

ROCK CUT CAVE TEMPLES OF ANAIMALAI AND TIRUPPARANKUNDRAM: AN ARTISTIC ANALYSIS

C. Pandeewaran*

Abstract

This research paper seeks to explain about the artistic analysis of rock cut cave temples of Anaimalai and Tirupparankundram through the primary sources such as South Indian Inscription Vol. XIV, Madurai Mavatta Kalvettukkal Vol. I, Avanam and other secondary sources. This paper covers from the earliest settlement of Jainism in Anaimalai and Tirupparankundram to 10th century C.E. In these periods the Kings officials made grants and gifts to the Vedic and Non – Vedic religious monuments for construction, renovation and maintenance in the respective places. We came to know that the Pandyas and officials patronized both religions equally up to middle of the 7th century C.E. The Saivism and Vishnavism started to reach its zenith after the decline of the Jainism.

Keywords: rock cut cave, Anaimalai and Tirupparankundram, art, architecture.

* **Ph.D., Research Scholar, Department of Medieval History, School of Historical Studies, Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai**

Introduction

By overthrowing the Kalabhras in the Southern region of ancient Tamil Country, the first early Pandya king Kadungon established his power around 550 C.E. with Madurai as traditional their capital. The early Pandyas along with their contemporaries like Pallavas of Kanchi and the early Western Chalukyas of Badami made a crucial role in the political scenario of the early medieval South India. The continuous wars and the close interaction between these dynasties paved way for acculturation among these regions. Accordingly, such kind of art, architecture and sculptural forms spread easily from one region to another region. In this way the early Pandyas were imitated by the rock – cut architectural tradition of the Pallavas and Chalukyas and started similar attempts in their region.

The early Pandyas excavated more than 60 rock – cut cave temples at various places in their region. The epigraphical evidences such as Tamil Brahmi inscriptions of Sangam period and Vatteluttu inscriptions of the early Pandyas period are portrayed in the rock – cut caves at Malaiyadikkurichi, Tirupparankundram, Anaimalai, Arittapatti, Kalugumalai, Keelavalvu etc. These are clearly attested the fact that both Vedic and Non – Vedic religions existed in their region. The Non – Vedic religion like Jainism became to decline in the middle of the 7th century C.E. and paved the way for the zenith of Brahmanical rock – cut temples at the end of the 8th century C.E.

Though the rock – cut temples of the early Pandyas had an impact of the art traditions of the Pallavas and early Western Chalukyas, the early Pandyas displayed their certain native elements in the lay – out, architectural embellishments and sculptural forms.¹

Hence, in this paper an attempt is made to analyse the architectural and sculptural characteristics of rock – cut cave temples between Anaimalai and Tirupparankundram.

Anaimalai

Anaimalai is a village in the Madurai – north taluk of Madurai district which is located about 14 km. northeast of Madurai. The hill looks like a seated elephant (*anai*), and it is called as Anaimalai. Tiruvilaiyadal Purana states about the Anaimalai.²

On the slopes of this hill, there is a natural rock shelter. The façade of this shelter is measuring a height of 2.3 m. where a sculptural panel is found a length of 5.5 m. and the height of the *Tirtankara* image is 1 m. Totally eight sculptures are found facing west. Some of these sculptures are such as Parswanatha and Bahubali in *kayotsarga* posture alike, Mahavira in *ardhapadmasana* posture, Yakshi Ambika in *sukhasana*. There are eight Vatteluttu inscriptions belong to 9th century C.E. are found at the bottom of the sculptural images.³

The eight Vatteluthu inscriptions of Maransadaiyan alias Varaguna I belong to 9th – 10th century C.E. is found below the *Tirthankara* sculpture. The first one states that *Anathi nati* a person who made Jaina sculpture and donated to *Kalavali nattu aniyar*. The second one mention about the Jaina sculptures were under the protection of *Dhinai kalathar*. The third one describes about the support of the *Porkottuk karanathar*. The fourth inscription gives information about Attchanandi's donation and the protection of *Narasinga mangalathu sabhayar*. The fifth inscription states *Iyakkar* sculpture is donated by Cheliya Pandi. Sixth inscription informs about the gift of *Venbunattu Ambiraiyana Satan*. Seventh script states about Valathirukkai nattu Senthavan's donation and the eighth inscription gives note on the donation of Aviampoothi and protection of sculpture by *Puravuvarithinaikalathar*.⁴

