
CONTRIBUTION OF THE PANDYAS TOWARDS THE ROCESS OF SCULPTURE MAKING

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Abstract

The reign of Pandyas in Tamil country has been divided into three periods 1. Sangam Pandyas, 2. First Pandyas, 3. Second Pandyas. Pandya rulers of the Sangam period find reference in Ettuthogai and Pattupattu Inscriptions, seals, copper plates, coins and literature help to have an understanding about the Sangam culture. The rule of Sangam Pandyas came to an end by the raids of Khalabhras during 3rd century C.E. Growth of Jainism and Buddhism in Tamil country under the patron of rulers along with a support of Saivites, Vaishnavites and Jains made an impact in Tamil Culture. Khalabhras were overthrown by Kadungon of Pandya lineage and Simmavishnu of Pallava line age in late 6th century C.E, a starting point for proliferation of new ruling elites of Kadungon lineage when the first Pandya rulers involved in the expansion of their territories. They extended their support to promote the art and architecture.

Introduction

The Pandyas represent one of the oldest ruling dynasties² in Tamil country. The name Pandya originated from the word Pandu which means ancient. Their emblem was double fish.³ Generally Pandya country spread over from the Southern Vellaru to Cape Comorin. The boundaries of Pandyas, on the three sides of the country are surrounded by water. The region was extended beyond Rameswaram in the south. It is believed that even Ceylon formed an integral part of the Pandya country for some time. South Travancore, Nanchilnadu, Podigai Mountain, Parambu Mountain and Tirupparankundram were under the control of the Pandyas. The rivers of Pandya Kingdom were Vaigai, Tamirabarani, Chilambu, Pahruli and Kumari flow through this country. Thondi, Marungoorpattinam, Korkai, Alagankulam and Kumari were the famous ports where import and export of goods and commodities took place. Therefore, they flourished in trade with foreign countries. Other important cities and towns of the Pandya country were Koodal (Madurai) Mogoor, Thangal, and Aalaival (Senthil) and Pichir. However, it is due to two big devastating floods, several of its big towns, cities, ports and rivers and the place where the two Tamil Academies functioned had submerged in water and vanished. Fortunately, the third Tamil academy, having escaped from such calamities, succeeded in producing a lot of literature on the language of the people and society of the period. The Pandyas were excelled in trade and literature before the Christian era. In Course of time they have achieved in many fields. They have contributed much to literature, architecture, sculpture, painting, music and religion besides their political and economic thought to Tamil country.

Pandya Sculptures

Pandya were second to none in the development of fine arts even from Sangam age. Sangam classic Nedunalvadaï gives a vivid picture about the paintings drawn on the ceilings of the Pandyan Palace. Another later work Paripadal describes the paintings found on the walls of Thirupparankundram Temple. Since remains of sangam period structures, temples, Palaces are not traceable; the study of its artistic quality, workmanship and aesthetic beauty is not possible. After the Kalabhra interregnum, the early Pandyas who ruled Pandya region around 550 to 920 C.E. actively engaged in temple building activities as equal to the Pallavas. Number of Cave temples, monolithic structure and structural temples were created by the Pandyas. This process was continued up to 1300 C.E. by the successive Pandya rulers. Because of this development in the temple arts, sculptures and bronzes 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 number of sculptures. So, tracing out of the study of sculptural art, particularly in Pandya region which is attempted here is quite interesting.

Rock cut Caves and Sculptures

Pillaiyarpattin rock cut Cave temple located in Sivagangai District is considered the earliest of its kind in Tamil Nadu. 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 Tamil Nadu. The earliest datable Cave temple are located at Malaiyadipatti has some sculptures but because of the damage figures are not identified. Pandya Cave temples mostly have sculptures both in central shrine as well as on the niches or walls of it. For example at Anaimalai Narashimha Cave (770 C.E.) on bas-relief sculpture of Yoga Narashimha is carved in the cell. But Thirupparankundram cave is designed with two cells and three niches.

