

Rock Arts in Dindigul District - Tamil Nadu

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ABSTRACT

Rock Arts are abundantly found in Western Ghats of Dindigul district. Particularly in Andipatti, Pappampatti, Vadakadu-Pachalur, Sirumalai, Koliyuthu and Kombaikadu. They are found in deep forest of western ghats and in adjacent hilly rock areas. Majority of the rock arts in dindigul district belong to sangam period. The lower limit of the age can be fixed at 300 BC, and upper limit will go up to some 4000 years. The drawing found here are mainly in four colours. The white, Red (Red ochre) Black and orange. Almost all the rock Paintings are drawn in white Colour, some are Painted in Red colour. These Red ochre paintings are found in Pappampatti, Kombaikadu and in Sirumalai. Black and orange colour paintings are very rare in the world. And these paintings are astonishingly found in koliyuthu. The shape and size of these drawings are not regular and varies from one inch to two feet. Human figures are used as brush and in some drawings organic sticks used also as brush. Black and Red colour drawings are coloured densely and also coated twice. Some unknown herbs, resin are used as raw materials. The drawings found here are mainly animals both tamed and wild beasts. Cattles like cow, goats, beasts line porcupine, tiger, elephant, deer, tamed animals like horse, elephants dogs are drawn. Some weapons like sword, shield, and trident are also drawn. Here tridents are drawn for ritual purpose and not for war. Almost all the paintings speak the heritage and rich culture of the Tamils of Sangam period, with the course of their life. This study would help to expound the hidden treasures in rock art of Dindigul district. If this study is extended to different districts, definitely enormous creations would be stored as long lasting treasures.

Key Words : Rock Arts, Sangam period

INTRODUCTION

Drawing refers to sketches. Drawings are written by the longitudinal lines, the carved lines, the cross-lines and in red, black, orange and white colours. Ever since the Sangam period, even before 2000 years ago, the art of drawing has undergone great growth which can be understood from the Sangam literature¹.

The drawings on rocks have originated at the time of the tribes who went for hunting. In those days, men have drawn the figures of beasts that he hunted and drawings of beasts that scared him. Hence the drawings on rocks are considered to be the figures of the hunting beasts. The best examples for the rock drawings of ancient days can be found at Bimbetka².

The beautiful scenes that are a prey to the ravages of nature incited the ancient man. These, in course of time, bloomed into an instigation of beauty. It was this sensitivity that triggered him to draw sketches and drawings. Such type of drawings on rocks can be found galore on the Western Ghats of Palani, Dindigul District, Tamil Nadu.

Very ancient drawings have been found in the hilly caves and on the face of rocks in India³. Majority of them are based on the resistance of man against the beasts. These would have paved the way to erect Herostone in the later days where he is seen fighting against the animals and winning over it. In the Sangam literary collections, notes on Drawings and the art of drawing can be found⁴.

The rock arts of Dindigul district display great virtues of balance, appropriate use of colour, love of nature. The scene of battlefield, travel, hunting, festivities and others are depicted with reality and sensitivity. All the images etched on rock surfaces clearly demonstrate their urge to express themselves in forms that are intelligible. There are paintings of elephants, cattle, tiger, deer, wild boar and porcupine, and of human beings dancing or fighting. The prehistoric artists used white kaolin herbs, lime or even ash to paint these figures. The contemporary tribal people have used enamel paint to embellish some of these paintings.

Rock arts in Kombaikadu:

This drawing can be found in the Kombaikadu area at the height of 1000 m above the sea level on the way from Palani to Kodaikanal of Dindigul district. This Kombaikadu is a paliyar settlement area. It is understood that these rock arts are the creations of the paliyar tribe. The Archeologists state that the drawings might have been around four thousand years old⁵. They have been drawn on the side of the rocks near the paliyar settlement. They were drawn in red ochre but now the colour has faded away over time due to weather and, now, these paintings look in pink colour. A few of them are in dark red colour. Some of them have crumbled and drenched in the rains, faded in colour and are completely defaced. Among these drawings, most notable are as follows. In one drawing two men are seen seated on animal and the other, where the figure of one man is seen standing upon the shoulder of another man.

In another drawing a man is holding an axe and another man falls under his feet. In that drawing, on either side of a long line, the trident has been drawn. The trident is a symbol of worship for the Saivites. This symbol has a link with rituals of the ancient tribes⁶. Yet another drawing is about a hand, which has been pressed on the red ochre colour paste and is pressed on the rocks⁷. Here the structure of the fingers have been drawn very clearly. These type of drawings are found in Zimbabwe, Indonesia, South Africa, Philippines and France.

