

A Study on the Rock Paintings Found Among the Jain Monuments in Madurai

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Abstract—Paintings on the bare uneven rough surface of the shelter caves in hill ranges are known as Rock paintings. Moved by the charm of nature around him, man has expressed his appreciation of it in works of art produced by him. This goes back to a time when he was still a primitive. Art in some form or other cannot be missed in everyday life even in the remotest corners of every place. The earliest paintings of the prehistoric age in the caves all over world give the magnificent examples of the observant eye and the trained hand even in man's savage state. The colours chosen, the movement portrayed and the expression suffused in the pictures really makes marvel. The prehistoric cave paintings in India give a picture of life in those far-off days of the early man in India. In this paper, an attempt is made to reveal the importance of rock paintings in Tamilnadu with special highlights to the Jain monuments in Madurai.

Index Terms—Rock Paintings, Yanaimalai, Arittapatti, Keezhavalavu, Alagarmalai.

I. INTRODUCTION

Rock paintings are usually in the form of engravings, bas-reliefs or pictorial representations. Paintings on rock shelters reflect the artist's expression to represent the social character of a race. Rock paintings are studied for their subject matter as well as for their antiquity and techniques in order to identify and track down the elements of cultural continuity in the form of artistic motifs which one culture transmit to another. Thus, the rock paintings provide a comprehensive cultural development of art, communication, aesthetic expression of early man and hence a treasure house of human activities. Jainism was the earliest religion to reach the far south from the north. It was founded by Mahavira in North India in the sixth Century BC. The tradition is that Chandra Gupta Maurya, the Mauryan emperor and the disciple of the Jaina sage Bhadrabahu led the Jain

monks of North India to Sravanabelogolain Karnataka for preaching the religion in the South. The Jain monks spread to Chola, Chera, Pandya regions and Lanka also. They built centres of worship and established Jaina centres. Among the greatest centres of Jainism the famous were Pallikkal, Karunagapalli, and Chitharal in the west coast and Madurai in the eastern region. For about twelve centuries from the fourth Century B.C to eighth Century A.D, Jainism flourished in the Tamil Country.

The contribution of Jains to architecture, sculpture, iconography and paintings are seen from the Jain caves and temples that still exist. Cave temples were founded for worship or habitation. The caves for worship were known as Chaityas. The Chaithya caves comprise magnificent carvings of Jain art, figuring of scenes that depicting the episodes in their lives. Stone beds were carved for monks to recline. The Chaithya caves contain wonderful carvings of Jaina art, figuring their demi-god Thirthangaras and scenes depicting episodes in their lives.

II. SIGNIFICANCE OF ROCK PAINTINGS IN TAMILNADU

The settlements of the pre- historic men were the caves, which created by thenature. Those places were the shorting points of human culture of period. The caves made the human species that walked with their forelegs to walk in two legs. In the same caves, the early men applied his hand in wet red sand and make imprints on the walls of caves. With this continuous movement of the hands, they ridiculed the images stores in their minds with the usage of red stone lines, in the caves. By this manner, the line drawings made up of red and white lines about the characters made them wonder and fearful. The lines or

drawings of red colour painted by the early humans inside the walls of caves are known as cave paintings. As far as Tamil Nadu is concerned, hardly paintings are been found inside the caves. In one hand, the paintings were found so far in Tamil Nadu are in the side passages of rocks, steps and the outer surface of the rocks, they of course are called rock arts. On the otherhand, rock paintings were drawn inside the dark and interior of caves in countries like France, Italy, Egypt and Africa are not found much in Tamil Nadu which also lead for a vacuum that the art and culture of the early human in Tamil Nadu is unknown.

The art forms of the prehistoric humans can be classified based on their living place, living pattern and migrating pattern, such as art, cave art and clay art. The paintings found inside the cave settlements and caves drawn by the Early Stone Age people not only represent their living style through different art forms but also sense of colour, engagement with nature and nature friendly. The horns and bones of animals, clay, and metal were used as materials by ancient Tamil people, while explaining these art forms.