On the same rock, another *Tirtankara*, identified as Mahavira is found facing north. In this specimen, Mahavira in *ardhapadmasana* with three umbrellas over his head is sculptured. It is covered by lime plastering, over which traces of painting fragments are represented. A little away from this *Tirtankara* image, a rock cut, locally known as Ladenkoil is found.

Subrahmaniya Rock Cut Cave Temple (Ladankoil)

The Subrahmaniya cave temple is locally known as Ladankoyil which is excavated on the western face of the Anaimalai. It is located 60m. south west of Narasimha cave temple. The Ladankoyil is scooped out on the southern section of the hill where the hill scraps down as an almost uniform mass without being obscured by loose boulders. The Ladankoyil rock cut cave is excavated practically at the foot of the hill.

The Lodankoyil consists of west facing *garbhagriha* and an *ardhamantapa*. The rock cut ceiling height is 2.15mt. The whole *grabhagriha* is scooped out with an important *adhithana* which

height is 1.5 mt., with *upana*, *kumudam*, *kandam* and *pattika*. Above these *adhistana* there are two pilasters found on the either side of the entrance to the *garbhagriha*. Those pilasters are square in shape. *Ganas* are chiseled out on the capitals of the pilasters. Besides, on the either side of the entrance to *garbhagriha*, cock and peacock are represented respectively on the right and left side.

On the rear wall of the *garbhagriha*, Lord Muruga and his consort Valli sculptures on the basal rock is found. The height of the images of Lord Muruga is 1.2mt. Both Muruga and his consort are having two hands. Muruga holds an unidentifiable object in his right hand, while the left hand rests on the thigh. The Muruga sculpture is decorated with *channavirapatrakundala* and *karandamakuta*. His consort is seated in *sukhasana* with two hands. Her right hand holds a flower bud, while the left hand rests on the thigh. A channel was made in the *garbhagriha* to drain out the *abhiseka* water through the entrance of the *garbhagriha*. The *garbhagriha* is flanked by two Dwarapalaka images. Infront of the *garbhagriha*, there is a rectangular *ardhamantapa* measures 4.14mt x 1.3mt. On the southern and northern wall of the *ardhamantapa* very near to the Dwarapalakas, a seated devotee and animal are represented. There two pillars and two pilasters are at the entrance of the *ardhamantapa*. The shafts of the pillars are square or *saduram* at the top and bottom, while octagonal in the middle part of the pillars. Floral medallions are found on the square portion of the pillar. The capitals of the pillars are decorated with *trangapothika* a typical Pallava feature. The whole rock cut complex was excavated at a height of 1.50mt from the base, which could be considered as *upapidam*. Consequently, flights of steps on the northern and southern side of the rock cut are found. A *makara* motif is on the both side of the steps. A seated Lakulisa with two hands faces west carved with in a *kudu*, surmounted by well developed *kapota*, measures .7mt x .5mt infront of the rock cut on the *upapidam*. His right hand holds *danda*, while the left hand is in *kadihastha*. The *jatabhara udarabanda* and *patra kundala* could be noticed on the figure.

Dwarapalaka (Rishi on the North)

A Rishi as a Dwarapalaka is depicted on the northern side of the entrance of the *garbhagriha* with in a rectangular niche which measures 1.69mt x .80mt. He is represented in the standing posture with two hands. His right hand holds a bunch of flowers while the left hand is in

kadihasta. He wears a loin cloth for covering his genital organ and devoid of any upper or lower garments. *Jatabhara* is found beautifully. The face is highly worn out. *yajnopavitha* could not be identified on the figure. Except *hara* no other ornaments are found on the figure.