Rock arts in Andipatti:

There is a cave by the west side of the Andipatti hill, near Palani. On the slope of the cave more than ten collections of arts have been drawn. They have been drawn with time-medicinal-herbs and resin of trees with colour. These drawings have now started to fade in

colour. They reflect the two important aspects of the Tamils of the Sangam Age, which are love and bravery. This cave has been continuously in use between 10 B.C and 3 B.C. It is conjectured that these drawings might have been drawn nearly 2300 years. Usually the cave-drawings are found in white, some time dark in colour. This enables to determine their period. Most of the white-coloured drawings found in this cave are drawn using human figures as brush⁸.

In a drawing for a festival ritual, many ladies fetch water in pots. Another drawing depicts men, women and children in dancing posture with jubilant mood. To the right side of the a goat eight big drawings as a collection are drawn. Three children drawings are drawn in between the big drawings. It can be noted that to reflect the happy mood they go hand in hand to offer the sacrifice to their deity and worship the God. Irrespective of the young and the old people, all are in an ecstatic mood. These type of dances are being performed by the primitive Tamil tribals the Paliyars and the pulaiyars till today⁹. In another collection six members are seen standing, with their hands holded with each other. Opposite to them small birds have been drawn. Another drawing depicts the men and women in dancing posture. Other than these, drawings of elephant, tiger, Porcupine, men, figures of independent women, and hunting expedition are drawn.

A collection of drawing of an elephant being caught by digging a deep and broad pit and taming it has been pictured continuously. In the first scene an elephant falls inside the pit. Next scene portrays a man controlling the elephant and he takes steps to control it. The elephant that has been controlled partially is being tamed by a few mahouts in the third scene. In the next scene the jumbo has been completely tamed and has been presented to the king. The king cheerfully been seated on the saddle of the animal. This makes one to remember the eighth song of the Sangam literature namely 'Ahananooru'. In that song, a female-elephant breaks the boughs of trees and puts it inside the pit where the male-elephant had fallen. The song explains how the female-elephant with perservance, helps in bringing out its lover from the pit.

In another collection of drawings, a man is seated in the palanquin on an elephant and is moving forward. While, on another elephant the watchmen in the standing posture follow the elephant going before, with immense protection. In another collection of drawings, people with weapons go in a crowd to assail the elephant. Here the

elephant runs out of fear. The tusks have been drawn lively as though they are sharp¹⁰.

The Andipatti drawings that are discussed before, are the drawings found in the first cave. The next drawing is in the third mountainous area of the Western Ghats at a distance of 1kms from the first cave and is of four-thousand years in age. On the rocks and on the cave, all the drawings are white in colour. A majority of them have been destroyed due to rain and shine. Many of them are in ruining stage. The drawing that were drawn on the areas that were free from the rain and sun are in good condition. Here the beasts like elephant, stork and tiger have been drawn in different collections. A cattle capture and rescue art reflects the sangam age tradition¹¹. Drawings of elephant, horse and the infantry with the sword and armour have been drawn. The physically-challenged on the crutches have also been drawn.

Other scenes like the chasing of the honey-bees, taking the pregnant lady, the noble people going in a cluster and the elephant water in its piling trunk and having a happy bath have been drawn on the rocks.

In Andipatti there are two big caves. In these two caves many gigantic honey-combs are seen hanging. This is a very hazardous place. On these rocks of the cave in a cluster, the honey-bees sting the men. Seeing this, the people flee for life. Certain beasts unable to bear the sting are seen on the ground¹².

Among the drawings found here, this is remarkable in deed. Besides this, a war scene can be seen. Here the soldier on the elephant has been drawn in the warring posture. Some of them are seen on the floor with the armour and the sword in their hands. Here they abandon the elephant and flew away. In a stipulated gap a man is drawn running separately. It differs from this scene.

Rock arts in Pappampatti:

Ancient cave drawings are drawn at mountainous regions of Mayavankaradu next to Pappampatti near Palani by the stone age people. In Pappampatti area the Dolmens and Cist that enable to compute the time, have been found. Among them the cave-drawings are very ancient. Among these drawings a few have been defaced. These are drawn by the people who lived in pre historical Age. They are three in colours like the white and red ochre and dark green colours.

The white-coloured drawings bear the animals like deer, cow, and elephant. A hunting expedition scene is also seen. The red ochre drawings are in a destroyed

state. Numerous symbols are also found. One does not know what it symbolizes. It is guessed that they might belong to nearly seven-thousand years and before¹³.

The yellow colour drawing that is found next is very significant. This resembles the figure of the dinosaur that have been extinct nearly six and a half million years before. The beast is of thick tailed, four legs, a big hump on the back, short neck and wide-mouthed. This is in a pale yellow colour. This colour could be extracted from certain herbs and the roots of plants¹⁴.

