



Impact Factor:4.081

A COMPARATIVE STUDY ON THE ICONOGRAPHY OF THE BAS-RELIEF GANESAS IN THE ROCK-CUT CAVE TEMPLES OF PUDUKKOTTAI DISTRICT, TAMIL NADU

Dr. T. Sumitha

Assistant Professor, Department of History, Seethalakshmi Ramaswami College,
Thiruchirappalli– 620 002. Tamil Nadu. athimust@yahoo.com Mobile No.
9787695222

ABSTRACT: Rock-cut cave architecture flourished in the Tamil land between C.E. 6th to 9th centuries. The Pallavas, Pandyas, Muttaraiyas and the Adiyas were the dynasties that contributed to this type of architecture in their respective territories. The region roughly constituting between the south of the river Cauvery and north of the river Vellaru forms the Muttaraiyas land and the present Pudukkottai district of Tamil Nadu forms part of the region. About twenty rock-cut cave temples are found in this district, in which two are incomplete. Though this type of architecture has a common basic pattern, nevertheless, indigenous traits are evident for every dynasty both in architecture and sculptures. The Muttaraiyas are no exception; their indigenous traits are conspicuous in architecture and iconography. Among the eighteen finished rock-cut cave temples two belong to Vaishnavism and sixteen belong to Saivism. Among the various deities that were incorporated by the Muttaraiyas in their rock cut cave temples, Lord Ganesa find prominent place as associate deity in the Saiva Rock cut-cave temples. At ten places either in the mandapa of the rock-cut cave temple or in a niche on the slope of the mother rock, within the vicinity of the rock-cut cave temple, Lord Ganesa had been depicted as giant bas-relief sculpture. This article is purely based on field study and attempts to bring to limelight the iconographic excellence of the ten bas-relief Ganesas which are earliest available Ganesa Icons of Pudukkottai district.

Key Words : Rock-cut cave temples, Ganesa, Pudukkottai, iconography, Muttaraiyas

INTRODUCTION

Rock-cut cave architecture flourished in the Tamil land between 6th to 9th centuries C.E. The Pallavas, Pandyas, Muttaraiyas and the Adiyas were the dynasties that contributed to this type of architecture in their respective territories. The region roughly constituting between the south of the river Cauvery and north of the river Vellaru forms the Muttaraiyas land and the present Pudukkottai district of Tamil Nadu forms part of the region. About twenty rock-cut cave temples are found in this district, in which two are incomplete. Though this type of architecture has a common basic pattern, nevertheless, indigenous traits are evident for every dynasty both in architecture and sculptures. The Muttaraiyas are no exception; their indigenous traits are conspicuous in architecture and iconography. Among the eighteen finished rock-cut cave temples two belong to Vaishnavism and sixteen belong to Saivism. Among the various deities that were incorporated by the Muttaraiyas in their rock cut cave temples, Lord Ganesa find prominent place as associate deity in the Saiva Rock cut-cave temples. At ten places either in the mandapa of the rock-cut cave temple or in a

niche on the slope of the mother rock, within the vicinity of the rock-cut cave temple, Lord Ganesa had been depicted as giant bas-relief sculpture. This article is purely based on field study and attempts to bring to limelight the iconographic excellence of the ten bas-relief Ganesas which are earliest available Ganesa Icons of Pudukkottai district.

„PLACEMENT OF THE DEITY

Among the sixteen Saiva rock-cut cave temples of Pudukkottai district at ten rock-cut cave temples Ganesa is sculpted as a rock-cut bas-relief sculpture either within the rock-cut cave temple or in a niche on the slope of the mother rock in which the rock-cut cave temple is excavated. Mangudi, Malayadipatti, Kundrandarkoil, Malayakkoil, Thirugokarnam, Kudumiyamalai, Thevarmalai, Poovalaikkudi are the places where Ganesa is found as rock-cut bas-relief sculpture. Among the above said places Thirugokarnam and Kudumiyamalai are the places where Ganesa is seen at two places; both in the madapa and also in the slope of the mother rock.