Siva and Vishnu are housed in the cells. Ganesha, Durga and Muruga are found on the niches. Behind the Siva Linga is the first cell Somaskanda panel is also carved out. Moreover on the walls of the Siva cell a group of sculptures, viz, dancing Nataraja, Parvati, Nandi playing Kudam etc are seen which are good examples for the early Pandyan sculptural art (773 C.E.) This Thirupparankundram Cave remains as an example for panchayatana cult (five Gods). But almost in the same period another cave at Trichi (lower cave) was also made by the Pandyas which represents the shanmatha cult (with six deities). 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.

Sculptures of Uma Mahesvara are also depicted in some cases 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, there are bas-relief sculptures of Muruga and Devasena are seen in suhasana pose. Besides this, portraits of a Saint, 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, Thirumalapuram, Sevalpatti, Thirumeyyam, Kunrakkudi, Kudumiyanmalai¹⁶⁸ etc are seen with Sivalinga. All these Caves may be dated back to 7-8th Century C.E. This feature is a quite different one compared to the caves of the Pallavas.

Thirumalapuram sculptures represent Vishnu, Brahma, Ganesha and Dwarabalakas with early features like thick sacred thread crossing on the right arm of the body. Sevelpatti, and Chockanpatty caves are also having the similar figures like Thirumalapuram. Kunrakkudi cave temple has a group of early Pandya sculptures like Garudavahana Vishnu, Nataraja, Lingothbhava, Harihara and Durga. Duvarabhalaka sculptures noticed here is something different with horns on the head and it may be the representation of Ayutha Purushas. Similar Duvarabhalakas can be seen at Thirumeyyam Cave also. The Vishnu cave temple at Thirumeyyam is remarkable to mention. The Anantasayana posture of Vishnu with his ganas, Asuras like Madu, Kaidapa is a very rare specimen with exquisite workmanship in Tamil Nadu. Thiruthankal cave also represent Anantasayana Vishnu. Arittapatti cave has a rare sculpture of Lakulisa Siva which may be dated to 8th Century C.E. 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.

Thenparankundram Umaiyandarkovil cave is housed with a bas-relief sculpture of Ardhanarisvara. But, the branches of Ashoka (papal) tree found above the head of the sculpture suggest that the temple was originally dedicated to a Jaina but latter on it is converted into a Siva temple. Chockampatti and Senthamaram caves have remarkable sculptures of Dvarabhalakas. 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. Kalugumalai Monolithic Temple and its Sculptures

Kalugumalai Vettuvan Koil 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 (Griva and Prasthara portion) represent various forms of Siva, Umamahesvara, Dhakshinamurthi, Vishnu, Brahma, Karthikeya, Surya and Chandra are very neat and fine execution of sculptural art. Bhuda ganas playing various musical instruments also add the aesthetic and humorous sense of art. The dressing pattern and ornamentation of these sculptures represent not only the significance of Pandyan art but also the influence of Pallava, Chalukya and Rashtrakuta art of traditions.

Individual Sculptures

Apart from cave temples and monolithic temple structural temples were also constructed during the early Pandya period. But most of the early Pandya temples were dilapidated and remodeled and so the original structures and sculptures are very rare to

see. Some loose sculptures which are noticed, collected and housed in Museums and temples provide ample evidence to study the early Pandyas sculptural art. Though Meenakshi Sundaresvara temple at Madurai is a very famous one and referred to in Devaram hymns, early sculptures and architectural structures are not traceable. Only one Surya sculpture, located in the second prakara of Sundaresvara temple may be datable to 8th century C.E. One early Pandya temple constructed at Kilmaththur near Madurai was completely ruined. But the sculptures like Sabthamathas, Vishnu, Durga, Kali, etc are collected and housed now at Thirumalai Naicker Mahal Museum at Madurai. They provide evidence for the early Pandya sculptures.