Dwarapalaka (Rishi on the South)

Another Rishi or a Dwarapalaka is found on the South devakoshta to the entrance to the *garbhagriha*, which measures 1.67mtx.80mt. He is standing in *ardha vaidasthiga stanagam* posture with two hands. His head is slightly tilted towards the entrance. His right hand holds a flower bud, while the left hand is in *kadihasta*. His lower garment is shown with horizontal wavy lines. He has a *jatabhara* with a long beard. There is a thick band of *yajnopavita* around his left shoulder.⁵

Narasimaha Cave Temple

Little away from the Ladonkoyil on the western slopes of the same Anaimalai hill, there is another small rock cut cave dedicated to Ugra Narasimaha. This rock cut contains of a west facing *garbhagriha* and an *ardhamantapa*. The *garbhagriha* is square in plan which measures 2mt x 2mt. The height of the *garbhagriha* is 3mt. Ugra Narasimaha is depicted on side rear wall of the *garbhagriha*. There is an *ardhamantapa* in front of the *garbhagriha* which measures 5.29mt x 2.15mt. There are four pillars at the entrance of *ardhamantapa*. The shafts of the pillars are square with octagonal middle portion. There is no floral medallion found on the *sadurams* of the pillars. The pillars are surmounted by cut corbels. Dwarapalakas are not found in this rock cut cave. Façade of the rock cut has a *kapota* like extension upto 2.5mt. which prevents the rain water.⁶

Ugra Narasimaha is the only sculpture found in the *garbhagriha* as presiding deity at this rock cut cave. The height of this Ugra Narasimaha sculpture is 2mt. He is in *yogasana* with four hands. A *yoga patta* is found around the knee. His upper hands hold *sankha* and *chakra*. The lower hands are in *dandahasta* and rest on the knees. He is represented as *simhamukha*, which is ferocious with canine teeth. There is no *kritamakuta* on his head, however, the hair of lion is shown beautifully around the head. He is represented with *yajnopavita*, *hara*, *keyura* and *kadaga*.

On the eastern wall of the *ardhamantapa*, either side of the *garbhagriha* two inscriptions are found dated to Maransadaiyan (Varaguna I) the ruler of the early Pandya. One of the inscriptions of Maransadaiyan dated to 770 C.E. states that the rock cut was excavated by one *Madurakavi*, the son of Mara of the Vaidya family and was consecrated in kali year 3871, which can be equated with 770 C.E.

Thus, from the above record available on the wall of the edifice, it could be explained that the Narasimaha rock cut was excavated during the period of Maransadaiyan in the 8th century C.E. by Marangari who took the title *Madurakavi* and consecrated it in 770 C.E. According to epigraphical record Marangari excavated but he died before consecrating. Hence his brother Maran Eyinan who was also the prime minister of Varaguna I performed consecration.⁷

Thiruparankundram

Tirupparankundram, a notable centre of pilgrimage in Tamil Nadu and also considered as one of the six *pataivitus* (sacred abode) hallowed to Muruga. It is situated in the South of. From early times the Tirupparankundram hill has been regarded as a holy place by the Hindu as well as by the people of other sects. The Muslims also considered the hill as sacred and they call the hill as *sikandarmalai*. The antiquity of Tirupparankundram dated back to the pre – Common Era. The natural caves with series of rock cut beds for the Jaina monks, who occupied these caverns in the pre and post Christian eras, are found on the western face of the huge hill almost at the mid – height of the hill. The Brahmi inscriptions engraved there attest this fact. There are four Tamil Brahmi inscriptions of 1st century BCE to 1st century CE inscribed on the front side or head of the stone beds and also on the lodge above the row of stone beds. They read as

Thirupparankundram is mentioned in glorious terms in various *Sangam* literary works namely *Akananuru*, *Kalittokai*, *Maturaikkanci*, *Paripatal* and *Tirumukuruppatai*. This place is referred to in the *Sangam* literatures as “*Parankunru*”. In addition to the *Sangam* works, this place is also mentioned in *Tevaram*, *Kallatam*, *Periyapuram*, *Tiruppukal*, *Kantapuram* and many other later works. The *Talappuranam* of this place is known as *tirupparangirippuranam*. There are two cave temples excavated on the northern and southern faces of the huge hill, which is the prominent land mark of this town.⁸

