, which shows way for the BalaDeva. In this river has been represented vertically to show the like and reality the fish has been decorated with different pose and movement. BalaDeva the river also helped to cross the river. And near the river Baladeva has been represented with lord Krishna. His backside brown color divided single panel. Nanda Gopa had brown color body, he is receiving child and giving pose in opposite direction and last left of the Nanda Gopa one women is standing took the child from her husband. In this panel background plain white background. In this Baladeva has been represented as giving lord Krishna to Nanda Gopa.

In this second panel background is divided four parts. Two parts are white color and another two parts are reddish brown. In this scene lord Krishna youth period has been narrated with seven evil spirits, sent by Kamsa. In the panel left to right lord Krishna killing evil spirit by kicking. In this evil has represented chakras with lot of geometrical motifs. Lord Krishna has been represented in light body color, with simple out line. Below the scene step mother has tied lord Krishna with motor. In this scene evil spirit is in the form of tree, artist has been represented in the form of palm tree, donkey, horse, and women Rakshashi. Every tree has been decorated with different motifs or form. All these form as painted with dark background brownish red. At last entry of Baladeva, Vasu deva, Devaki arrived near the scene. In this Devaki has been painted with lot of expression by seeing the lord, Krishna.

In third panel right to left the lord Krishna has represented with simple form. Govardhan Giri has been mentioned with only out line without any details. Lord Krishna is lifting Govardhan hill with left hand little finger. Under the Govardhan hill lots of cows, and other animals are painted with simple color and fearful expression. Near Govardhan hills two trees has been represented with similar pattern and colour. Nanda and his friends or villagers rushing to their village with fear of Kamsa threat. Here painted with similar style and dark reddish background. Facial expressions are clearly represented; this panel has been motifs or pattern. It shows highly decorated and mood of the scene. These all three panels are decorated with white line border in dark color background.

In this panel Vardamana is going to the forest for initiation in a palanquin. In this upper panel middle of the picture Vardhamana is sitting in palanquin face is side pose direction. Palanquin decorated with geometrical pattern and plain color cloth decorated with palanquin, right side of the palanquin seven people are standing. Artist has painted with similar pattern and color. They had similar decorated crown and left side of the palanquin, Vardhamana carrying by some people. In this panel artist as painted plain background, geometrical pattern drapery, dark brown color and at last left side one men is standing with flag.

In the middle panel artist as painted plain yellow ochre color for Vardamana going out for food and worship offered by the king of the clan village. Total background colour is reddish brown. Here similar pattern and four trees' motifs are

divided by panel. Right side of the picture the king offering to Vardamana going out for food and worship. The king and queen has been decorated with white color drapery with small dots design they are sitting on the throne. It is decorated with geometrical pattern the king face is showing side view of the left. He has decorated crown and he is smelling one lotus flower. His mustache is curved. His eyes is in fish form, front of him two people are standing, they wore decorated geometrical pattern drapery. And they pray to king that pose is showing. Here upside form looks like designed geometrical pattern, which is similar of temple architectural style. And designed white colour drapery hanged two sides. It resembles a dramatic appearance and left side in between decorated geometrical pattern which is similar of temple architectural style. And designed white colour drapery hanged two sides. It resembles a dramatic appearance and left side in between decorated geometrical pattern arch is showing. It has reddish brown cloth hanged on the both sides.

In the lower panel left side Mahavir is performing penance to gain kevala-jnana. Expending all his karma. Mahavira sitting pose is front view and background colour is reddish brown that throne is decorated with geometrical form, upside of the thrown resemblance is temple style. Beside of him goddesses are praying to him the artist as painted similar pattern motifs and plain colour. Right side last one God standing pose is there, his face and hand

Lion, Deer, Tiger. Background colour is reddish brown and circle no-2 has been represented temple arches. Circle no-3 has been right side and left side three temples' arches, similar pattern Ashoka trees background is in reddish colour. Circle no-4 is represented reddish brown colour flags and white background. Circle no-5 represents similar pattern Ashoka trees and white background colour, left side and right side of the circle three, three temple arches are there. Circle no-6 shows in line drawing form, yellow ochre background two sides of temple arches. Circle no-7 represents out line floral design and dark colour background. And at last circle no-8 shows out line temple's arches, white background. In this circle in between Mahavira circle four sides-four ways divided. In these ways has been outline temples arches are decorated and reddish-brown back-ground. And every circle decorated by black outline border in white colour background. In this picture surface of the circle decorated with white flowers, reddish brown background and upside of one decorated pillar, four gods are sitting on the floor. The floor is decorated by white flowers.