Rock Arts- The images of animals, thumb impressions of human, line drawings of human images, and other human drawings chiselled on the inside walls of the caves, were the cave arts. The prehistoric men registered their contemporary life style in the caves like, hunting, mysticism, rituals as paintings. They reveal the contemporary history of the human race, habits and beliefs of that period. These sorts of cave arts have been found in different rock arts of Tamil Nadu. Based on the pattern of the rock paintings, the life system of early humans can be classified into three stages-

- Work of early human being lived like and with animals.
- Rock arts with more animals, species and hunting scenes.
- Arts for worship or ritual art forms, after the Agrarian society.

Human was not delivered the arts. He designed the tools required for his living. Even though they would have lived in cave, because they found more sketches near the caves. There was no specific clothing pattern for pre-historic men. Chances are there, for wearing the skin of the animals hunted by them.

War and Hunting Scenes- Image of bull, horse, snake, sheep, cow, deer and fish were found in the rock painting of Tamil Nadu. Rock paintings with animals alone were not found but also scenes of hunting animals using arrows, by individual or in groups were found in plenty of the rock arts in Tamil Nadu. Human groups with animal species were portrayed in many works. The x-ray form of bull at Alambadi, animals head picture at Keezhvalai and with birds' beak were the master pieces.

The rock paintings ensure the prevailing of hunting society in Tamil Nadu. Beyond hunting based cultural movements specifically, old Tamil Nadu people were lived as a society of different racial groups; they were in the primitive stage of civilization they gathered their food by plucking vegetables, fruits, cereals, hunting and primitive agriculture methods. They could not meet their minimum requirement of food. They do not possess any tools used to produce food, against the forces of nature. Therefore, there was no energy also. The scientific knowledge of designing tools were also absent.

The animals shown in the rock arts of Tamil Nadu were not ordinary in nature. They lived in the habitation of several thousand years back. They were the group's emblem too. Not only in Tamil Nadu, that a clan/group worshipping emblem was prevailed, and also in the mega-lithic age. This faith would have emerged out of the hunting life and agrarian society. Strongly believing of faiths, they even claimed that they were the decedents of bear, tiger, lion, rhinoceros, and elephant. They believed strongly that the non-killed animal in the hunting process would definitely protect their interest. They depicted the powerful animal or the animal which is not dangerous as their groups emblem symbol, for example, they embossed fish on their groups will prosper link fish folks.

In Tamil Nadu, particularly in a few villages of Tiruchirappalli District, Edhumalai, Varadharajapuram, Thenur and Nathakkadu every year on a particular date, entire village people will gather before Mother Goddess's temple. They prepare communal meals Pongal, dance, sing and perform folk arts, beat local musical dance retreat was certainly about their glory of the forest and the assistance rendered by the animal folks to the human beings. After the performance, one head per family join hands to gather for hunting. They offer their first

prey to the Mother Goddess and consume the remaining. Dance plays a vital role in the preparation for hunting adventure. Mostly they perform their hunting process for their cultural activities. They use the age old instruments made up of animals' skin, for the background music.

Rock paintings are divided under two heads. They are Pictographs and Petroglyphs. Pictographs are primarily in the form of paintings that are found on the walls and ceilings of naturally formed caves and rock shelters. In India the pictographs show an affinity towards various shades of red colour, the shades varying from dark violet to yellowish brick red. Chemical analysis and microscopic examination of the pigments obtained from sites show presence of red haematite nodules, containing iron oxide. Besides red, the next most frequently used colour was white which was obtained either from calcium carbonate nodule or kaolin clayey deposits. Many pictographs have been executed both in red as well as white colours in which the white colour was generally used for filling up the figures and red as outline. In many of these paintings the colour white has faded out leaving the red outline.

Some very early rock paintings were depicted in green and yellow which are found in rock art sites of central India and Odisha with the use of mineralized chalcedony of the respective colours. The green paintings are unfortunately in a very poor state of preservation. So, in India the pictographs are monochrome, bichrome and polychrome in nature. Regarding the pigments it has been proposed that the paint was obtained either by diluting the colour in water or by tempera. Though microscopic tests could not establish presence of any binding medium or adhesive in the pigments, however use of organic binding adhesives, cannot be ruled out, which probably has not survived for such a long period. The colours were used in liquid form and not in powders and generally without colouring of the background. The paintings used to be done on unplastered, unprimed rock surfaces, which would not be smoothed nor dressed or polished before painting. Interestingly there was absolutely no use of blue colour.