Muruga (cave No. 1)

The rock cut consists of two cells are facing each other on east and west, which is connected by a *mantapa* facing in the centre. The *mantapa* had huge pillars with *tarangapotika*. There are three *niches* facing the entrance on the rear wall of the *mantapa*, which are occupied by Durga in the centre, Muruga to her right *niche* and Ganesa to her left *niche*. Lateral cells on the either side of the panel are occupied by Siva (on the west facing east) and Vishnu (on the east facing west). In the panel of the Muruga, he has four hands and his consort is seated to his left and a Rishi image on his right. In front, a group of sculptures such as peacock, elephant, two *ganas*, a ram and another *gana* and cock banner are found.

The exterior side wall of the cell containing Sivalinga portray and two panels depicting the dance of Siva. These panels are separated by pilasters. In a panel Siva is shown in *chatura thandava*, while in another Parvati with *nandi*, *sivaganas* and other *devatas* dance is depicted. Siva is shown dancing on *apasmara*. Siva has four hands, the upper hands are holding *jwala*, and bull staff, while the lower right hand is in *ahuyavarada hastha* and lower left is in *gajahastha*. His *jatamakuta* is elaborately decorated. Heavy ear ornaments, *haras*, armlets, *yajnopavita* and *kadisutra* are carved out in early style. It is worth to note that there is a central decoration apart from the loop on the waist. Anklets on his feet suggest the *nupurasinjita* resounding anklets in dance.

In the next panel, Parvati is witnessing the dance. Her right hand rests on the *gana*, while the left hand is holding a lily flower. She is adorned with some ornaments such as *makuta*, *neckalace*, *yajnopavita*, *katisutra*, *mekala* etc., The iconographical features of Durga are quite similar to the Durga found in the Varaha cave at Mahabalipuram. A bull stands behind her. The *ganas* are represented as peeping from other side. Their hands are clasped in adoration. A drummer is playing the *urdhvak* drum depicted below her. By the side of the drummer, a *gana* is playing flute. On the top, there are three *devatas* found witnessing the dance of the lord. Here a four faced Brahma is depicted at first time. Next to Brahma, Vishnu holding *sankha* and *chakra* and Indra are sculptured.⁹

In this rock cut, there are two inscriptions in Vatteluttu dated in the 6th regnal year of Varaguana I (773 CE). One inscription records that a Sattan Ganapathi from Karavandapura belong to *Vaidya* community excavated this shrine for Durgadevi and Jyestadevi.

Another inscription of Varaguana I in 773 mentions that the shrine for Siva erected by Ganapati.¹⁵ The worship of Jyesta was given up after 8th - 9th century CE. The images of Jyesta were either disfigured or thrown out from the temple because of new cult tradition came to being i.e., Sridevi.¹⁰

Thentirupparnkundram

Umaiandar rock cave is excavated on the southern slopes of the Tiruparankudram hill. This cave was actually excavated during the period of the early Pandya and dedicated to Jainism. It is facing square *garbhagriha*, with an *ardhamantapa*, scaling 6.15mt x 2.35mt. There are two pillars and two pilasters at the entrance of *ardhamantapa*. They are square shaft with corbels. The floral medallions are on the *sadum* of pillars. While the hewn - out of the rock cut the image of *Tirtankara* was existed in the *garbhagriha*, which was subsequently removed by chipping out the image of the *Tirthankara* and chiseled out an image of Ardhanariswara in the cave. Even today one can see the rear wall of the *garbhagriha* where the creeper designs of the *Tirtankara* is found. There is no epigraphical evidence of early Pandya period in that cave. On the basis of field study the rock cut originally dedicated to Jainism during the period of Arikesari Maravarman, as he was a follower of *Jina*.

