

Tigers In The Tamil Culture: With Special Reference To Rock Arts Of Tamilnadu

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Abstract: This paper aims to understand the evolution of tiger in the culture of Tamils by critically analyzing various rock arts of Tamil Nadu in one hand. On the other hand, tries to critically answer the question that why tiger been given importance during the early stone age than other wild animals by Tamils.

I. INTRODUCTION

Early man who lived in the caves expressed his feelings by the way of drawing paintings or lines on the rocks. Amongst, portraits of animals were given importance. Drawings of animals were classified as Mantra, Rituals and hunting scenes which had been noticed in many rocks scattered across Tamil Nadu. Paintings such as hunting of a solitary man as well as group of men carved on the rocks been noticed at Mallapadi, Chethavarai, Chenna Rayana Palli, Vettaikaran Malai, Konavakkarai, Mallasamuthiram, Siramalai, Opathavaadi, Kuravinarayanapalli and Oramanakunda. (Picture -1)

Incidents relating to rituals which portrayed early man dancing with head of animal, nose and long hair/tress were also been found on the rocks. Portraits relating to dances were found always accompanied with hunting rituals on the rocks. The dances of the ancient people were always centered on animals. They had the belief to worship the animals which assisted them in the process of hunting that would empower their hunting skills. Hence, the ancient Tamils, during dances exhibited the animal's gait, gestures and movements which were informative through rocks.



Picture 1: Animals face for hunting man

II. ANIMAL RITUAL & SYMBOLS

Many numbers of symbols on the rocks were drawn for the purpose of rituals alone. Rituals were performed praying

for agility and safety, prior to venturing for hunting. For instance, the Chola Kings had bow & arrow, the Pandya Kings had tiger and the Chera Kings had fish respectively as their symbols. Similarly, the ancient people had the portrayal of different animal symbols representing their Clans. They had the ritual of keeping those animal symbols in their homes as well as praying centers for worshipping. Those symbols which represent their clans were found noticed at Thiramalai, Mallasamuthiram, Kutralapadai, Pothigaimalai, Perumukkal, Thalapatti, Thiramalpadi and Attakudal in Tamil Nadu. The tribal at the Pothigai Hills called “Kaanikaran” maintain their clan’s symbol and the practice of worshipping it even till today.

Further, for instances, Symbols of Indus Valley Civilization had been found at many rocks in Tamil Nadu, particularly in and around Dharmapuri District. It serves as a testimony to the growth of symbols and language in particular period.

III. PICTURES DEPICTING TIGER ON ROCKS

In ancient Tamil Nadu, Forest occupied vast areas rather than people occupied. Hence, people led their lives in a scattered manner, small in numbers as group. In those days, death of a hunter had resulted in a tremendous impact and grief among the people.

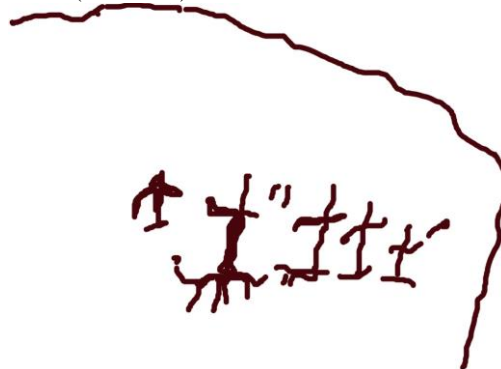
In those days, warriors died in the battle. In this context, it did not mean that the battle took place between two countries. On the contrary, it meant that the battle took place between a hunter and an untamed wild animals, both belong to the same forest, because during historical period alone establishment of Government and Country set up was formulated. It is important to note that there was no setup prior to that. Hence, in this context, the warriors braved their death due to attack by wild animals like tiger rather than facing battles, which were found in the arts portrayed on the rocks of Tamil Nadu.

Many Hero Stones were found in Dharmapuri District which depicted the brave fight with tiger. Many stone sculptures were found at Pandavar Panda even till today portraying memoirs of brave warriors. The word “Pandavar Panda” belongs to Telugu language. In Tamil Panda means “rock”. Mr. Mathivanan, the archaeologist of the Indus Valley claimed that the above place was supposed to be called as “Mandavar Parai”, because the word “Mandavar” in course of bygone years had been pronounced as “Pandavar”. Hence, during Stone Age onwards, the hunter who had braved death was buried in a grave yard with Hero Stone, and in course of time the village assumed the same name.

The portraits of sculptures at Mandavar Parai depicted that the hunter who killed the wild tiger, which intruded into the village and scared the people, was honoured by keeping him on a dead tiger above a chariot. A procession was also taken in which floral garlands and prizes were offered to the hunter. This was practiced as a culture by ancient Tamils. Hence, the hunter who killed the tiger was honoured by way of arranging a festival called “Puli Mangalam”. This festival is in practice even till today at “Kudagu Nadu”.

