



## REVIEW ARTICLE

### ROCK ART PAINTINGS IN VILLUPURAM DISTRICT – A STUDY

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#### ABSTRACT

Villupuram district of Tamilnadu in India is rich and plenty of rock and paintings. The pioneering task was traced out by K.V.Raman, R.Pandidurai and K.T. Gandhi and has also done concrete work by documentation and photography. The present study has covered some sites where rock out painting found in Villupuram district. The symbol at Kilvalai are similar to those of Indus valley seals but these are chromatically post – dated to Indus Valley as it has horse symbols which are absent in Indeus valley civilization. It is preserved that there was a connection between Indus Vally and Tamil region and influence of the Socio-Cultural trends. These painting might be dated to 1000BC to 500BC or beginning of the Megalithic period, the paintings found at Sethavarai, Alampadi and Padiyanthal might have belonged to 1000BC to 500BC, Neolithic and 1000 BC to 500 BC respectively. It is also indicating that techno-social and cultural development was possible as it has X-Ray paintings which are shown inner part of the animals. According to material evidences, the painting at Kollur can be late Neolithic 1300 BC to 1200 BC and as drawings at Sikkadu is related to Tamil Brahmi Script, it may be related to the period of 500BC to 300BC. The paints of Kulamthakka might be dated from 1000 to BC and the painting at Somasamudhram might have belonged to late Neolithic and early megalithic period. A drawing of big sized domesticated animal figure depicted at Somasamudhram where domestic animal was in maximum level might have been possible in this region. Thengunam paintings and Konaiputhur paintings might have belonged to pre-historic age at Devathanapettai hill, there are numerous Dolmens have been found with white colour rock art painting. A human tattoos seems to be worshipping the god by two hands, the paintings at Devathanapettai reflects the religious activities of the human beings. The Rock paintings were also a kind of media to convey the messages to others during the pre and proto historic period. Nowadays it is also sources to study about the socio-economic and religious conditions of the human past.

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## INTRODUCTION

Rock art is a branch of Archaeology for recording human notion to make information with authentic city and reliability. It is manmade markings made on the natural stones. It is also categorized three major division based on its nature of carving such as petro-glyphs, pictograph and pictoform, petro-glyph is a kind of carving into the rock, pictograph is also carving on the rock surface and petro form is designing or pattern or pin sculpture made by aligning or piling. There are many worldwide forces on rock in Asia, Europe, Australia and Africa. Types of rock art is rock art is varied not only from its nature but also based on Vandalism which means an action involving deliberating destruction of or damage to public or private property and graffiti which is writing or drawing that have been scribed scatted or painting illicitly on a wall or other surface of an within public view. The rock paintings are the

visual and permanent and visually expression could have been binding together methodological landscapes, physical, landscape, and political landscap, and there oral unwritten and collective, tradition. The style of rock painting could have carved message that was strictly political and the purpose was to inform passerby and trespassers. Villupuram district of Tamilnadu in India is rich and plenty of rock and paintings. The pioneering task was traced out by K.V.Raman, R.Pandidurai and K.T. Gandhi and has also done concrete work by documentation and photography. The present study has covered some sites where rock out painting found in Villupuram district. The symbol at Kilvalai are similar to those of Indus valley seals but these are chromatically post – dated to Indus Valley as it has horse symbols which are absent in Indeus valley civilization. It is preserved that there was a connection between Indus Vally and Tamil region and influence of the Socio-Cultural trends. These painting might be dated to 1000BC to 500BC or beginning of the Megalithic period, the paintings found at Sethavarai, Alampadi and

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Padiyanthal might have belonged to 1000BC to 500BC, Neolithic and 1000 BC to 500 BC respectively. It is also indicating that techno-social and cultural development was possible as it has X-Ray paintings which are shown inner part of the animals. According to material evidences, the painting at Kollur can be late Neolithic 1300 BC to 1200 BC and as drawings at Sikkadu is related to Tamil Brahmi Script, it may be related to the period of 500BC to 300BC. The paints of Kulamthakka might be dated from 1000 to BC and the painting at Somasamudhram might have belonged to late Neolithic and early megalithic period. A drawing of big sized domesticated animal figure depicted at Somasamudhram where domestic animal was in maximum level might have been possible in this region. Thengunam paintings and Konaiputhur paintings might have belonged to pre-historic age at Devathanapettai hill, there are numerous Dolmens have been found with white colour rock art painting. A human tattoos seems to be worshipping the god by two hands, the paintings at Devathanapettai reflects the religious activities of the human beings. The Rock paintings were also a kind of media to convey the messages to others during the pre and proto historic period. Nowadays it is also sources to study about the socio-economic and religious conditions of the human past.