Rajakalmangalam, near Nanguneri in Thirunelveli District also yielded a number of early Pandya sculptures. A large mound located here, may be a dilapidated temple site still yields now and then some sculptures. One big monolithic Narashimha sculpture, a Vishnu and Bhudevi are now displayed at Thirumala Naicker Mahal Museum, Madurai. Some sculptures have labels also viz, Satakrathu (Indra), Kujaha (Sevvay), Ya... (yama) etc in Grantha script.

Two early Pandya sculptures discovered from Thiruchchuliyal represent Sri-Devi and Bhu-Devi stand as good example for early Pandya sculptures. One more Ganesha sculpture and a Nanthi with early Vatteluthu inscription are located at Neeravi village in Kamuthi taluk, Ramnad District. An early Pandya Siva Temple might have been existed here and completely ruined due to some natural reasons. Vira Pandya (who took Chola's head) inscription found at this place attests the existence of a Siva temple named Muruisvaram. An early Pandya Vishnu sculpture dated to 8th century C.E. is noticed at Kallurani village near Aruppukkottai.

One Vishnu sculpture which may be dated back to 8th Century C.E. located at Kuraththiyarai village in Kanyakumari village set an example for early Pandyan art, another one collected from Arjnggraman village in the same district is now displayed in government Museum at Kanyakumari also worthy to mention. Pandya temples do not have sculptures in niches. All the niches will be empty and names as dummy Kosta. So, sculptural representations are minimum in Pandya temples. But rarely some later Pandya temples have sculptures at niches. For example Aruppukkottai, Melathirumanikkam and Tenkarai temples have some sculptures which represent the latter Pandya sculptural art. Number of later Pandya sculptures collected from the Thiruvathavur Siva temple is now displayed at Thirumalai Naicker Mahal Museum at Madurai. Oval shaped face, two or three varieties of neck ornaments and slim and slender body features are the salient features of the later Pandya sculptures.

Hero-Stones

To compare with northern districts of Tamil Nadu, the number of hero-stones discovered in Pandya country is minimum. One hero-stone found at Uluppakkudi village near Natham town in Dindigal district dated back to the 8th Century A.D. is the earliest one in Pandya country. Here the hero is shown with a sword and dagger and on his either side

Tamil inscription is engraved. Another hero stone dated back to 10th Century C.E. is noticed at Neeravi Karisalkulam village in Kamuthi Taluk in Ramnad District. In this stone also the hero is shown as standing with a sword and dagger and to his either side Vatteluthu inscription is engraved. Now this hero-stone is kept in Tirumalai Naicker Mahal Museum at Madurai. One navakanta sculpture was located at Thiurchuliyal in Viruthunagar district dated to 12-13th Century C.E. is also now under display at Tirumalai Naicker Mahal Museum at Madurai. More than ten hero-stones of 16th Century C.E., were noticed at Ilavelankal in Tuticorin district is now kept at Government Museum at Thirunelveli. Here the heroes are portrayed with bow, sword, and shields and shown as fighting with the enemies on the horse back. By the side of one slain hero, two women are shown as garlanding the departed hero.

Jain Sculptures

Pandya Country served as a hub of Jainism since 3rd century. B.C.E. and its remains are discovered all over the country in large numbers. This religion adopted idol worship during 8-9th Century C.E. and cluster of Jain sculptures were carved in important centres where Jainism was well flourished. Among them Anaimalai, Keelakuyilkudi, Keelavalavu, 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, Komatesvara etc are carved in these places. Kalugumalai was the great jain centre during 8-9th Century C.E. where about hundred images of Thirthankaras were carved out. Usually the Thirthankara figures are carved as sitting in arthapaiyanka asana on a pedestal carrying by three lions. The figure is shown in complete rude 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 were carved out as Votive figures by the devotees and students who studied jain philosophy.

