
THE ART OF SCULPTURES AND PAINTINGS UNDER PANDYA RULE

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Introduction

Pandyas represent one of the oldest ruling dynasties in Tamil country. Pandya's history started from Sangam period of 3rd century B.C.E. to Tenkasi Pandya period i.e. 16th to 17th century C.E. Basically sculpture is most valuable as it can bring out the information about what kind of art and architecture was followed in particular period. It could tell the story of development of human civilization. Sculpture is one of the most complexes of the arts. The word Sculpture means cut and implies the technique of carving and modelling. Finally carving and modelling are the basic techniques of sculpture. They vary according to the technical development in various periods in style and features. Although the earliest art of sculpture could be traced out from the Stone Age, this study on Pandya period tries to see from the Sangam age. The ancient Sangam period consisted coins and seals, carved portraits of animals, water species and symbols. The next earlier specimens of Pandya period sculpture are to be seen in Pandya cave temples. The latest period specimens of Pandya sculpture are to be seen in cave and huge structural temples in Pandya country.

Sculptural Art in Coins

The sculptural art of Sangam period coins express the figures of animals and water species acquired prominence in the art of sculpture in those days. Some other coins had human forms too. These portraits remain as an example for the art of carving and serve as source materials to know the history of the particular period. They mention about the earliest history of Pandyas and their contributions to culture. In the coins of Sangam Pandyas, particularly Peruvazhuthi Pandya, a carved portrait of a horse is seen in the front side. At the bottom of the face of this horse, two water troughs are there. In these troughs two tortoises are seen. From the face of the horse the name Peruvazhuthi is carved two times. This name is found in Tamil Brahmi letters. Another feature of this coin is that at the bottom of front legs of the horse, a symbol known as Trishule is found. At the back side of the coin, two outline figures of fishes are seen. Few more coins consist with four Tortoises in water tub-two in one side facing other two in direct. These water Tub Tortoise coins have with carved portrait of elephants and outline figures of fishes.¹

Besides the water Tub Tortoise coins, few more coins are available with four carved portraits of fishes in Tub. This type of silver punch marked coins were found in Tirunelveli district. In few more Peruvazhuthi coins, along with symbol of Tortoise, the symbol of

temple is seen. The artistic feature of coins expresses that, the carved portrait technique was employed during that time of Sangam age. During imperial Pandya period new coin called VeerapandyanKasu that was in circulation along with the old soliyankasu. Maravarman Sundarapandya I introduced a new linear measure. During the reign of JatavarmanVeerapandya, an inscription refers to the coins palamsoliyankasu and Veerapandyankasu. During the reign of Jatavarman I (1190 - 1217C.E) an inscription referred to the coindiramam (dramma).²

A good number of Pandyan coins have been discovered and are found mentioned in the inscriptions. A double carp on the obverse with an inscription is the common type of Pandya coins. The coins of Srimara Srivallabha, Maravarman Sundarapandya I, Jatavarman Sundarapandya I and Jatavarman Vira Pandya were known as AvanibhasekharaKilakni, Sonadukondan, EllamTalaiyan and VallalvaliTirandanKulikai respectively. Achchu, Anai – Achchu, Kasu or Sempon Kasu, Panam, Palankasu, Drahman, Kanam (-1 pon), PudukulagaiPanam, AnradaNarpaduKasu, Palam, Soliyakkasu, Palamudal and Achchu and others were some of the varieties of coins found during the reign of Pandyas.³