The table details about the place or name of the rock-cut cave temple, placement of Ganesa in the rock-cut cave temple and the size of the deity.

Sl. No	Name of the Rock-cut cave temple	Placement of the Deity in the Rock cut cave temple	Measure in mts Height & width
1.	Mangudi	Sanctum	H-0.54, W-0.54
2.	Kundrandarkoil	Mandapa lateral wall	H-1.96, W-1.41
3.	Okkaliswaram	Mandapa lateral wall	H-2.03, W-1.04
4.	Gokarneswara	Mandapa lateral wall	H-1.92, W-1.34
5.	Thirumerrali	Mandapa back wall	H-0.55, W-0.65
6.	Aalatturthali	Mandapa back wall - In the Saptamatha assemblage	H-0.84
7.	Thirugokarnam	On the slope of mother rock - In the Saptamatha assemblage	H-0.70
8.	Thevarmalai	On the slope of mother rock – in a niche	H-1.23, W-0.91
9.	Kudumiyamalai	On the slope of mother rock – in a niche	H-1.90
10.	Poovalaikkudi	On the slope of the mother rock – in a niche	H-0.67, W-0.83

Table : 1

Among the ten places, except Thirugokarnam and Aalatturthali in the rest of the places the deity is depicted as individual sculpture in a niche. At Thirugokarnam and Aalatturthali the deity is found in association with the Saptamatrika Assemblage. As like, Kundrandarkoil, Okkaliswaram, Gokarneswara, Thirumerrali and

Aalatturthali are the places where the deity is found in the mandapa of the rock-cut cave temple. Whereas at Thirugokarnam, Thevarmalai, Kudumiyamalai, Poovalaikkudi the deity is found on the slope of the mother rock in which the rock-cut cave temple is excavated. Mangudi is the only rock-cut cave temple of Pudukkottai district to possess Ganesa as presiding deity in the sanctum. Only two rock-cut cave temples in Tamil Nadu possess Ganesa as presiding deity in the Sanctum, viz., Ganesa Ratha at Mamallapuram and Mangudi in Pudukkottai. However, Mangudi is the only rock cut cave temple of Tamil Nadu to possess rock-cut bas-relief Ganesa in the sanctum, even the Ganesa Ratha at Mamallapuram carry only installed sculpture in the sanctum. Among the ten rock-cut bas-relief Ganesas, the deities at Kundrandarkoil, Gokarneswara, Okkaliswara, Kudumiyamalai, Thevarmalai are huge in size, ranging between 1.90-2.00mts.

DETAILS OF POSTURE, ATTIRE, ORNAMENTS OF THE BAS-RELIEF GANESAS

Sl. No	Name of the Rock-cut Cave Temple	Seated posture	Makuta & Dress	Ornaments	Weapons in hands	Tusk	Proboscis
1	Mangudi	Maharajalilasana	Karandamakuta	Not clear	BRH-angusa BLH-pasa FRH-wornout (motaka) FLH-motaka	Left broken	Left turn and placed on FLH
2	Kundrandarkoil	Ardhapadmasana	Karandamakuta Half dress udarabandha Yajnopavita (R-L)	Charapali Bangles Armllets	BRH-flower BLH-broken tusk FRH-Big motaka FLH- resting on thigh holding udarabandha	Left broken BLH carry	Right turn motaka inside scroll
3	Okkaliswaram	Cross legs	Small makuta Yajnopavita and udarabandha absent.	Charapali Armllets	BRH-Mango BLH-broken tusk FRH-motaka FLH-tusk	Right broken BLH carry	Right turn motaka at tip
4	Thirugokarnam	Cross legs	Karandamakuta Vastra yajnopavita Silk dress Idaikattu	Charapali Bangles Armllets	BRH-sugarcane BLH-broken tusk FRH-motaka FLH-holding idaikattu	Right broken BLH carry	Left turn motaka on the tip
5	Thirumerrali	Maharajalilasana	Karandamakuta udarabandha Yajnopavita	Bangles Armllets Head	BRH-broken tusk BLH-flower	Right broken BRH	Right turn Motaka