### Rock art paintings in villupuram district

#### a) Kilavalai

Kilavalai is situated about 23 km west of Viluppuram – Thiruvannamalai highways. Rock paintings are found 1km from the village Kilavalai. They are found in three different rocky areas and painted in thickened red ochre. There is a painting of seven human figures with the beak of a bird at a spot. The first man is seated on a horse with a prominent chest., his right shoulder just inclined down, elbow slightly bent holds his hand on his lap, his left shoulder just uplifted his straightened hand with four fingers, slightly touching the neck of the horse, a weapon seemingly held attached to his body; both legs very thin and hanging down. The second man's figure is in standing posture, with thickened hair spread over the head; right hand holds the horse's bridle, left hand with four fingers, just extended towards the third man. It has lean chest this body and weapon hand wears and a folded dhoti around his waist. The third one has shown standing faces the other two. He has a prominent chest, wears a lower garment and has outstretched hands, as welcoming the other two. It is suggested that these people are coming from one region to another for some purpose. The other four human figures (each with bird-beak) are found in a boat in a line with interlinked hands. The first image from right depicts a man in standing posture with broadened chest. His body is bigger than the other three, his right hand holds the other man, his left hand hanging down with five fingers. He wears a lower garment and faces his left. The second man is also standing with a horn on his head-similar to the image at Bhimbetkha in Madhyapradesh; his left hand holds a long stick for sailing the boat while his right hand holds the third person wears lower garment and faces right hand. The third man is standing with his right and left hands holding the hands of the adjacent men. He has a broad chest, wears a lower garment and faces his left. The fourth man (also with a broad chest) is standing with his left hand holding his neighbour, while his right hand hangs down. He wears a lower garment and faces his left side of the four men numbers first, third, and fourth face north while the 2<sup>nd</sup> man faces south.

Apart from these human images, 13 symbols are also depicted. Among them, three symbols, the sun with 17rays is found in one place. It may indicate a family worshipping the sun. In another place, five symbols are depicted. These symbols are very similar to the depiction on seals of the Indus valley civilization according to Iravatham Mahadevan. The meaning of it might be that during the rain accompanied by a thunder, a group of people under its chief goes north with loud music probably at the time of festival in another place, there are three symbols. Probably indicating heavy rain in and around the region at that juncture. In another place, there is a symbol of a drum shaped symbol suggesting a reclined human image. In another place, there is a multipronged arrow. On the inner side of the shelter, one can find number of human images. They are sun with 17rays; three people raising their folded hands above their heads in the attitude of prayer towards the sun. So it indicates the worship of Sun. But these three human do not have features of beak of a bird. At the bottom of the rocky area, one can find the following images in a row- namely wheel with four spokes, a man with straightened hair on its head, bow and arrow with multipronged arrow, another man in standing posture with the beak of a bird, horned on its head, both left and right hands hanging down and wearing a lower garment. Apart from these, there is a rowing-bow, a plant with roots and three men with the beak of a bird depicted in standing posture. Just below them, a star with eight rays are shown.

Above these images, are seen a sun with 10rays, a circle with multiple lines, star with 8rays and a human with the peak of a bird. Adjacent to it is a man holding a flag. At the corner of the rocky area are some pictures of trident; plus mark with dot; four spokes wheel and an "L" shaped line mark. The second rocky area contains six images. Among them, four images standing in one line and the other two are separated. The first image from the left is a man with horned headgear, his face resembling bird's beak. His right hand has four fingers, his left hand is very long and touches his feet with four fingers. He wears a lower garment, similar to an image in Bhimbetkha. The second image in standing posture is not clear; the third image is standing with the beak of a bird without a lower garment; and the fourth image is standing nearby them with the beak of a bird. Further there are two images with outstretched hands engaged in an attitude of dancing but lacking clarity. A trident is also found on the rock. This painting might indicate some ritualistic significance. The third rocky area depicts two circles each containing small circle. The symbols at Kilvalai are similar to those of Indus valley seals; but these symbols might be later than Indus valley, because they include the horse which was absent in Indus valley. These paintings might perhaps be dated to 1000 and 500 BCE or the beginning of Megalithic age.