The paintings were done on vertical, near-vertical and horizontal rock faces and at times on curved as well as under surfaces of projecting or overhanging rocks. At certain places, the floors of the rock shelters show

scooped out circular depressions with traces of paints on them, which were definitely used for preparing the colours. The use of fibrous material derived from plants cannot be ruled out for rock paintings. Traces of use of dry colours have also been found, either in the form of crayons, stencil or spray technique.

Petroglyphs or rock bruising form the second most important type of rock art which were done either by rubbing, hammering, scooping or pecking of rough granite surface. Rarely are bruising found on quartzite rocks because of the extreme toughness of the stone. At times dots and cup-marks have been found in some shelters which have been made by hammering the surface gently, and some of the cup-marks are as deep as fifty cm with an equal diameter throughout its depth. These include shallow dots, small holes, conical and U-shaped cup-marks and were probably done by a drilling technique with the help of metallic instruments. Cup marks are attracting the attention of rock art scholars and archaeologists now days. Another interesting feature of rock art not only in India but also other parts of the world is that both the paintings as well as bruising have been found in superimposed layers where a single surface has been used for several times.

Techniques of Rock Paintings

- The paintings were executed in different epochs and their style differed in different periods.
- The paintings were executed in limited colours.
- The subject matter of most of the paintings is animals and human beings. Geometric designs represented individually or in groups scattered all over the area of the shelter caves and in various sizes, in outline, or in solid form. Group activities and hunting series are found in some paintings.
- The Stone Age people have made the handles of brushes out of twigs or wood. For the brush itself they could have used silk cotton, animal fur or squirrel tail.
- The paints were made by grinding various rocks, minerals and vegetables. They got red from haematite which is iron oxide. The green came from a green variety of a stone called chalcedony. White might have been made out of limestone. The rock of mineral was first ground into a powder. This may then have been mixed

with water and also with some thick or sticky substance such as animal fat or gum or resin from trees.

III. YANAIMALAI

Yanaimalai is situated in Othakadai on the Melur Road at a distance of eight kilometres from Madurai city. After entering Narasingam village, before reaching Yoganarasimmar cavern, on the big rock of the right side of the hill there are Jaina sculptures and Vattezhuthu inscriptions. On climbing steps, there appears a cavern-like portion in the rock. On the north slope of the hill galaxy of Jaina sculptures are carved which are datable to ninth-tenth CE. On the face of the rock bolder these images are carved and below them inscriptions in Vattezhuthu scripts are

also engraved which reveals a detail by which these sculptures were made and protected. Among these sculptures, Mahavira, Parsvanatha-Neminatha, Bhagubali-Komathisvara and Ambika Yakshi are carved. Well ground lime paste is applied above these sculptures and different colours are painted in wet condition. Mostly red, yellow, green colour pigments are used in these paintings. Only some of them have still retained their colours whereas most of them have disappeared. Fly wicks, lamps and foliages have still maintained their colours. These paintings are comparable to that of Aritttpatti and Sitaannavasal paintings all are datable to ninth Century CE. These are standing as good illustrations for the early Pandyan painting art and also prove that Jains were not against fine arts.



IV. ARITTAPATTI

Arittapatti is a beautiful village surrounded by hillocks and ponds. It is situated about twenty five kilometre from Madurai on the Madurai-Trichy highway, to the west of Narasingampatti, a small village. Neminathar, the twenty second Tirthangara of the Jains was also called as AritaNemi. It is assumed that the village named after this Tirthangara. Tamil Brahmi inscriptions and rock-cut beds belonging to first century A.D and inscriptions of circa ninth-tenth A.D are found in the hillock named Kazhinjamalai. On a rock seen a little away from the

cave, a bas-relief of a Tirthangara seated below the traditional tri-parasol has been carved. Inscriptions are seen inscribed below the Tirtangara. A bas-relief of Jain Tirthangara is seen in this. A lamp and a fan have been carved on the both sides of the Tirthangara sculpture. The sculpture is covered with a thin coat of well ground lime and various colours are painted on fresco technique. Yellow, red, green colours are still brightly seen against the ravages of time and attesting a good example for early Pandyan painting. The colours used for painting these are still visible even after thousands of years.



