

Pandya Sculptures with Special Reference to Kalugumalai Temple

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Abstract: This paper presents an overview on Pandya sculptures with special reference to Kalugumalai temple.

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1. Introduction

An attempt has been made in the succeeding pages to unfold the distinctive historical features of Pandya Sculptures with special reference to Kalugumalai Temple. It is located now in Tuticorin District, is a rich abode of historical monuments like Kalugachalamoorthy Temple, Vettuvankoil, and Jain relics. They are different monuments and its Sculptures studied by making regular field studies and compared with the different writeups of the modern scholars and they are treated as secondary sources.

The early Pandyas Who ruled Pandya region around 550 to 920 A.D. actively engaged in temple building activities as equal to the Pallavas. Number of cave temple, monolithic structure and structural temples were created by the Pandyas. This process was continued up to 1300 A.D. by successive Pandya rulers. Because of this development in the temple arts, sculptures and bronzes they took their due places which attract the historians to have a separate study. The advent of Jainism and Buddhism in deep south also threw momentum in the development of art and literature. Their monuments are also accommodated in the number of sculptures. So, tracing out of the study of sculptural art, particularly in Pandya region which is attempted here is Kalugumalai monolithic Temple and its sculptures.

A. Objectives of the study

- To study the different types of Sculptures of the Pandyas in Southern region.
- To know about Rock cut Sculptures on the rock hill at Kalugumalai.
- To inculcate the knowledge of the Artistic skill of the Sculptor at an early age.
- To know about the development of Jainism which was spread out by the Thirthankaras in the Pandya region.

B. Rock-cut caves and Sculptures

Pillaiyarpatty rock cut Cave temple located in Sivagangai District is considered the earliest of its kind in Tamilnadu. Two bas-relief sculptures viz, Karpaka Vinayaka and Harihara

found on the rocky walls of the Garbagraha are the earliest sculptures so far known in Tamilnadu [1]. The earliest datable Cave temple located at Malaiyadipatti have some sculpture but because of the damage the figures are not identified. Pandya Cave temples mostly has sculptures both in central shrine as well as on the niches or walls of it [2]. For example at Anaimalai Narashimha was carved out in 770 A.D. one bas-relief sculpture of Yoga Narasimha is carved in the cell. But Thirupparankumram cave is designed with two cells and three niches. Siva and Vishnu are housed in the cells [3]. Ganesha, Durga and Muruga are found on the niches. Behind the SivaLinga in the first cell SomasKanda panel is also carved out [4]. Moreover on the walls of the Siva cell a group of sculptures, viz, dancing Nataraja, Parvati, and Nandi playing Kudam are seen which are good examples for the early Pandyan sculptural art in 773 A.D.

This Thirupparamkundram cave remains as an example for panchayatana cult [five Gods]. But almost in the same period another cave at Trichinopalli [lower cave] was also made by the Pandyas which represents the shanmatha cult [with six deities] [5]. These are the significant features in the cultural and religious fields noticed in the Pandya region. Thirupparankundram Jeystha and Durga sculptures installed by Nakkankorri are worthy to mention.

Sculpture of Uma Mahesvara are also decked in some caves such as Piranmalai and Thirumalai in Sivagangai District in the early Pandya period. In the same manner at Anaimalai, in a cave called Ladan temple bas-relief sculptures of Muruga and Devasena are seen in suhasana pose [6]. Beside this, portraits of asaint, a king kneeling before, a Peacock and a Cock [Vehicle and flag of Muruga] are all carved out. Pandya Caves are housed with Sivalinga since early period. For example Caves at Arittapatti, Thirumalpuram, Sevelpatti, Thirumeyyam, Kunrakkudi, and Kudumiyamalai are seen with Sivalinga. All these caves may be dated back to 7th-8th Century A.D. This feature is a quite different one compared to the caves of the Pallavas [7].

Thirumalpuram sculptures represent Vishnu, Brahma, Ganesh, and Dwarabalakas with early features like thick sacred thread crossing on the right arm of the body. Sevelpatti, and chockanpatty caves are also having similar figures like Thirumalpuram [8]. Kunrakkudi cave temple has a group of early Pandya sculptures like Garudavahana Vishnu, Nataraja,

Lingothbhava, Harihara and Durga. Dwarabhalaka sculptures noticed here are something different with horns on the head and it may be the representation of Ayutha Purushas. Similar Dwarabhalakas can be seen at Thirumeyyam Cave also [9].

The Vishnu cave temple at Thirumeyyam is remarkable to mention. The Anantasayani posture of Vishnu with his ganas, Asuras like Madu, Kaidapa is a very rare specimen with exquisite workmanship in Tamilnadu. Thiruthankal caves also represent Anantasayan Vishnu. Arittapatti cave has a rare sculpture of Lakulisa Siva which may be dated too 8th century A.D. In this sculpture Siva is shown with two hands, the right one is placed on the thigh where as the left one holding a lakula [mace or Dhanda]. Full dress up to foot level is given. It looks like a Saiva Saint [10].