#### b) Settavarai

The site Settavarai is located 40kms from North-west of Viluppuram. The rock paintings are found on the top of Ayyanar malai. One can find different animals like deer, cattle, wild boar, wolf and fish painted on the rock. Human palm are also found near these images. Paintings are found both in white and red ochre (Polychrome). Some of the animals are drawn with thickened red ochre. In few cases, Red ochre alone used to outline the images (Monochrome). The drawings of Deer, flame of fire, meat pierced by a rod, shield, wild boar, wolf

looking like hyena, buffalos, fish, cattle and hand impressions are depicted. Among them, Deer and X ray paintings (showing inner organs of the animals) are the notable. Two deer are depicted back to back. One is drawn bright with white and red ochre, but the other is dull and not clear as it is outlined in red colour. The first deer is found prominently, the outer line in red ochre and the inner side in white kaolin. The neck of the image is covered by a thick line which could be a necklace like ornament. In between the ears, small horns are found. The front leg is slightly bent and long tail is hanging towards down. In front of it is an image which could be meat of an animal with a rod inserted into it. The outline of the image is in saffron colour and inner side of this image is in white. Below these images are few pictures indicating a flame of the fire to fry the flesh of the animal. Another deer is depicted in single outline. The tail of the image is shortened and straightened. Adjacent to these are four hand impressions each with five fingers. Besides these images, a wild boar is found in double colour. Below this image, big sized wolf looking like a hyena is shown outlined by red ochre. Four left hand palm impressions with five fingers are depicted together in a border line. Among the four, two hands have 5 fingers, one of which is showing two fingers stretched and other three fingers are folded. While another one is showing three fingers stretched and two fingers folded. Three hands are shown in red and white, while the fourth is thickened in red colour. Just above these paintings are zigzag lines drawn in white. There are three buffaloes depicted on the rock. In the first image, the front half of a buffalo is depicted in thick ochre and the back portion is shown with bones and other inner organs. The second one is not clear. The third buffalo is similar to the first one. Two fishes are found above these paintings both drawn in red and white colours. One fish has six dots on the inner portion while the other is found with opened mouth also with six dots on its inner portions. But this fish is entirely different from the first fish. The fish may perhaps indicate a clan symbol. Just nearby this fish symbol, a Cow is also depicted with thickened red ochre, revealing its inner organs. The rock paintings might belong to 1000 B.C.E to 500 B.C.E.

### c) Alampadi

Alampadi village is located in Thirukkoyilur Taluk of Viluppuram District about 18km from Thirukkoyilur north-west of Villupuram. The paintings are found in a rock locally known as *Koozhankal paarai* about 2kms west of Alampadi village. The drawings of the animals i.e. tiger, cattle, cow and calf, snake, monitor lizard (Udumpu in Tamil) all in red ochre occur on the rock. The cow and calf and deer behind the trees are significant. The Cow is shown in standing posture with its calf and its intestines also depicted in its body, similar to the painting found at Chaturpetnattallah and Chatkunda in Madhyapradesh and Settavarai in Tamilnadu. In front of the cow, two calves are walking in another painting a deer is standing behind the trees. In the same place can be seen superimposed paintings, i.e. depictions of earlier paintings over the older ones. This indicates early man occupied this shelter continuously for some period. The painting drawn in late Neolithic or beginning of Megalithic period.

### d) Padiyandal

Padiyandal is located in Thirukkoyilur Taluk of Viluppuram district. This place is located about 12kms from Thirukkoyilur

near a place called Cholapandipuram. The paintings are found on a rock called Irulakal, both on the ceiling and on the wall. Paintings are found in white and red ochre. Paintings in white ochre are found on the ceiling meanwhile red ochre is only found on the wall. The drawings show a Trident, drum shaped symbol and half circle on the triangle and square which may indicate a village. These images are depicted in white ochre. In one place can be seen a multipronged arrow which is only found in red ochre. Similar image is found at Kilvalai. Nearby this image the image of a horse depicted. On the basis of similarity, these paintings can also be dated in between 1000 BCE and 500 BCE.

### e) S Kollur

This place also called Irula Kudisai is located in Thirukkoilur Taluk about 5kms off Thirukkoilur of Villupuram district in Tamilnadu. The painting is found on the northern side of the village. The paintings are found in red ochre with double, triple and multiple wavy lines. The double lines are running up down. The triple and multiple lines are looking like a Kolam designs before homes drawn by women in early morning perhaps the primitive stage of the kolam. Some Neolithic Celts have been collected nearby. The local people worship the Celts as their traditional village gods in a rock shelter. According to material evidences, the painting can be late Neolithic age (1300 BCE to 1200 BCE).

