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Bhairavakonda – Rock Cut Cave Temples

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Abstract

The main objective of the study of Bhairavakonda, it was in the Nellore district, the study consists of group of cave temples and explain about the historical background from Mauryan times, Satavahana, Ikshavakus, Pallavas, Chalukyas and Cholas.

It consists the study of Saivism in Nellore region during the 7th Century A.D. The study of Art & Iconography of Bhairavakonda. It contains the Iconography of Vishnu, Brahma, Ganesha, Chandesa and Nataraja. In Decorative art mainly in represented in carving of pillars. It contains Lions, Mkhamaala, half Lion, medalions, Vyalas, etc.

Keywords: Cave Art, Iconography, Decorative Art

Introduction

Historical Background

Bhairavakonda is 45 kms to the north of Udayagiri in Nellore district. The group of cave temples are located in a picture square spot looking a ravine called Bhairavakonda. These hills are soft schist and formed as a semi-circular ravine. The group of cave temples consists nearly eight and all are dedicated to Siva.

The history of Nellore region can be traced from the times of the Maurya Southern most boundary of the Mauryan Empire. It is attested by the discovery of Punch marked coins of Maurya at Allur. These coins are indicating the extension of Mauryan rule along the northern tracts of the river Pennar. The rule of Satavahanas over this region is known from the distribution of their coins. Besides these coins, the Roman coins found at Nellore are showing that this Nellore region had commercial contacts with the Mediterranean regions. Ikshvakus were the successors of Satavahanas who ruled over this region. After the fall of Ikshvakus early Pallavas become the masters of this region form A.D. 315 the early Pallavas started their rule across the Nellore and Guntur districts. The later half of the 6th century A.D. forms an important in the political and cultural history of this region. The Pallavas of the Simha Vishnu Iline began their rule with the capital at Kanchi from A.D. 550. The inscriptions at Badami reveals the complete conquest of the Chalukyan territories. The Cholas was ruled in this region.

Religion

Saivism was the oldest and most popular religion in Andhradesa. The popularity of Saivism in the Nellore region during the 7th century A.D. is known from the Talamanchi plates of Vikramaditya-I of the Chalukya of Badami. In the 7th century A.D. and 8th century A.D. *Pasupata* schools was in the strong foot hold. The important Saiva center of Siddheswaram and Jyothi are mentioned in the 7th & 8th century's inscriptions of the Renati Cholas. Due to the wide popularity of the *Pasupata* sect and the royal patronage, several new temple centres came up during 7th & 9th centuries A.D. Among the important centres mention may be made of Alampur, Siddavatam, Amaravati, Dharmavaram, etc. The creation of rock cut temples at Bhairavakonda is the result of the wide spread popularity of the *Pasupata* sect and also due to the influential *Saivacharyas* noticed in the Talamanchi plates from Nellore district.

Art & Iconography of Bhairavakonda

The sculpture in the rock-cut temple is badly weathered and mutilated. The sculpture is mainly religious. The religious representations are Vishnu, Brahma, Dharmapala's, Nandi, Ganesha, Chandesa, Harihara and Nataraja. The others are decorative motifs like Lion, Mukkamala half lotus, Medallions, Bhairava, Vyalas, etc.

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Iconography of Religious Art

Here the religious art representing the icons. The main worshipping god is Siva in the form of rock-cut Linga in the garbhagriha. The other gods are Vishnu, Brahma on the South and North of the Mandapa wall and Ganesha, Chandesa in the niches on the walls of the courtyard. The other in Nandi invariably placed at the centre of the courtyard facing the shrine. The bas-relief of Mahesa is important one carved on the hind wall of the garbhagriha of cave no.5.

In front of the cave no.4 on the other side of the stream there is one Siva temple with icons of Vishnu and Brahma in the niches of garbhagriha on a big boulder opposite to the third cave on the other side of the stream there are sculptures of Harihara and Nataraja.

