
A Note on Petroglyphs from Ariyittapara, Pothamkandam, District Kasaragod

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Abstract: *Sajit reported citing of a rock art at Ariyittapara, near Pothamkandam, Dist. Kasaragod by Historian Nandakumar Koroth (Sajit 2020). This news later also appeared in some vernacular newspapers. The site of Ariyittapara, was visited by the first and third authors in order to gain further information. This article is a brief note on the rock-art findings there and their possible significance.*

Keywords: Rock Art, Petroglyphs, Ariyittapara, Laterite, Anthropomorphs, Bull, Cupules

Introduction

Rock-art motifs on open lateritic formation has been earlier reported from three sites in Kasaragod Dist. (Kumar and Raj 2019 24-35). The newspaper article on the findings from Ariyittapara looked interesting on account of the fact that for the first-time anthropomorphic figures were being reported in association with bull figures, on open lateritic surface. Hence, it was decided to make a visit to the site for an in-depth assessment. Ariyittapara is located at Pothamkandam. Pothamkandam is around 23 km northeast of Payyanur along the Payyanur-Cherupuzha road via Kankole or from Cheemeni along the Palavayal-Odakolly road. At Pothamkandam junction close to Achoos Bakery and Cool bar 200m along the Padiyorchai road, a kaccha track road to the left leads to Ariyattpara, Sri Paramelamma open air shrine premises where the site is located. A Chembaka tree and some flimsy rubble structure is noticed close to it (Figure 1).

Local Environment

The rock art site is situated on a hard lateritic plateau forming a basin and sloping eastwards towards the Thejaswini River. The rock surface is strewn with leached rock-

sediments and decayed vegetation, this helps in the rich growth of grass and other Xerophytic plants. The crevice and depression where the soil deposit is larger, the vegetation is more luxurious. The whole area surrounding the rock art site is an ideal grazing land, extending several acres. The main source of water for grazing cattle was the Thejaswini River located east of the site. On the lateritic rock surface to the south of trees and flimsy rubble structure are noticed the petroglyphs (Figure 2).



Figure 1: General View of the Site with Chembaka Tree and Rubble Structure



Figure 2: Lateritic Rock Surface with Petroglyphs



Figure 3: Large Anthropomorphic Figure with Genitals Demarcated



Figure 4: Anthropomorph from Ezuthuala, Marayoor



Figure 5: Smaller Anthropomorphic Figure with Cupules



Figure 6: Anthropomorphs from Edakkal

The Rock-Art Motifs

There are two anthropomorphs, three bull, one deer and some cupules at one site which measures roughly 4x4 m. There are more cupules on a rock surface further west of the site too. The larger of the two anthropomorphic figure measures a maximum of

170 cm in length, 150cm in maximum width and 30 cm at the waist (Figure 3). The head of the figure is oriented towards north. The facial features are not very clear and the right hand of the figure rises upwards from the elbow and left hand is extended outwards. The waist is cylindrical and at the groins his genitals are indicated. The legs are parallel and the feet are splayed sideways. This anthropomorph in its body posture recall the pictograph of an anthropomorph from Ezuthuala, Marayoor, Dist. Idukki (Figure 4).

Further south, towards west of the bull pair, is an anthropomorphic figure measuring 130 cm in maximum length and 90 cm in maximum width and 30 cm at the waist, with both hands raised upwards (Figure 5). The legs of the figure are shorter compared to the larger anthropomorphic figure and there is no specific indication of its gender. The palm of the raised hands has finger or some spike like object in depiction. To east of the figure's right leg extending from the feet to waist is series of cupules in two parallel rows. The body posture of this figure reminds of similarly postured large anthropomorphic figures in Edakkal caves (Figure 6).



Figure 7: Deer



Figure 8: Bull



Figure 9: Pair of Bulls Facing Each other from Ariyittapara



Figure.10. Bulls Facing Each other from Usgalimal, Goa

Towards the feet of the larger anthropomorphic figure on the northern side is carved a deer like animal roughly 25 cm in height, facing east (Figure 7). Further east, to the far end of the rock, not far from the deer is a humped bull measuring around 30cm in height, with large horns turned backwards and raised tail in a movement to the right

or west (Figure 8). To west of this bull and to the south of the deer is a pair of humped bull facing each other (Figure 9). The bull on the left (east) has a maximum of 75cm at the hump and the bull on the right (west) has a maximum of 60 cm at the hump. Bulls facing each other has been reported on lateritic rock the sites of Usgalimal, Goa (Figure 10).