### f) Sikkadu

Sikkadu is located about 30km from Ulundurpet. There is a big hill found running in east-west orientation. It is locally known as Murugarmalai. In northern side of the mount, a rock lying on the boulders i.e. found in north-south orientations. Under the rock, local people have built a small temple for goddess Selliyamman. A 13<sup>th</sup> century Chola temple known as Thiruvakkisvarar temple is located on the western side of the village. The paintings are found on the lying rock facing towards southern direction. Out of 11 images, three images are found in one place. Among them, two are found in dancing posture, remaining are normal. Adjacent to these, images of boat and fish are also depicted. Nearby are three stick images. Perhaps they might represent Tamil Brahmi script. It reads korra. Tamil brahmi letter i.e. na (e) is also seen. For the first time finding and reporting of Tamil Brahmi scripts are associated with rock paintings in Tamilnadu. Nearby is a human depicted in dancing posture. Another image is in standing posture holding in his left a bird. In the context of the Tamil Brahmi script, it may be related to the period 500BCE to 300BCE.

### g) Kulamthakka

This village is situated in Ulundurpet Taluk about 5kms from Ulundurpet in Viluppuram district. The paintings are found on the eastern side of the village and were discovered by Veeraraghavan, School Teacher of Viluppuram. The paintings are depicted in two different places. Both are depicted in red ochre. One is found at the entrance of the shelter i.e. an image is shown in standing posture with straightened and thickened hair on its head. His hand is shown like stick with three fingers. On the other side are three images in standing posture. The first man from left side is shown on a boat ('Parisal' in Tamil)

holding a rowing stick and thickened hair, spread over the head (similar to an image at Kilavalai). The second man shown standing with his right hand holding an arrow while his left hand holds a bow. He has thickened hair on its head. The third man holds an arrow and he is linked with one circle. He might be a chieftain. Just above these images, two more images are found. The first one is depicted with four quarters and a large sized circle found on each one quarter. Three lines are depicted at the top of each quarter. Perhaps it could be a capital city of the village or town. The third man linked with a circle through the line mark, might be a chieftain. Another one is also depicted with four quarters. The first quarter has two circles, one large sized and the other medium sized with two dots also; another one quarter has three circles in small, medium, large sized with dot is also. The top two quarters have large sized circles, with two dots depicted in each. Two bent lines are depicted over the top of these quarters. It indicates different family members living together at one place. These paintings might be dated to 1000 BCE to 500 BCE.

#### **h) Somasamuthiram**

The site located in Gingee Taluk of Villupuram District is situated at the distance of 9km from Gingee. The site is found on eastern side of the Konaiputhur which is union of this village. Orientation of the mountain ranges is east – west direction. The Rock paintings are found in five different places and paintings are found in five different places and the shelter faces towards south – east direction. Both red and white ochre used for the drawings but predominantly red ochre found in the Rock paintings. Here figurines of different animals and human figurines are depicted. The figurines are executed only through the outline. The drawings are not able to trace out because of erosion. Paintings are found in superimposition motives. At the ceiling of the shelter one can find a big sized figurine of cow which is depicted in red ochre. The double lines are drawn for the outline of the figurine. An outline of the body is not fully depicted. It is shown incomplete figurine. The body has shown very fat. The tail has been depicted in shortened form. The rough drawing lines are also depicted over the animal. Just above of this, figurine of a dog shown in standing posture with opened mouth. Ornament like ring has been depicted in its neck. It may be used as a pet animal or for hunting purposes. Besides figurine of antelope has drawn in standing posture. Just away from these, figurines of honey bees are shown hanging in its net. Besides drawing of human left hand depicts with five fingers. In one place, two human figurines and trident are shown in white ochre. In the same place, drawings are also depicted in red ochre which is not visible but the drawings' shown as white ochre are latter than the red ochre. In another one place, figurines of deer and horse are shown in standing posture. They are depicted only the outline. In the last two places, they were roughly depicting the lines like childish behavior. According to Rasu Poundurai, the paintings are categorized into three on the basis of animal style for fixing the date to Rock paintings. In the point of view, this painting belongs to second category. The paintings must be drawn between late Neolithic or beginning of megalithic.