V. ALAGARMALAI

Alagarmalai is very famous one among the eight ancient Jain hills. At the middle of the hill range, very near to Kidaripatti village, one spacious natural cavern is seen. It can be reached by steps and iron ladder with some cautious effort. Pre-Historic Paintings: The rock art in the caves indicates that the place was a human habitat even before the arrival of the Jain monks. The people who lived in the caves were primarily hunter-gatherers. There are thirteen rock arts in this cave. These pre-historic paintings drawn with red ochre and white are seen on the ceiling of the natural cavern. Hunting scenes, animal figures, deer, ladder, triangles, human figures are seen clearly. The rock art has been made using a

mixture of powdered laterite and leaf extracts. The rock arts were painted with brushes made from tail-hairs of animals or with sticks and fingers. The most beautiful paintings were done using brushes made from animal hairs and the crude paintings were done using sticks and fingers. Paintings of stages are evident in two rock arts which indicate a hunter community's lifestyle. They believed that by painting rock-arts that has showed a hunt, they would get more animals during a hunt. These rock-arts have not yet been carbon dated. Another painting shows a human figure with an axe sitting on a horse/elephant. Based on this, the rock art can be dated back to later megalithic age or early Iron Age before third Century B.C.



VI. KARUNKALAKUDI

On the highway of Madurai to Trichy at about forty kilometre distance this village is situated. To the east of the village, there is a hill called PanchapandavarMalai. There are two natural caverns which lie one above the other are found in this hill. The lower cavern is the larger, measures about ten metre east to west. The cavern has its opening in the southern side. Inside this cavern are a number of beds. Above this cave, on the terrace of the rock some figures of pre-historic paintings are seen, mostly they are drawn in white colour. So, it is assumed before the advent of the jains, at this hill number of ancient tribal people might have occupied this cave and its surrounding. Jain monks might have approached them and converted them into their faith. Now this Jain cave is declared as a historical monument and protected by the Department of Archaeology, Government of Tamilnadu.

VII. KEEZHAVALAVU

Along Madurai to Thiruppathur main road at about thirty eight kilometre distance lies the village

Keezhavalavu. On the western side of this village there is a hillock which is named as PanchapandavarMalai by the locals. The rock beds are scooped at this hill are very neat and smoother than any other beds around Madurai. There are relief sculptures of Mahavira which date back to third century B.C and various sculptures of Thirthangaras can be found in this hill. On the western side of the cave, at the face of another boulder six stone figures of Thirthangaras are cut. These images are assignable to ninth-tenth Century CE.

There are two groups of bas reliefs carved in this cavern. The first group facing the east and the second group facing the north. The east facing group consists of six Jaina figures. The second figures from left to right is Parsavanatha- the twenty third Thirthangara in a standing posture with a five hooded serpent as a canopy above his head. The next one is also Parsavanath in a standing posture, but it is a half-finished one and the canopy above him is not complete. All the other four figures are Mahavira, in seated posture and triple umbrella over their head as a canopy. The fourth figure of Mahavira, from the left is beautifully carved. This figure contains application of painting which is faded. Two flowers in orange

colour appear above the predominantly carved fly-whisks which are placed over two lamps found on either side of the Mahavira. The head of Mahavira is

surrounded by an arch of flames. The figures are painted with various colour pigments just like Yanaimalai and Arittapatti figures.



VIII. CONCLUSION

Pre- Historic paintings and drawings on rock surfaces known as Rock Art, which was produced by people who did not know the art of read or write. It is one of the greatest surviving art treasures. Art has had a softening influence on man. While even animals like cows and calves, horses and elephants are decorated to fit into a scheme of colourful life radiating joy and beauty, art as a separate entity cannot be expected to be crystallised in isolation. Jainism has helped in enriching Indian culture, particularly in the fields of Literature, Architecture, and Sculpture. The Jains have made commendable contribution to almost every branch of learning. The Jains have erected exquisite temples either on hill topes or in secluded valleys. Paintings play a significant role in their artistic form. Visiting the Jain sites is an experience filled with great aesthetic satisfaction. One can engage in Heritage as well as Historic tourism in these potential Jain monuments at Madurai. The biodiversity and historical importance of these monuments encourages tourists to learn more about the historical as well as natural variety which are existed. The paintings are very much informative to know about the history and artistic traditions of those periods.

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