Sculptural Art in Caves

The next phase of development in the art of sculpture is to be seen in the cave temples of Pandyas. The sculptural art of the early Pandyas is to be found mainly on rock, in the excavated temples and in monolith at Kalugumalai. Its method of cutting differs from that of the Pallava, for at Kalugumalai a part of the hill has been separated from the parent rock for carving out the monolith, which is also left unfinished. Its style is essentially that of the Pallava art of the seventh and eighth centuries, but there were some regional variations. Some of the magnum opus of Pandya work is at Tirupparankundram in Madurai and Tirumayam near Pudukottai. However the high reaches of Pandya art are seen at Kalugumalai. They followed provincial school of art. The cave temples have many kinds of artistic features. Sculptures in Pandya cave temples are represented Brahma, dancing Siva, Vishnu, Ganesha, Sabdamathas, Durga, Subramanya and Jyesta. Particularly the sculptures of Siva, Vishnu, Durga, and Ganapathi are found in the Thirupparankundram. This is a remarkable feature of Thirupparankundram cave temple. Consequently the galaxy of sculptures of Ganesa, Subramanya, Brahma, Lord Sun and Goddess Durga on the backside walls of Mandapa are found in Keelkudavari temple at Trichy. The image of Ganesa is found at cave temple at Pillaiyarpatti, Kudumianmalai, Malayakoil, Thirukkokarnam, Kunnathur, ThirupparankundramKundrakudi and Arittappatti. Cave panels are found in later cave temples.⁴

The significant art and architecture feature of cave temples might view in many aspects like decoration, rhythmic grace and facial expression found in images and relief sculptures. Next the monolithic temple at Kalugumalai might be referred to monolithic architecture at Pandya country. This temple has Vimana, Octagonalgriva and Shikara. Another significant feature is Lord Muruga as Kalugasalamoorthy with six hands is found here. The special

architectural feature is that, Lord Muruga with his vehicle Peacock carved in a single stone is found here. The architectural feature is seen in the Vimana structure of this temple. On its Vimana is a heavy seated figure of Siva in the Lalitasana flanked by fat ganas. Similar to this Siva figure is the figure of Vishnu seated in Virasana. In the sculpture gallery of this temple, sculptures of Siva with Parvathi in sitting position, Dhakshinamoorthy with Miruthangam in hands and Narasimhar, Brahma, Skanda Surya and Chandras are found here. The sculpture of Dakshinamoorthi is shown as playing miruthangam with his hands is not found anywhere. These sculptures reveal the fact that they had been carved on the style of Pallava, Chalukya and Rashtrakutas arts.⁵

The significant sculptural Art of Chola Pandyas shown in Soamantha Shrine in Tirunelveli. A bhuta frieze beneath the Kapota of the entablature depicts various scenes like bhuta holding serpent as in the Tirttalinatha Temple at Tiruppattur in Pandya region, playing musical instruments like mirtanga, cymbals, pipe, flute and conth, holding sticks, flywhisks, chendu (a bunch of flowers tied like a ball) dancing and others. One dwarf gestures Vismaya, another rides on an elephant and yet another on a lion, and one is acrobatic. The corners of the frieze house a few bhutas upholding the kapota as in the Pandya rock-cut monolithic shrine at Kalugumalai. The monkey faced bhutas also appear at Tiruppattur and Kalugumalai. The medieval and imperial Pandya period sculptures are seen in numerous temples which are constructed during this period. The sculptures represent the religious saint figures of that period. As a result they are Saiva sculptures, Vaishnava sculptures, Jain, Buddhist sculptures and folk traditional sculptures. These outstanding sculptures might be seen in Tirunelveli Nellaiappar temple, Tenkasi temple, Madurai Meenakshi temple and Srivilliputtur temple. Later period sculptures are incredibly large in size. Madurai Meenakshi Amman temple is a fine example of artistic feature of Pandyas. The bases of sanctum of this temple at four sides are shown as two elephants carried on each side. The sculptures of elephants seem to be excellent in appearance. These are found not anywhere else. These sculptures were belonged to the period of JatavarmanKulasekaran I (1191 C.E - 1216 C.E) Particularly arthamandapa, mahamandapa and Sannathi gopura in front of the SundareswararSannathi and figures in them belonged to the period of Jatavarman Kulasekara.⁶

As regards to Vaishnava sculptures of later Pandya period, Tirumal in Nindra, Amarntha, Kindantha positions in sanctums are seen. These types of sculptures of Tirumal are found in Tirumohur temple near Madurai, temple at Kallikudi and temple at Kampam area. In the temples of Tirumal, the little shrines for Sridevi and Budevi are built and the incarnation (Avatar) Narasingamperumal and Varakaperumal are placed. The sculptures for Sakkarathalvar and SenaiMuthalvar are placed since 12th century C.E. These are evidenced from inscriptions of imperial Pandyas. The iconography of the Nayak period had derived its tradition from the Cholas and Pandyas.⁷