The stone sculptures at Pandavar Panda Puli Mangala depicted the memoirs of hunters who killed tigers. The

hunter’s sculptures were drawn in queue in standing postures at there. Out of which, four hunter’s shapes alone were very obvious. Others were found in the dilapidated condition on the rocks. (Picture-2)



Picture 2: Hunter’s drawn in queue in standing postures

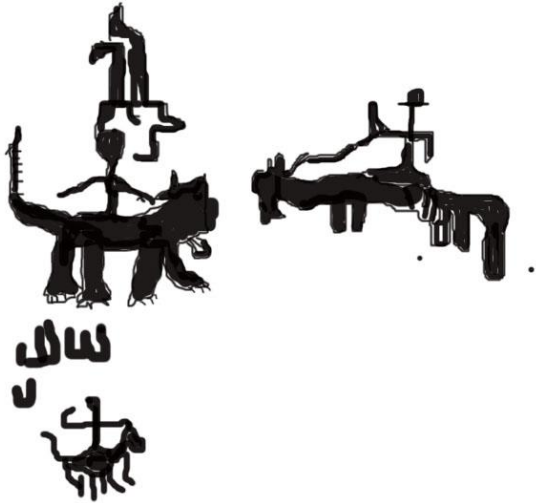
The carnival of taking “Pulimangalam” was also found in the pictures of stone sculpture for a hunter at Pandavar Panda. In this sculpture, the drawings denoting dance particularly groups dancing behind the hunter, who was on the dead tiger was found noticed. The drawings of “Pulimangalam” were found in good condition at Mallasamuthiram rock painting. In this drawing, the tiger was found in standing posture with its tail atop. On the right side of the tiger, the hunter was found in standing posture with victorious mark on his head. Below to that picture, the hunter was found in possession of sword and shield in his hands. The man who stood at the center of the big tiger was found with rope tied around the neck of the tiger in pulling position. The three tridents at the center of the picture depicted it as weapons of three hunters. Hundreds of stone sculptures were found as memoirs to hunters at Sumalum, Mallasamuthiram and Nedumparaimedu. In the inner wall of one of the stone sculptures depicted a hunter who was taken in a procession in “Pulimangalam” carnival. The hunter on this drawing was found lifting sword and shield on his hands. During that procession, one person who was on the front was found playing trumpet. This drawing of trumpet playing, justified that it is a procession scene. (Picture-3)



Picture 3: Trumpet playing, justified that it is a procession scene

Similarly, the drawing of taking “Pulimangalam” carnival for a hunter who killed a tiger was also found noticed in a rock at Boothikutai hamlet near Maharasakadai village. The drawings also depicted two hunters atop the tiger on the left side of it, besides found in garlanding position. The same drawings were noted on the right side of the tiger also. In this picture, the wearing of garland on the chest of the hunter was

very obvious. On the bottom of the same picture depicted hunters wearing sword on their waist who were found commending the act of the main hunter. The rocks at Chennarayanapalli near Gudiyatham depicted the drawings pertaining to a hunter who was found standing on a tiger, during the course of fighting. This picture also depicted an illuminating light circle around the head of a hunter. (Picture-4)



Picture 4: Two hunters atop the tiger

IV. TIGER – ITS RELATED CULTURE

The drawings on the rock depicted the relationship between tiger and man during ancient Tamilagam. These drawings also portrayed the threat posed by tigers to men and more number of their killings at Sumalum and Mountains of Dharmapuri Divisions.

Even after the formation of village and colonies, a warrior stood as a protector to it, who even sacrificed his life for the safety and welfare of the village. The Hero Stone was laid for a warrior who sacrificed his life and his picture was also drawn on the stone, which was worshipped by the villagers. The worship of Madurai Veeran, Iyyanar and other deities even today in villages are a fall out of this tradition alone. This was seen in the drawing on the rocks which stated that they lived in our villages and protected it. To prevent the attack by tiger and to safe guard the people, ancient Tamils started worshipping tiger. Some of the clans made tiger as their symbols and avoided hunting it. The nail men made it as a practice to disguise them as animals as well as worshipping also with the belief that then only they would get animal's prowess.

Therefore, just to get tigers' valor, the art of tiger dancing by disguising themselves as tiger is in practice till today in temple festivals in Tamil Nadu. Hence, the drawings on rock ascertained that the tiger dance dated back to bygone years and its historical continuation of practice is in vogue. Traditionally, cruelty to tigers and hunting of tigers were totally avoided by Tamils. Ancient man had avoided hunting of tiger, killed it only on the occasion of sudden encounter, only as self-defense. Moreover, they buried the tiger in their

neighborhood itself with the intention that it would protect as well as be beneficial to them.

Man who killed the tiger started wearing tigers' skin as his dress with the belief that it would give prowess to him. He preserved its head with the belief that it would also give power. He wore the tooth of it with the belief that it would protect him from haunted demon, devil and other bad evils. Its nail was also used to gore the things as well as wooden bark. The hair of the tiger is being used for rituals even till today by tribal.

Even after Colonization and Globalization; the Tribal, Narikuravas and Kattu Nayakars till today maintain their antique tradition of using organs of tigers in their worship, dressing and rituals which should be recorded at this juncture. The masculine symbols were found in the drawings of tiger in the rocks of Tamilnadu and the writings on the Indus Valley too. A question arises in this context, whether a tradition was in vogue that animals had been classified into two divisions meant for the purpose of hunting exclusively by men and women alone

V. CONCLUSION

Tamil literary works belonging to Sangam period explained that a brave woman used a winnow to chase a tiger. But, why it was not reflected in any of the drawings on the rocks? Or whether it is not known to human eyes so far? In modern days only males of tribal community and Narikuravas were found using tiger's teeth and hairs on their chest and wrist. On the contrary, we found the ladies belong to the above communities wear Pearl, bead, Coral and other stone embedded different colour ornaments. On examination of above facts, it is assumed that man was compared on par with tiger symbol. Tiger was being used by men for his welfare as well as to protect them from other animals.



Hence, it is obvious that we found through rock drawings that the ancient Tamils possessed discriminatory knowledge about each and every animal, about its characteristics behaviour, usage and worship. Consequently, we can also presume that the tigers symbolize the valor and prowess of ancient Tamils, besides represented as clans' symbol for a long tradition.

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