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Art and Culture of Early stone Age: Rock Paintings of Tamil Nadu a Study

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Abstract

Generally, the common minds had been inculcated that painting are filled with colors and lines, rather more than that paintings reveals one's culture, art, science and geography. Thus, this paper aims to critically analyze and understand the art, culture, science and geographies of rock-paintings in Tamil Nadu particularly the Early Stone Age.

Key words: art, culture, science and geographies of rock-paintings in Tamil Nadu.

Introduction: The settlements of the pre- historic men were the caves, which created by the nature. Those places were the shorting points of human culture of period. It is the place, where they slowly detached from their barbaric culture. 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 caricatured 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 color painted by the early humans inside the walls of caves are known as cave paintings.

In so far as Tamil Nadu 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 other hand, 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.¹

The art forms of the prehistoric humans can be classified based on their living place, living pattern and migrating pattern, viz 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

¹ *Dr. Rasupoundurai, Tamilaga paarai oviyam (2001), Meyyappan Padhippagam, Chidambaram. Volume-III, Issue-IV January 2017*

living style through different art forms but also science of color, 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.

Cave Arts: The images of animals, thump impressions of human, line drawings of human images, and other human drawings chiseled 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.²

Based on the pattern of the rock paintings, the life system of early humans can be classified into three stages.

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



(Image for –Hunting Scene at Sirumalai)

The above three stages can further be divided into three based on their occupation; first stage- hunting and food gathering, second stage – hunting and food producing, third stage – agriculture, creating settlements. Why the early people draw the animal form? if it is in aesthetic sense, why he deft mountains, tree, sun, river, human, birds etc? was elephants and rhinoceros were alone knowing to him?

² *Gandhirajan (Article), Indhiya pazhangudi panbadum Tamil panbdum (2011), Bodhivanam, Chennai.*

Pre-archaeologists determine the period of cave temple with the images drawing of elephant, and rhinoceros into two lakh year age.

In the rock arts of Tamil Nadu, there is a cave across with an image of an animal along with that of a hunter deer, goat or by son. The image of the animal depicts their group identity. Chances are less for the pre-historical people to draw an animal hunted by a bow.

The edge of the arrow should be made up of stone, which certainly the stone age period. It depicts a hunting scenes. Their belief should be in such a way that, the extraordinary power of human identifies the animal and then he releases the arrow and kills their freely. Such type of belief still exists among several racial groups, even today. The stone age people draw such pictures to express their beliefs.



(Image for- Animal face human)

Human belongs to this age produced small knives, digging tools, blades and needles and made use of them. In the later period he used the bone of the animals hunted by him, is a mark of growth. When comparing the rock art of the image of an, elk deer, during middle age, it clarifies the same.

Human was not delivered the arts. He designed the tools required for his living. Even though he would have lived in cave, because more sketches were found 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 spines were portrayed in many works. The x-ray form of bull at *Alambadi*, animals head picture at *Kilvalai* 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.



(Image for – Coat Hunting at Sirumalai)

Animals, plants, creepers and trees playing a vital role in the human society was not a big surprise, in the society of food gatherers, who wonder for gathering cereals and animals. Their thinking would have also surrounded among the above species. Some belief would have come out of it. they believed that connectivity with powerful animals will increase the hunting strength. Strongly believing such a kind of faiths, they even claimed that they were the decedents of bear, tiger, lion, rhinoceros, elephant etc.

They believed strongly that the unkilld 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.

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 groups emblem too. Not only in Tamil Nadu, that a clan/group worshiping emblem was prevailed, and also in the mega-lithic age. This faith would have emerged out of the hunting life and agrarian society.

Dance Culture in Rock Arts: As we mentioned earlier, megalithic people strongly believed that the individual strength is totally depends upon the group's strength.



(Image for - Dance Vellearukkampalayam)

Every time, before start for a hunt, they would join with their racial groups and perform dance to gather.

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.³

The bell sound has no languages and played a lead role in performing dance to gather variety of sound and music. By observing the present day folk art forms, we can imagine the dancing pattern of the pre historical people by closely watching the step of *Silambattam* we can come to a conclusion that the method of handing an animal through a stick, should have evolved a dance.

The chain of difference methods against a violent animal, will be similar to the step in the martial art *Silambatam*. similarly, the difference or precautionary exercise were

³ Interview from Periyannayagam, hunter, Varadharajapuram.
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manipulated in the steps/ movement of *Kolattam* dance, also performed for rituals. Such a kind of dances are called as mythical dances. Many evidence are found in *Kilvalai* rock painting about wearing the mask of the various animals, or emblem of animal which connected to particular ethical group, to perform ritual dances.

Even today there are several moisture performed in the *Thalugai Murungapathi* village located in the foothills of *Pachamalai* in Tiruchirappalli Distick, is very popular. People perform their green- room activities for the above dance in grave yards. The person lead the role is '*Katteriy*' [Forest Demon] will paint his body with black colour and proceed with dancing by holding the mortal remain in a skull from the grave yard. He uses to wear the skull and the bones as garland.