#### **i) Thengunam**

The village is located in Ulundurpet Taluk of Villupuram District and the village is situated at the distance of 15km from

Ulundurpet. The site is located about 1km from the village and it is also situated on northern side of the village. Selliyamman (mother goddess) temple is located very near to the Rock paintings. The paintings are found at three different places. The drawings are depicted in thickened red ochre. Front of the temple, two shelters are found. Among them, in the right hand side only can find drawings which are depicted figurine of human left hand and figurine of human. The human hand shown with four fingers. Beside a human shown in standing posture. Both figurines are executed only by out-line. But it's almost faded. In another one shelter, 18 dots are shown in oval shaped. Just down figurine of sun with 16 rays shown. Near these, figurine of like a shelter or a mount depicted in red ochre. In the last shelter, the drawings are depicted in two different places. Among them, one has shown the figurines of a fawn and tiger. The tiger has depicted in standing posture with opened mouth which means trying to attack the fawn. Front half portion of the tiger has shown with line marks and back half portion has applied with thickened red ochre. An each legs had shown with sharpened nails. The tail depicts hanging down. An opposite of the tiger, the figurine of fawn has also depicted in standing posture which is drawn only outline by thickened red ochre. The tail has shown just upturned. Besides figurine of weapon like axe with handle depicts in red ochre. Near of this figurine of sun shown with rays. Just above these figurines, two human figurines are depicted in standing posture. First human shown in dull red colour. It is eroded and it is not able to trace out but it's almost similar to other one. Second human shown in thickened red ochre. His faces look like monkey's face. Hairs are depicted on his head as spike. His right hand holds a weapon like sickle while left hand hangs down. He has depicted just as turns his head and shown his back portion. His back portion has clearly shown him wearing a cloth like a shawl which is hanging down from his shoulders. Crossed lime decorations have also drawn in his back side. It may be wearing upper garment. The human figurines are depicted only by out-line. Beside a sun with rays has also shown. An indicating the sun in this shelter means there may be existing of nature worship. Just above, the figurine of horse has depicted in running posture with upraised tail. Some remains of human figurine shows on horse. It may be he has shown as riding the horse. But the full human figurine has been eroded. Near of his human shown in standing posture with stretched out hands.

#### **J) Konaiputhur**

Two rock art sites in Konaiputhur on the hillocks behind the Gingee fort in Villupuram district consist of a painting of a deer done in white kaolin with outlines in red ochre. This is really rare, while this figure of a deer is about three feet length by three feet in size, there are tiny drawings of deer and lizard (Udumbu in Tamil) on the adjacent rock surface and it might belong to circa 1000 BC.

#### **K) Dhevadhanapettai**

Many archaeological evidences were founded in Devadhanapet hills, near Gingee at Villupuram district. In this hill there are numerous Dolmens have been seen. A lot of rock art paintings were painted inside the large cave which was located on the north side of this hills. These rock art painting were seen in which colour at three places. In first place there are two human

tattoos including a women and man shapes. In a second place we could find woman tattoo without a head. A human tattoos which found in the third place seems to be looking like worshipping the god by his two hands. Hence, we came to know that the human race staged here and worshipped the god.

### Conclusion

The study of Rock paintings requires deep study and systematic analysis to understand the social, cultural and historical phases of human behavior and their initiation into the ritualistic and religious beliefs. Fixing the date to the paintings is adapted to the present study on the basis of style and similarities of other reported sites. Moreover, Archaeological evidences in the region are also important and considered to determine the date to the Rock paintings. The painters had been conveying their messages to others through the paintings. It may be found that there are two types of images depicted. Under one category, more artistic and aesthetics valued figurines are appeared. On the other hand more primitive form images just like a behavior of child. But each and every painting has given their own history. The paintings are shown in the shelter both believable and an unbelievable figurines i.e. mythical figurines. Meanwhile, the paintings are given full clear picture of the human past. It has been given the great significance to reconstruct the past. The important significance of the painting in the region is symbols which are found in the Rock paintings at Kilvalai. Similar to these symbols are found on Indus seals. It may be presumed that the connections between Indus valley and Tamil region and influence of socio-cultural trends. Another important significance is X ray paintings which is shown inner parts of the animal. It is indicating the techno-socio-cultural developments of the region. These paintings are found at Alambadi and settavarai. Another important significance is Tamil Brahmi letters which is identified for the first time in Rock paintings at Sikkadu. Therafter, the design like Kolam is also depicted in S.Kollur, it is also one of the significant living traditions particularly in north Tamilnadu. Another important thing is town planning

which is excited in Kulamthakka. Somasamudhram might have been the place where the largest animals being domesticated in this region. Thengunam is also one of the important places where mythical human figurines and different animal figurines are depicted. The Rock paintings were also a kind of media to convey the messages to others during the pre and proto historic period. Nowadays it is also sources to study about the socio-economic and religious conditions of the human past.

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