Thenparankundram Umaiyudarkovil cave is housed with a bas-relief sculpture of Ardhanarisvara. But the branches of Asoka(pipal) tree found above the head of the sculpture suggests that the temple was originally dedicated to a Jina but later on it is converted into a Siva temple. Chockampatti and Senthamaram caves have remarkable sculptures of Dwarabalakas. Majestic look, broad chest, proportionate shoulders, narrow waist, oval shaped fleshy face are the salient features of the early Pandya sculptures. Minimum ornaments with natural beauty attract the art lovers [11].

C. Kalugumalai Monolithic temple and its Sculptures

Kalugumalai Vettuvankoil stands as the only one example for the early Pandyan monolithic art. It is really a remarkable attempt which attracts numerous visitors and art lovers. The divine sculptures carved on the Vimana portion [Grive and Prasthara portion] represent various forms of siva, Umamahesvara, Dhakashinamurthi, Vishnu, Brahma, Karthikeya Surya and Chandra are very neat and fine execution of sculptural art. Bhudaganas playing various musical instruments also add to the aesthetic and humorous sense of art. The dressing pattern and ornamentation of these sculptures represent not only the significance of Pandyas art but also the influence of Pallava, Chalukya and Rastrakuta art traditions [12].

D. Individual sculptures

Apart from cave temples, monolithic temple structural temples were also constructed during the early Pandya period. But most of the early Pandya temples were dilapidated and remodelled and so the original structures are very rare to see. Some loose sculptures which are noticed, collected and housed in Museums and temples provide example evidence to study the early Pandyan sculptural art.

E. Jain sculptures

Pandya Country served as a hub of Jainism since 3rd century. B.C. and its remains are discovered all over the country in large numbers. This religion adopted idol worship during 8th to 9th Century A.D. and cluster of Jain sculptures were carved in important centers where Jainism was well flourished [13].

Among them Anaimalai, Kilakuyikudi, kilavalavu, Kalugumalai and chitalar [Thiruchcharanathu malai] are very notable centers where number of Jain sculptures are carved out in natural rock shelters. Sculptures of Jain Thirthankaras like Mahavira, Parsvanatha and Ambika Yakshi, Padmavath Yakshi and Komtesvara are carved in these places. Kalugumalai was the great Jain centre during 8th and 9th Century A.D. where about hundred images of Thirthankaras are carved out. Usually the Thirthankara figures are carved as sitting in arthapayanka asana on a pedestal carrying by three lions. The figure is shown in complete nude form and head is adorned with triple umbrella. Above the umbrella branches of papal [Asoka] tree is also seen. Two yakshas will be seen on either side with fly whisks. Two Kinnara [Angels] figures are also shown as flying on either side above the head. At Kalugumalai most of the Thirthankara images are carved out as Votive figures by the devotees and students who studied Jain philosophy [14].

F. Vettuvankoil-rock cut monolith

This famous monolith cut out temple is one of the important monuments from the historical point of view. The Vettuvankoil is a tiny temple which consists of small sanctum sanctorum facing east. This monolithic temple, consisting of several architectural images and beautiful plaster of great beauty in its Vimana, is at the top of the hill at Kalugumalai. It must be mentioned here that it is the only rock cut monolith available in the Pandya region. It is not, only identical to the works of the Pallavas at Mahabalipuram but also comparable to that of the Kailasanatha temple of Ellora.¹⁵(Photo affixed). This temple is datable to eighth century A.D. The artisans have cut out along hill of granite by cutting the latter into three parts. The dimensions of such a boulder is 30 feet in depth, 47 feet in length and 24 feet in width. Then the Vimana consists of three tiers square in shape and has an octagonal sikhara at the top immediately reminding of Dharmaraja and Arjuna rathas at Mahabalipuram.

There are four figure facing the quarters just under the eaves of the Vimana-top-seated Siva and Parvati to the east, Dakshinamurti with his foot on Apasmara to the South, Seated Narasimha to the west and Brahma seated on lotus supported by two elephants to the north. Four Nandis adorn the four corners [16].

G. Umasahith

Siva seated in sukhasana with parvati having an axe and a deer in his rear hands. The front left hand is kept on the thigh but the front right hand is broken and probably that would have been in Abhayamudra. He is beautifully moulded with decorative Ornaments such as necklace, yajnapavita, armlets, by the side of Siva is just having titled face towards Siva and his legs are folded. As pointed out by C,Sivaramamurthi this feature is akin to that of the late Pallava and last phase of the Western Chalukyas [17].

H. Dakshinamurthi

The Dakshinamurthi figure is carved in an unique manner. With an ecstatic smile, he is playing with a mritanga with his right hand while holding the drum with his left. The mritanga is tied to a strap which goes around shoulders. The upper hands hold the axe [parasu] and rosary akshamala Dakshinamurthi usually associated with gnanas is at times associated with music. In the latter he will be shown with a Vina, and be called Vinadhara Dakshinamurthi. However, the depiction of Dakshinamurthi with a mritanga is a rare one and probably the only one of its kind in Tamilnadu. This drum or mritanga is actually associated with dance [18]. (Photo affixed). The ornaments worn by him is also more or less akin to the Siva sculpture. Further while his right leg is folded and supporting the mritanga his left leg is rests on Muyalakon.