The local drum *Thaarai Thappattai* will be beaten in high pitch. Two people with their whole body covered by hay stack, will proceed front and back of the '*Katteriy*'. They will sing with meaningless lyrics along with a heavy wooden pole used for pounding rice for their dance will be an expression of their valor or anger.

Women folks who said to be in the clusters of evil organs come front of this '*Katteriy*' and dance by staining their body, before prostrating with long and cry. In return "*Katteriy*" will enquire about the evil spirit living in the particular woman and will be followed by a sudden collapse, the girl will get back to her home, believing that the evil spirit has driven away. The ghosts inside the children will also be chased away in the same manner.

By their rituals, they believe that the feminine god '*Katteriy*' is their protector from the evil spirits. Further, '*Katteriy*' will be worshipped in the village boundary as their savior and also the symbol of their home for previous seven days. Then, they will apply black, white and red colour to their face, particular on eyes, nose and cheek to express the danger and the body will be decorated with black and red dots.⁴

Anthropologists say these kind of activities as sympathetic magic. During the later ages, there were chances for the ancient people to had choreograph group dance. In general, dances were performed for rituals. The sound of words without any meaning were murmured in particular frequencies drip the later ages and fine tuned in to a music form. Further people composed ragas, *Thalams* {tunes/rhythms} which is a musical evaluation process. In the same way the performance of the group symbol of animals or the hunting style before their savior God, in later days, as a fine tuned dance performance with fast and slow frequent body moments.

Such a kind of ritual based on their behavior would have prevailed during the early stone age and further the people would have drawn their savior God's image in the rocks for the purpose of shipping and symbols like the heads of the energetic elephant, bulls can be quoted. Here the images of rock arts of *Konavakkarai* may also be cited. The living style as communal depicted in the rock arts are extract now.

⁴ Interview from Kandhan, Kaliyattam performer, T. Murungappatty.
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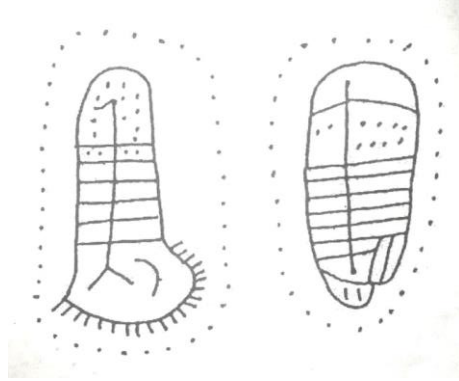
(Image Arts of Rock Arts of Konavakkarai)

In the civilized society, the age old art forms like group folk dance ‘Gummi’ and ‘Oyil’ are still exists as a residual of ancient life style. People have migrated in all the five type of lands are; *Kuringi, Mullai, Marudham, Neydhal* and *Palai*, during the *Sangam* Era. Here the community living was replaced by the Monarch. After the formation of kingdoms, human art forms developed form the background of group of symbols. Group symbols were changed into Demy-Gods. Kings represented them as their descendents. People completely forgot about their group symbol worship and its extension as their living style changed. The residual of group symbols remained with handful of people became meaningless. Either as the descendent of fertile Gods or a residual of the feminine worship and as a demy-gods in epics, the feminine Gods became a character in art forms.

Bhudevi and Sridevi, are emerged a fertile Goddess in the present day worship. In general, there is no direct link between the rock arts and the contemporary art forms, certainly we can realize that there exists a cultural relationship between them.

Worship Rituals: The stone age people, was composed of Mythic rituals and worship methods. Therefore, indicating the present or the ancestor’s domicile is a way of expression to reveal the relationship between the individual or the group with the particular place when they lived.

This connectivity may be an expression of the magical, mythic rituals. The early Tamil society registered the information about ancestor worship or soul worship in their art forms. Worship were rituals and the places of performing rituals were the connected between the people living pattern and the place of living. It wills also a symbolic expression of their ancestor worship. Hence, home or domiciles were the mythical representation of their offerings. Therefore, the place and place based arts can be considered as a registration of the ancestral worship.



The main animal forms appear in the cave arts is deer. It find place even in the cave arts of Pre-historic period. The scene depicts the deer, reveals the hunting society is existence. Chasing the deer and killing by arrow was accurately drawn s a clear picture. The experts gone through the painting have come to a conclusion that these types of scenes engraved to gain more energy through magic and mystic way to hunt more deer.⁵

Conclusion: Generally there are not many studies available on rock art of Tamil Nadu. This paper is an attempt to fill that gap by critically analyzing a few rock arts which discovered by different people. Even though the available studies on the same line hardly engaged in terms of linking the rock arts with the culture of the people particularly the ancient culture of the marginalized. The arguments which the paper carries out are just an outcome of a few rock arts founded throughout Tamil Nadu. If the whole range of rock arts founded by research scholars, it will be a great outcome that a mammoth of art and culture of the early Tamil during the early stone age will be brought out. Therefore this paper suggest scholars who engaged in art and culture also should extend their research towards rock arts of Tamil Nadu, which would admire the future generation to engage in the field of Arts particularly the rock arts.

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