Rock arts in Kumlamarathupatti:

A cave art has been found in a place by name Kumlamarathupatti which is on the Vadakadu region of the Western Ghats near Oddanchathiram in Dindigul district. It is drawn nearly four thousand years before and white in colour¹⁵. More than five collection of drawings noted here. A scene is about a dead being carried in a cradle or in a hearse. A group of nine members stand in a circle and dance. Another collection of drawings depicts a group of three, dancing hand in hand and with the pot on the head. The first drawing is drawn smaller in size, the second a little bigger than the first and the third the biggest of the three drawings.

In another collection next to this, a person is drawn playing the Mathala (the musical instrument) and near this man another person is seen dancing to the left of this person who is playing the Mathala is in a ruined state. In another collection of drawing a person is seated on an elephant. In another place the figure of the elephant is in a fading condition. Many human-figures are drawn around this elephant. These have been completely destroyed. In certain places small human figures are also seen. Opposite to this drawing two persons are dancing clutching one another hands. Below this drawing, there is a drawing of a small child. Another drawing is seen apart from these drawings but in a destroyed state¹⁶.

In another collection of drawing dead man is taken in a cradle tied to stick. The edges of the stick are borne by two men another figure of a dead man inside the cradle has also been drawn. Near this scene the figure of three persons is drawn. Before the man who is dead the other people are seen dancing. In this cave the death scenes have been drawn as two collections. Many people go before the dead person. In other places the drawings are seen in a destroyed state.

Rock arts in Koliyuthu:

Near Chathirapatty of Dindigul district on the

mountains of the Western Ghats ancient rock drawings are found on the cave known as Alaikallu¹⁷. This drawing could be estimated to three-thousand years. These drawings have been drawn in three colours. They can be classified as black white and orange arts. The drawings in black belong to early days. Next is in orange and white colours, respectively.

The drawings found here in orange colour belong to very early days. They might have been drawn with the extract from the herbs. This is because the black colour has not faded. The porcupine and the crocodile drawings have been drawn very clearly and densely. This crocodile has been drawn, as if attacked by man on four sides. The dark green drawings also bear battle scenes. At some places the drawings are seen in all the three colours-black, white, and orange. Many figures of animals are drawn in white colour. Above this white-coloured drawings the black coloured drawings have been drawn¹⁸.

Above the white coloured drawings the red drawings have been drawn. A man controls an animal and sits on it. This has been portrayed in orange colour. Near this another man stands opposite to the animal and attacks it. In the kozhithu paintings, most of the paintings are from the Mesolithic to the Neolithic period. The conflict is one of the main themes depicted during this time. The war scenes are common but reasons for conflict are not indicated. The horsemen armed with swords overline the earlier paintings portraying the life of hunters and gatherers. They bear war equipments consisting of axes, swords, bows and arrows. The infantry as well as men riding caparisoned horses. Men and horses of geometric construction are randomly spaced across the walls. Such paintings are drawn during the rainy season and on festive occasions, and bear a close resemblance to those found in the painted shelters.

Rock arts in Sirumalai:

This is a prosperous and fertile mountainous area near to the palani mountainous range of Dindigul district. There is a small cave in the area by name Minpetty. Here majority of the drawings are found in white and minority of them in dark-safron colour. The drawings found on the upper portion belongs to the earliest days of history. The drawing could be dated as two-thousand years before. Drawings of figures of human-beings, animals, the animal fightings and hunting of the beasts are found on these drawings. Drawings of similar type could be seen in a place by name Kulirati on

Mahalingasamy mountain of Virudhunagar district¹⁹.

The drawings on the Sirumalai cave are the figures of human-beings of flat shape. It is drawn with the dense white colour. On a figure it has been shown as though the sannaveeram has been worn in red colour. In figures of human-beings the lines in the circular form and turbans are seen. The important scene found in the Sirumalai drawing is inciting of the animals to fight among them and then the men witnessing it with earnestness. There is a man with a long stick in his left hand and aggravating the fight among the animals. Surrounding him are the people raising the hands circling the hands and encouraging the fighting.

This drawing reminds how in the ancient days, the goats were allowed to fight with each other and the people witnessed it. Special mention should be made of a tall figure, that stands in the midst of a heavy crowd he looks like their tribal leader. These drawings have been seen and are found to have been drawn in later days. The rock drawings are also found in a place by name Purakudu. This information is known from the Dindigul district Archaeological Guide²⁰.

Conclusion:

Generally there are several types of drawings, in Dindigul district. Predominantly human and animal forms are found. The realism or naturalism has been observed mainly in animal drawings. The technique adopted is portraying the animals in a freehand wash. No outline was drawn but the figure was completed with wash only. But in many cases, first the outline was drawn and the figure was completed with wash. From all the rock arts we discussed hither to, it can be driven that all the rock arts, speak the culture of sangam period which dates back around 3000 years. All the rock arts, reflect the rich culture and heritage of sangam age Tamils. The rich culture and heritage of sangam age Tamils picturised in all the rock arts, if not discovered by archaeologists, could left un noticed, and could be vanished from human history for ever.

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