I. Narasimha

On the west Narasimha is seated in sukhasana with his right leg folded and the left leg placed on a lotus. His crown is like a lotus bud. As pointed by C. Sivaramamurthi it is identical to that of the Narasimha statue of Badhmi. Thus here Dakshinamurthi is not only with music but also with dance. It may be noted here that both Dakshinamurthi and Nataraja are appropriated to the riches on the southern part of the temple. This sculpture testifies to the popularity of fine arts like music and dance.

His right hand is in tarjani to remind evict deers of the fate of Hiranyakasipu, and the the left rests at ease on the thigh, almost in the Katyavalambita pose. In his rare hands he is having a conch and chakra to note that he is the manifestation of Lord Tirumal. Again "the yajnopavita with the double bell clasp, the armhands, the anklet, the Katisutra with a ribbon shaped knot, all indicate an early date of carving [19]. (Photo affixed).

J. Brahma

In the North Brahma is seated in Padmasana posture on a lotus supported by two elephants. His vastra-yasnopavita is in an usual form. Except Udharabandha to is wearing many other ornaments. He is having two faces and four hand. In the hands at the backone is holding Askshamala and the other is having a Kamandala [Kundika] one of the front hand is Abhayamudra. While the other is having a book. The faces of Brahma are carved with a slight smile on the lips. The Jatas are well arranged, neither as a huge pile or as a diminutive rest. The youthful face without the beard, and the torso with a small waist suggest Brahma as a Deva in the South Indian tradition. This is the opposite of what type of North Indian sculpture, in which the beard and the developed paunch suggest the elderly Pitamaha [Grand Father] of the Gods. The lotus on which Brahma is seated is supported by two elephants facing each other. They evidence the great value placed on accurate animal study by the Indian sculptor [20]. (Photo affixed)

Nandis adorn the four corners of the tier just under the octagonal Vimana top. The Nandis are in realistic style. The

horns are short, the develop and hump prominent, and the bent legs with the tails squeezed in between the hind legs and encircling the cloven hoofs suggest the case with which it is enjoying its rest. The face is alive the nostrils dilate, the eyes become piercing.

Beneath them the vyalavari of lions is carved. It contains dwarfish Bhutagana figures. Two rows of Bhutagana figures are in different postures. The hair style or the Jata of the Ganas are superb in style and noted for architectural beauty. The first row of the Ganas depict the music performance by a drum. The other who designed to witness the concept are depicted in a merry mood. There are other statues in the form of playing flute and vina. The next row also contains a number of Ganas playing in musical instruments such as vina and Gadavatya few of them are having replies in their hands. Such expositions reveal the significance assigned to the fine arts at the time of the first Pandyan empire when it was at its zenith. Again the musical instruments such as drums, vina and flute also reveal the different type of musical instruments along with the patronage of the rulers of fine arts. There are statues of dwarf sages and monkeys. They remind us of the traditional worship of Siva by the monkeys. They have the mithuna figures too. The damsels are carved in all excellence. The damsels are in different posture. One is carrying a box and another a lotus white the third one is just listening to something. Such are wonderful specimens of sculpture, but they are not adorned with a number of jewels. Anyhow, the dresses are carved with artistic exuberance. Most of the figures of the damsels are half hidden.

The sculptor has paid special attention to the arrangements of the curls and Jatas on the heads of the Ganas. The Jata-bhara or Jatamandala are revealing in their variety. The smiling faces beaming with enthusiasm, give away their frolicsome nature. The drummer evidently listens with unsupresses joy to the loud music produced by him. His companions on either side of him not their heads in approbation, with figures beating time, or bodies awaking to the tune. The flutist forgets the world around and is engrossed in the reed which he holds light on his lower lip while his fingers play the merry walty. Another Gana plays the Urdhvaka type of drum keeping time to the flute. There is appreciation of music writ large on the beaming face of the Gana seated next. At the farthest end of this group the long danda of the Vina is held by a Gana adept at the lute.

Again the secondary positions offered to deities like Vishnu, and Murugan enable us to understand the elevated position of Saivism. Simultaneously they are compelled to notice the policy of religious toleration adopted by the Pandya rulers during ninth and tenth centuries because deities of different religious sects found places in their rock cut monoliths. The lonely rock cut monolith political feuds among different political power such as Pallavas, Pandyas, Cholas and minor chieftains of that period, the traditional art and architecture maintained among different powers. Above all it throws light on the distinctive ornaments, the hair style, the musical instruments, different types of animals and express the cultural glory of the Pandyas.



Fig. 1. Jain bas-relief stone Sculptures at Kalugumalai



Fig. 2. Sculpture of Brahma in vettuvankoil at Kalugumalai



Fig. 3. Sculpture of Narasimha in vettuvan koil at Kalugumalai



Fig. 4. Vettuvankoil vimana



Fig. 5. Sculpture of Dakshinamurthi in vettuvankoil at Kalugumalai

2. Conclusion

This paper presented an overview on pandya sculptures with special reference to kalugumalai temple.

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