I have taken this picture from the 1st row of the East side. In this panel middle is another highly decorated goddess Lakshmi with an indigo background stands as a powerful symbol of the divine feminine. She has been represented with twenty armes, which is painted in dark brown colour and jewelry. Her hands painted with white colour nails and white colour bangles. She wore one huge lotus flower garland. It is light indigo and light brown color divided in two parts. Goddess has been painted with heavy jewelry, decorated crown and facial expression shows with pleasing. Goddesses right side and left side vertical panel has been decorated with three Goddesses each side. Around the Goddesses oval shape has been decorated with fish and lotus motif in white line drawing form, yellow ochre background is in dark color border. In this picture up and down lord Vishnu symbols of Shanku, and chakra has been decorated. Besides of this two, two flowers design decorated with white color motif, which is in yellow ochre background.

In fourth row of the East side ceiling painting of Thiruparuthikundram, represents. In this panel geometrical forms symbol are visible, which represents Jain cosmic diagram. It looks like tribal art. This diagram has been decorated with geometrical pattern, plain cream color background. And left side of the diagram one

rectangle box has painted dark brown color. And box left, right sides vertical plain light brown color, white color line gives well balanced composition. Beside the border decorated with lotus design and flower motif in circular form. It is painted with reddish brown color.

4. THE COMPARATIVE STUDY OF EARLIER PAINTINGS AND REPAINTED PAINTINGS

These paintings were originally executed during the later Chola and Vijayanagara periods, reflect the refined beauty and spiritual depth of Jain culture in South India. In recent years, many of these paintings have been repainted, leading to debates about preservation, authenticity, and artistic integrity. The original paintings, made with mineral-based pigments and natural binders, feature a delicate and earthy color palette. The tones are warm and old-fashioned with delicate form, fine lines and subtle transitions. These paintings are depicted through refined brushwork and carefully composed spiritual scenes, reflecting the iconography and narrative style of Jain religious art. Repainted scenes often feature bright, synthetic colors that appear more vibrant but less subtle. The original elegance and detail are often lost, replaced by bold outlines and flat areas of color, there older paintings were layered and textured, new layers are uniform and glossy. The old painting visual language undermines stylistic consistency and diminishes the images' ability to convey the meditative and sacred atmosphere they once evoked. The original ceiling paintings at Thiruparuthikundram may have been created using the frescosecco or tempera technique on lime-plastered surfaces. These traditional techniques include detailed preparatory sketches, the application of fine layers of pigments, and a deep understanding of natural materials. The use of modern materials not only changes the aesthetics but also risks damaging the original layer underneath, especially if the surface preparation is inadequate or abrasive. The original murals are rich in religious symbolism and storytelling, depicting Jain Tirthankaras, divine beings, donors, and scenes from Jain scriptures. Unfortunately, many repainted versions dilute or alter these meanings. Some repainted figures appear generic or lack the exact iconographic elements. Unfortunately, in many cases at Tiruparuthikundram, repainting appears to have been done without proper documentation, historical research, or conservation training. This approach risks erasing invaluable historical evidence and also creates a false sense of continuity.

5. CONCLUSION

The Thiruparuthikundram Jain Temple, located in Tamil Nadu, stands as a magnificent testament to the rich cultural and religious heritage of Jainism in South India. This temple complex reflects the architectural patronage of the Mahavira temples - Pallava and Chola dynasties. This temple's Art forms including carved stone sculptures, finally detailed pillars, demonstrate the spiritual and artistic greatness of that era. The paintings inside, especially those from the Chola period, demonstrate the clear use of natural colours - red, ochre, yellow and black - derived from minerals and organic materials. Reflecting not only aesthetic sensibilities but also ecological harmony. The stylistic elements combine Dravidian architectural features with Jain religious symbolism, creating a unique confluence of faith and regional art traditions. Today, the temple serves as a cultural and spiritual landmark, preserving the essence of Jain philosophy, South Indian art, and the vibrant historical narratives of Tamil Nadu.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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