Figure 11: Bull and Anthropomorphic Figure from Avalakkai Pare, Kollur
(Courtesy: Paniyadi Gururaj, www.deccanchronicle.com)



Figure 12: Bull Figures from Ettukudukka, District Kasaragod

Approximate Date

There are no strong indicators to date the petroglyphs precisely. Given the similarity of the bull figurines at the site with Ettukudukka, Edakkal etc., and the occurrence of megaliths close by, the petroglyphs at Ariyittapara rock art in all possibility date to megalithic-early historical times.

Discussion and Conclusion

It is interesting to note that stylistically similar bull and anthropomorphs, represented together or otherwise, have been reported on lateritic formation along the Konkan extending from Sindhudurg District in Maharashtra in the north, to Kasaragod District, Kerala in the south. To the south of Kasaragod petroglyphs on laterite have not yet been reported.

Bull figurines and anthropomorphic figures carved into lateritic formations have been earlier reported from Kudopi (Lalit 2015), Usgalimal / Pansoimol in Goa (Nambirajan 2015) and from Karakunje and Gavali etc., in Udipi Dist. (Murugeshi 2015). Recently, Paniyadi reported of anthropomorphic figure associated with bulls discovered by T. Murugeshi from Avalakkai Pare a village in 15km from Kollur, in Udipi district (Figure. 11) (Paniyadi 2019.) Open air bull representation on lateritic rock, closer to this site has been previously been reported from Ettukudukka (about 2km away by road from Ariyittapara/Pothamkandam) (Figure 12) (Kumar and Raj 2019 28-35).

What exactly is the significance of the bull along with the anthropomorphs at Ariyittapara and various other sites is not clear. However, some opinions expressed earlier by scholars regarding the significance of human, some animal and other motifs noticed in a few rock art sites can be recalled here. In Manipur region, as part of funerary rituals and feasts for the assembled gathering, pigs or Mithun ox (*Bos frontalis*) are slaughtered. On rocks adjoining such ritualistic sites, are carved heads of Mithun and pigs along with footprints. The heads accounts for the number of animals slaughtered and footprints are indicative of the deceased ancestor (Devi 2017 500). At Usgalimal / Pansoimol in Goa, also footprints are depicted close to bull representations (Figure 10). In ethnographic studies conducted in Northeast India, it has been understood that many rock art sites with such motif are sacred places where people come to communicate with ancestors or supernatural (Devi 2015 317). In the world context ethnographic studies undertaken in Boliva indicate that till recently in certain rock art sites bulls and lama used to be sacrificed to propitiate success in agriculture, wellbeing of the community and for the success in livestock activities (Lewis 2014. 81).

The anthropomorphic figures may be indicative of ancestral spirits or bhutas or some sort of protective or guardian spirits of cattle and humankind (Kumar and Raj 2019 195). Fawcett was the first to draw similarity of anthropomorphic figures in Edakkal shelter with Bhuta /Devil worship practiced in Tulunad (Fawcett 1901: 416) and other regions by tribes. There is a view that many of these representations of animals and humans on laterite at Kudopi, in Maharashtra are remnants of Shamanistic rituals held

in the past (Lalit 2015. 387). It has been observed that some of the painted anthropomorphic figures in rock-art with webbed feet or hands are called *payee* or spirit and they were created as part of exorcism activities in Marayoor region (Kurian 2015 503, 513).

Murugeshi in his study around rock art site of Udupi district has observed that the worship of Bulls is still part of a living tradition. Apart from Zoomorphic bull figurines, synchronistic type of bulls with human heads or human with bull head are found worshipped. In some tribal hamlets these bull figurines were also found associated with phallic and fertility cult (Murugeshi 2015 434-435).

Nandakumar who noticed these has stated in the press report that the Mavilan tribe still perform rituals annually near a Champak tree adjacent to the engravings and there are megalithic rock-cut chambers within a diameter of 1km (Sajit 2020). The Champa/ Champak tree (*Plumeria alba*) at the site is incidentally also noticed planted close to many megalithic dolmens in the Marayoor region.

As stated earlier, there is a possibility that these petroglyphs were the work of shepherds or cattle rearing people who wandered along the coast seasonally, in search of pastures for their livestock (Kumar 2019 34). The cupules found close to the anthropomorphic figure and on rocks in the vicinity are intentional creations associated with some magical-religious rituals. Cupules could not have served as lithophone as lateritic rock does not produce sharp tones. Does the anthropomorphs and bulls at Ariyittapara indicate a deceased sole and sacrificed animals as in Manipur, or some Shamanistic or fertility cult as in Udupi, Karnataka or part of Bhuta cult as observed in Tulunad and reflected in Edakkal engravings, nothing can be said for certain and all are possible equations. The true meaning as envisaged by its creator will remain a mystery. The anthropomorphic figures along with bull for the first time reported on lateritic formation from Ariyittapara, near Pothamkandam, Dist. Kasaragod is definitely interesting and apparently there are more such sites in the area awaiting discovery.

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