			Half dress	ornament	bud FRH-motaka FLH-on the thigh	carry	at tip
6	Aalattuthali	Maharajalilasana	Karandamakuta udarabandha thick yajnopavita Silk dress	Charapali Bangles Armllets	BRH-broken tusk BLH- sugarcane FRH-motaka FLH-on the thigh	Right broken BRH carry	Right turn motaka on tip
7	Thevarmalai	Cross legs	Small makuta Udarabandha	Worn-out, bangles, armlets visible.	BRH- Nilotpala BLH- Sugarcane FRH-worn- out (seems holding udarabandha) FLH- udarabandha	Tusk absent on both sides	Right turn motaka on tip
8	Thirugokarnam	Lalitasana	Karandamakuta Yajnopavita- niveta Short dress	Charapali Bangles Armllets Udarabandha	BRH-broken tusk BLH- sugarcane FRH-motaka FLH-on the thigh	Right broken BRH carry	Left turned
9.	Poovalaikkudi	Cross legs	Worn-out	Worn-out	BRH-mango or motaka BLH-broken tusk FRH-motaka FLH- unidentified might be sugar cane	Right broken BLH carry	Right turned lifted up much as a circle inside motaka
10.	Kudumiyamalai	Maharajalilasana	Karandamakuta Head ornament Yajnopavita	Necklace Bangles Armllets Udarabandha	BRH-angusa BLH-pasa FRH-broken tusk FLH-palm leaf	Right broken FRH carry	Left turned

BRH-back righthand, **BLH**-back lefthand, **FRH**-back right hand, **FLH**-front left hand, **R**-right, **L**-left

Table : 2

The above Table illustrates that Ganesa is depicted only in seated posture throughout, though huge or small. The seated postures are cross legs,

ardhapadmasana, maharajalilasana, lalitasana. Ganesa at Okkaliswaram, Thirugokarnam, Thevarmalai, Pushpavaneswara are in cross legs; Kundrandarkoil is in ardhapadmasana; Aalatturthali, Mangudi, Thirumerrali, Kudumiyamalai are in Maharajalilasana and Ganesa at Thirugokarnam is seated in lalitasana.

The deity is adorned with either karandamakuta or small makuta as head dress. Ganesa at Okkaliswara and Thevarmalai are decked with small makuta whereas all the other Ganesas are adorned with karandamakuta. For the deity at Kundrandarkoil, the karandamakuta is further ornamented with lotus petals in each layer of the makuta. Relating to dress and ornaments, the deity is either adorned with silk dress or attire draping upto knee. Ganesa at Aalatturthali and Thirugokarnam are adorned with silk dress; Ganesa at Kundrandarkoil, Thirumerrali are adorned with a short attire extending upto knee. Mangudi, Okkaliswara and Thevarmalai are not clear.

Yajnopavita usually vastra type is worn in upavita fashion. Ganesa of Kundrandarkoil is wearing yajnopavita in praccinavita fashion, that is indifferently from right to left. It is quite interesting to see both the Ganesa and Siva at Kundrandarkoil rock-cut cave temple are wearing yajnopavita in praccinavita fashion. Yajnopavita is worn in niveta fashion by Ganesa of Thirugokarnam. Attire and ornaments of Ganesa at Mangudi are not clear. At Thevarmalai yajnopavita is absent whereas at Okkaliswara both yajnopavita and udarabandha are absent. Head patta, charapali, keyura, bangles and udarabanda are the ornaments adorned by Ganesa.