Individual figures of Thirthankaras are seen almost all over the Pandya country. They are kept in some museums and some are worshiped in some villages. For example, places like, Puliuran, Muttupatti, Pandalkudi, Kovilankulam, Pasumpon, Kamuthi, Thiurchuliyal, Mahipalanpatti, Thoppilakarai, Palavanatham, Karaikkeni, Devankuricci, Ukkirankoottai, Korkai, Ilavelankal etc yielded thirthankara sculptures. Ayvarmalai (near Palani), Kuppalnaththam (near Sedapatti) uththamapalaym are the some other places where cluster of Jain sculptures are noticed. All these sculptures and panels are dated back to 8-9th Century C.E. when, revival of this religion took place in Pandya country.

Buddhist Sculptures

Buddhism did not wield much influence compared to Jainism in Pandya region. It was followed and nourished by the maritime traders not by itinerant merchants. One Buddha sculpture dated back to 10th Century C.E. is now worshiped by the village folk near

Madurai as Pandi Munisvara. Another one sculpture is placed in a Siva temple at Ilaiyankudi. These sculptures are shown as Buddha sitting in a Yogaasana (arthapariyanka Asana) with his two palms placed on one another. Totally shaved head and elongated ears, dress folding is seen on the chest. These are very simple in decoration and without any ornamentation.

Bronze Icons

Temples not only served as religious institutions but also considered as a treasure house of arts. So many fine arts like sculptures, bronzes, paintings and music were well nurtured in the ancient times in temples. The specimens of bronze icons are available from early Pandya period. Comparing to Chola period bronze icons the Pandya period bronzes are different in nature. Chola period bronze images are shown with round and bulky faces. Unlike this, Pandya bronze icons seem to be straight and lean figures. The Early Pandya bronze icons are found in Pandya country. At present few bronze icons of Pandya period are exhibited in museums. In this regard, one bronze image is seen in Madras Museum. It was unearthed from a village of Poruppu Mettupatti, Usilampatti Taluk, Madurai District. It is the image of "Athira Veesi Adiya Peruman" whose story of dance with changing of both left and right legs, is told in the chapter "Kaalmari Adiya Padalam of Thiruvilaiyadal Puranam by Paranjothi Munivar.

The Bronze icons of Ramar, Lakshman, Sita and Bharata from Tiruppullani Kalyana Jeganathapperumal temple of Ramnad District and bronze images of Rama, Sita, Lakshman and Hanuman in Cheranmadevi Ramasamy Temple belong to Pandya period. Few more bronze images are seen in the temples in and around Tirunelveli district. For example, Bronze image of Kangasalamoorthy in Nellaiappar Temple of Tirunelveli, images of Vedanarayanan, Vedavalli, Puvanavalli in Rajagopalasamy temple known as Mannar koil and bronze icons of Nataraja and Sivakami in Someswarar Temple, Aththur might be cited in this context as belonging to Pandya period.

In Kudumiyamalai there are 30 bronze images for various Gods and Goddesses. Different aspects of Siva viz., Somaskantha, Umasahithi, Bikshadana, Bairava, Chandrasekar and Nataraja images are housed in a room. Sivakama Sundari, Devi, Uma, Pidari as the representations of Goddess are also found here. The Devaram trio, Vinayaka, Murugan images were also intricately made and kept here. Most of the bronzes may be dated to 11 - 12th Century CE and after. These images were made for the processional purpose. Some of the bronze images of early Pandya period are found in the area of Pandya country. Particularly, Vishnu image of Kudal Alagar Perumal temple and Kodumudi bronzes of Nataraja images were excavated from Tamaraikulam near Palani are remarkable icons of early Pandya period. The icons of Nataraja from Natarajeeswaram in Thiruvekampathu, Chandrasekhar, Somaskantha and Nataraja from Virapandi are noteworthy examples of later Pandya bronze images. An inscription belongs to the sundara Pandya Deva records the gift of land in Marudur Kottai for offerings to the image of Paravai Nachchiyar set up by a certain Deviyammai. Another inscription records that during the time of Maravarman Sundara Pandya I, the images of Sundarar and his consort

Paravai Nachchiyar were installed in the siva temple at Thenthirupperai. Further the bronze figures of Senthamarai Kannan and Senthamaraiselvi in Aranganatharkoil Museum are noteworthy examples of Pandya period.

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