Jain and Buddhist Sculptures

Jain religious Thiruthankarar sculptures of early Pandya period are found at Thoppulakarai and Alwar Tirunagari. There was a temple for Aristanemi, twenty second Thiruthankara of Jain religion at Vilathikulam at Tuticorin. This temple was dilapidated. However, the figure of Yakshi Ambika was found from this destroyed temple. Number of Jain sculptures can be seen at AnaimalaiKilavalavu, Kilakuyilkudi, Sittanavasal and Chitaral are dated between 9th and 10th century C.E. Buddhist sculptures are found in many places in Tamil Nadu. A Buddha statue in sitting posture was found in Maranadu near Tiruppachetti. Another Buddha statue in standing posture in Siva temple at Sundara Pandya Pattinam near Thondi was found. Recently one Buddha image dated to 10th century C.E. is discovered at Rosanapatti near Andipatti in Theni district. Further in many villages the figures of folk deities are found. What is said above stands as an evidences and testimonials to the sculptural art of Pandyas from Sangam to later period.

The Art of Painting in Pandya Period

The art of painting is awfully popular in the Indian way of life, which is known from the ancient and medieval literature. Chitramatam is referred to in the Sangam literature. Chitramatam or painted niche seems to have prevailed in the Pandya country in the Sangam age. Pandyas contribution to the development of Art of Painting in their country is very limited. The excellent example for paintings of Pandyas in cave temple, Sittanavasal and Tirumalapuram might be cited as they are excelled at world level. The Jain paintings are seen in Sittanavasal temple. The rock was plastered thinly and the paintings were done on it. The phase of South Indian painting after Ajanta is at Sittanavasal painting discovered by JoureauDubreuil. This painting is similar to Ajanta. These are in best tradition of classical and originally believed to be Pallava. It is now found that there are two layers of paintings an earlier one and a later one as an inscription which proves that what were originally reckoned as Pallava are really Pandya paintings of the 9th century C.E.⁸

In the ceiling of the mandapa the water tank spread with lotus flowers was painted. The tank was painted with the figures of fish, swan and buffalo. Further the figures of Jains were painted. Among them two are appearing, holding lotus flowers and third person is seen with flower pot in left hand and plucking the flowers by right hand. In the façade of Mandapa, the painting shows that, the two pillars are flanked by two women at hip level. This painting shows the dancing girls with ornaments. The figures of king and queen were painted in the middle of left side column. This cave temple remains as a hall of the art of sculpture, painting and dance. This cave temple is one of the outstanding achievements of Pandyas.

Tirumalaipuram Cave Temple Painting

The ceiling, wall and sculptures of this temple got plastered and crowned with paintings. This painting was discovered by JouveauDubreuil in 1935. On the figures yellow, green, black, blue, red, saffron and white colours were painted. Among the Pandya

paintings, Tirumalaipuram Paintings are most popular next to Sittannavasal paintings. During 9th and 10th century C.E. similar to Sittannavasal paintings, Anaimalai, Keelavalavu and Arittappatti sculptures are painted. In these places the Jain Thirthankara figures were covered with their paste of lime mortor and on their paintings were made in those places. Red, yellow, green and black colour pigments were used to paint on the sculptures. Still they are maintaining their original colour against the vagaries of time. The structural temples paintings consist with plaster works, plaster figures, and paintings on the ceilings, walls, vimanas, gopuras and sculptures. The construction of huge and large temples with vimanas and gopuras on sanctum sanctorums (Garpagirahas) with entrance feature of the Pandya architecture in later period.⁹

Conclusion

This paper explains the Pandya contribution to the development of art and architecture especially the art of sculptures and paintings during Pandya's rule in Madurai and Tenkasi. They were patronized them in their country. The art and architectural features of Pandya are found in temple architecture throughout the ages. Moreover Sangam period exposes the art and sculptural features on coins of those days. The sculptural aspect of art is found in Pandya's cave temples and structural temples of imperial Pandya. The patronages to paintings are visibly seen in cave and later structural temples. The promotion of art and architecture was very significant one in the history and also the present work makes an earnest attempt to unravel the social and cultural life of the Tamils during the Pandya regime.

End Notes

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