One of the noted aspects that carried out in the Ganesa iconography in connection with mythology is the absence of tusk at one side and carrying the same in one of his hand. Except Mangudi and Kundrandarkoil in all the Ganesas, the right tusk is broken whereas in the above said two of the places the left tusk is shown broken. But at Thevarmalai both the tusks are absent. Usually the broken tusk is carried in any one of the back hand; Kundrandarkoil, Okkaliswara, Thirugokarnam carry in the left hand whereas Thirumerrali, Aalatturthali carry in back right hand. Ganesa at Kudumiyamalai carry the tusk in one of the front hand.

Another noted aspect in the Ganesa iconography is the twist and turn given to the proboscis. The Table illustrates that majority is right turned. Except Mangudi and Thirugokarnam all the other Ganesas are shown with proboscis right turned which is known as Valamburi Ganesa and at some instance the trunk is carrying a motaka either on its tip or on the scrolled region of the trunk. The above said two Ganesas are left turned and at Mangudi the trunk is placed on the left hand that holds motaka. While the proboscis of Ganesa at Thirugokarnam and Kudumiyamalai are left turned, the one of Poovalaikkudi is right turned and much lifted up forming a ring and holding a motaka in it.



KUNDRANDARKOIL



OKKALISWARA



THEVARMALAI



GOKARNESWARA

The objects at the hands of Ganesas are the remarkable feature to discuss. Among the ten Ganesas, the prominently carried elements at the back hands are broken tusk, sugar cane, motaka, mango and flower particularly nilotpala. Except the Ganesas at Mangudi and Kudumiyanmalai all the other are carrying any two of the above said articles whereas at Mangudi and Kudumiyanmalai the back hands are carrying pasa and angusa. The front hands are shown either on the thigh or carrying motaka, broken tusk or at some instances holding the udarabandha or idaikattu. The motaka at Kundarandarkoil is prominently huge comparing the others. The Ganesa at Thevarmalai is holding udarabandha at both the hands. The Ganesa at Kudumiyanmalai is carrying palm leaves on the left hand.

The characteristic features of the Ganesa iconography in the district is that the deity is depicted only in seated posture and four hands through out in the rock-cut cave temples of the Pudukkottai district. Among the objects in hands, except two almost all the Ganesas carry in their back hands combination of any two of the following things viz., motaka, broken tusk, sugarcane, mango, flower. As like, the things shown in the front hands are motaka, broken tusk, rested on the thigh, holding the idaikattu or udarabandha. But two of the Ganesas viz., Kudumiyanmalai and Mangudi carry pasa and angusa in the back hands and the objects in the front hands for the former is palm leaf and motaka, whereas for the latter motaka is seen on one hand and the object in other hand is much worn out. On the basis of objects at hands the Ganesa of Kudumiyanmalai and Mangudi remain alienated among the ten rock-cut bas-relief Ganesas of the district, which can be taken as later period. Among the rock cut caves that carry Ganesa in the mandapa, Thirumerrali stand out of all in placement, size and the articles at the hands didn't match with the other examples of the district of same period, hence there might be possibility of the deity's addition in the later period.

CONCLUSION

Ganesa in rock-cut architecture is seen throughout Tamil land, but comparing the northern part of Tamil land the southern region possess more in number. Even though the Pallavas (Northern Tamil Land) incorporated Ganesa in one of their earlier cave i.e., Vallam, but among their forty-two excavations only four of their rock-cut cave temples carry Ganesa.¹ But the southern Tamil land the region south of river Cauvery possess Ganesa more in number. In the district Pudukkottai nearly at ten places Ganesa had been incorporated. To the south of Pudukkottai which is said to be the Pandya Country possesses Ganesa nearly at eighteen places; seen either within the rock-cut cave or within the vicinity of rock-cut cave.² In their forty-one excavations nearly eighteen rock-cut cave temples possess Ganesa. Pillaiyarpatti of Sivaganga district is one of the earliest cave of the Southern Tamil land incorporated huge Ganesa in the mandapa.