The conversion of the rock cut from Jainism to Brahminical religion seemed to have happened during the later Pandya period. The *ardhamantapa* of rock cut was further enlarged towards the northeast. In the process, two pillars and two pilasters were created in the middle on the rear wall of the extended portion of the *ardhamantapa*. On the façade of the rock cut Bhairava, Ganesa, Saiva saints like Appar, Sambandar, Sunsarar and Manikkavasagar and Rishi sculptured to proclaim that the rock cut is dedicated to saivism. These rock cut indicate that it was a conversion from Jainism to Saivism during the later Pandya period.¹¹

The present study reveals that the admixture of artistic features of Vedic and non – Vedic religious monuments at Anaimalai and Tirupparankundram.

Jainism was well flourished during 2nd, and 1st century BCE. The five Tamil Brahmi inscriptions and beds are represented both Anaimalai and Tirupparankundram. One Tamil Brahmi inscription belongs to 2nd century CE in Anaimalai¹² and rest of the inscriptions belong to 1st BCE¹³ and 1st CE¹⁴ in Tirupparankundram.

During the early Pandya period c. 9th – 10th century CE the next stage of the development of the Jainism took place at Anaimlai and Tirupparankundram.

In Anaimlai the Muruga and his consort sculptured in the *garbhagriha* but in Thirupparankundram not like that but there are three panel of *niches* facing the entrance on the rare wall of the *mantapa*, which are occupied by Durga in the centre *niche*, Muruga with his consort and Rishi to the right niche and Ganesa is found in the left side *niche* of the Durga, which shows that there is not separate *garbhagriha* for Muruga.

Some group of sculptures are found in the Thirupparankundram such as peacock, elephant, *ganas*, ram and cock banner but the similar sculptures are not found in Anaimalai except peacock.

The image of Muruga is decorated with *channa virapatrakundala* and *karandamakuta*. His consort is seated with holding of flower bud in her right hand is also depicted in the rock cut cave. There is channel was made to drain out the *abhiseka* water. But there are no more decorations on the image of Muruga like Anaimalai.

In Thirupparankundram, Suriya and Chandra are flying above the Muruga in the right *niche*. And the whole family sculpture of Siva such as Parvati, Muruga and Ganesa are found at first in the southern most part of Tamil Nadu. These varieties are not appeared in Anaimalai.

There are two Dwarapalakas are found in the north and south rectangular *niches* to the *garbhagriha*, the *niches* measure 1.67mt x.80mt. Both Dwarapalakas stand with two hands, the right hand holds flower but the left hand is in *kadihasta*. The *yajnopavita*, *hara* are not found on the Dwarapalaka in the north *niche*, while the *yajnopavita* is on the shoulder of the Dwarapalaka in the south *niche*. Dwarapalakas are not found in Tirupparankundram.

The flight of steps on the north and south side of the rock cut are found with *makara* motif in the Anaimalai Ladan temple. The similar things are not found in the Tirupparankundram.

A seated Lakulisa sculpture with two hands, his right hand holds *danda* and left hand is in *kadihasta* facing west in the *kudu* is represented in the Ladan temple. He is decorated with *jatabhara udarabanda* and *patra kundala*. There is no same sculpture found in Tirupparankundram cave.

Ugra Narasimha sculpture with *yajnopavitha*, *hara*, *keyura* and *kadaga* is only found in the *garbhagriha*. There is no a separate shrine for Visnu in Tirupparankundram but the image of Visnu is chiseled out in the east facing lateral cell. The similar decoration on the image of the Visnu is not seen in Tirupparankundram rock cut cave.

Therefore, during the early Pandya period the Pandyas were patronized equally both Vedic and Non – Vedic religions at Anaimalai and Tirupparankundram. A number of inscriptions such as Tamil Brahmi inscriptions, beds, Vatteluttu, images of *Titanakaras*, excavation of Siva temples (Ladankoyil and Vaishnava temple Ugra Narasimha) reveal this fact. Though the rock cut caves were dedicated to Siva and Vishnava in Anaimalai and Tiruapparankundaram during the same period of Maransadaiyan alias Varaguna I, the artistic features of these caves. In Anaimalai there is no cannot see any chipping out of Jain monuments like Tirupparankundram, which shows that there is no any impact of Sivism within the Jain cave in Anaimalai.

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