Not only the number but also the placement of the deity reveals the significance given to the cult in the region. Accommodating Ganesa within the rock-cut cave temple and in a prominent place and size exhibits the significance given to the cult in the region. In the Pandya land, among their forty-one rock-cut excavations

only four of the rock-cut cave temples have accommodated Ganesa within the structure i.e., mandapa. Pillaiyarpatti, Muvaraivendran, Sevalpatti, Thirumalaipuram are the four places and among these the latter three alone come under the core region of the Pandyas. Whereas in Pudukkottai region more number of Ganesas had been incorporated within the rock cut structure. Besides, in three rock-cut cave temples Ganesa in huge form are predominantly placed equal to the prime deity Lord Siva³ which undoubtedly exhibits the significance of Ganesa worship in the region. In proportionate to the territorial extension, the number of caves and the number of caves that carry Ganesa is far more numerous in Pudukkottai region by Muttaraiyas than the other contemporary dynasties.⁴

END NOTES :

1. On the facade extension wall at Vallam I cave, on the slope of the hillock at Vallam II cave, mandapa back wall at Thiruchirappalli Lower rock cut cave and in the sanctum at Vadajambunathar cave at Thiruvellarai.
2. Pillaiyarpatti, Arittapatti, Kundrattur I and III Caves, Thenparankundram, Vadaparankundram, Kundrakudi between I and II cave, Kundrakudi III cave, Thirukolakkudi, Aralipatti, Thirumalai, Muvaraivendran, Sevalpatti, Virasigamani, Thirumalaipuram, Aandichiparai, Kurathiyarai, Mahibalanpatti.
3. Kundrandarkoil, Malaiyakkoil, Thirugokarnam.
4. Among the forty two caves of the Pallavas only four carry Ganesa and in this only two carry within the structure. As like, among the forty one caves of the Pandyas eighteen carry Ganesa and in this only three are within the structure that lie in their core area Madurai to Thirunelveli.

REFERENCES

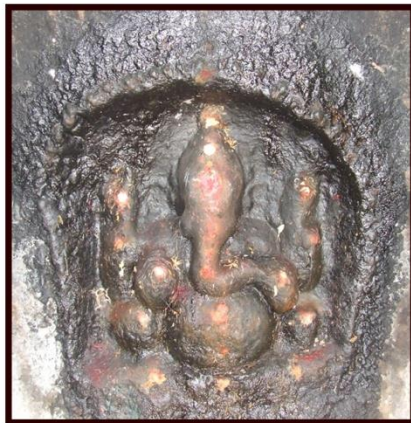
1. Lockwood Michael, with Vishnu Bhat A., Siromoney Gift, Dayanandan P., '*Pallava Art*', '*Pallava Dvarapalas and the Mahishamardini Cave-Temples*'. Tambaram Research Associates, MCC, Tambaram, Madras. 2001. p.8.
2. Nalini, M., Kalaikkovan R., '*Pudukkottai Mavatta Kudaivaraigal*' Dr. M.Rasamanikkanar Centre for Historical Research, Thiruchirappalli-18.
3. Nalini, M., Kalaikkovan R., '*Madurai Mavatta Kudaivaraigal*' Dr. M.Rasamanikkanar Centre for Historical Research, Thiruchirappalli-18.
4. Nalini, M., Kalaikkovan R., '*Thentamil Nattu Kudaivaraigal*' Dr. M.Rasamanikkanar Centre for Historical Research, Thiruchirappalli-18.
5. Soundara Rajan K.V., '*Rock-cut Temple Styles Early Pandyan Art and The Ellora Shrines*', Somaiya Publications Pvt. Ltd., Mumbai. 1998.
6. Srinivasan K.R., '*Cave-Temples of the Pallavas*' date as given by the author. p.9-13.



POOVALAIKUDI



THIRUGOKARNAM



MANGUDI



AALATTURTHALI



KUDUMIYANMALAI



THIRUMERRALI