Iconography

Vishnu: Vishnu images carved in these temples are of *Samapadastanaka* pose with four hands. In the cave no.1 the artist followed the convention of depicting four armed Vishnu with *Sanka*, *Chakra*, *Gada*, as found in practice, in the Krishna, Guntur region during the Vishnukundin period. But late the change is noticed in showing Vishnu without *Gada*. This convention is usually followed in the Tondaimandalam and the Chalukyan territories.

Brahma: Brahma images are also carved in *Sampada Sthanaka* pose and with four arms. Here the iconography of Brahma is standardised. The three faced God with four arms appears youthful standing in *Samabhanga*, and holds *Akshamala*, *Kamandalu* in the right and left upper arms and the lower right arm in *Abhaya*, the lower left arm is on the *Kati*. The *Padmapitha* is absent in all these representations.

Ganesa: Here Ganesa is shown in four hands and seated in *ardhaparyankasana* or *Padmasana*. He is shown without *Vahana* – the mouse. In the early examples of Ganesa in Andhra, the God is shown as two armed and seated in *Sukhasana* and without *Vahana*. It is only from 7th century A.D. Ganesa is shown as four armed in Andhra.

Chandesa: Chandesa is one of the names of Siva and is also the name of one of the principal Siva ganas. In all these caves Chandesa is shown seated in *Sukhasana* Chandesa has two hands, holding an axe in the right hand is similar to the figures of Chandesa in the Pallava sculpture. In Chola temples from 9th century onwards Chandesa is represented invariably. Chandesa does not figure in the early Chalukyan temples in Andhra. It shows the representation of Chandesa in the iconographic scheme is indicating the impact of the Pallava and Chola tradition over the Bhairavakonda temples.

Mahesa: Here Mahesa is represented with three heads. The central face which faces east is serene and the face on proper right which faces south is terrific, whereas the north facing face is smiling and joy and looks feminine, the central face has third eye. The lower portion of the brut is weathered and broken. Two hands are represented with snake and *pasa* in right and left hands.

Mahesa figure on the hind wall of the *garbhagriha* is noticed in the Bhujangesvara temple at Bhavanasi sangam in Kurnool district. It is dated to the later part of the 8th

century A.D. on its architectural tradition. At Ellora some temples contain Mahesa panel in the *garbhagriha*. But in Pallava tradition their carving is absent. It indicates that the Chalukya, Rashtrakuta tradition in western India had influenced the architects of these caves.

Harihara: Eight handed Harihara is shown standing in *samabhanga* pose. The right portion is representing Siva, the four hands of this part are holding *Trisula*, *Parasu*, *Akshamala* in upper hand and the lower hand is in *abhayamudra*. The left section is representing Vishnu. The left hands are shown holding *Chakra*, *Sankha* and *Khadga* in three upper hands and the lower is held in *Katyavalambita* pose. The head dress shows the *jatamakuta* on right and *karandamakuta* on left sections. The third eye is represented.

Harihara image is represented in iconographic scheme from 7th century onwards in Andhra, Karnataka and Tondaimandalam regions.

Nataraja: The image of Nataraja is *Ananda Tandava* pose in the niche next or left to Harihara niche at this place is the outstanding example in The iconography of Siva. He has eight hands, the right hands are holding *Trisula*, *Parasu*, *Damaru* and *Abhayamudra*. The left hands are holding *Naga*, *Khatvanga*, *Gajahasta* and the last is not clear.

Dharmapala's: The *Dvarapalas* are two armed and are represented in stone profile, standing in *Tribhanga* with legs flexed and resting the arms on the clubs. They wear heavy *Jatabharas* above which are the horns curled on either sides. The *Dvarapalas* forming part of the doorway is found not only in the Pallava rock-cut temples at Vijayawada. Representation of these horned *Dvarapalas* seems to have been associated only with the particular forms of Siva.

Decorative Art: The decorative art mainly is represented in carving of Pillars. It contains lions, *Mukkamala*, half lotus medallions, Beki Bhairavas, Vyalas etc.

The pillar bases are rendered as seated lions. This convention is due to the influence of Pallava tradition, The carvings of *Mukkamala* on the *Mala sthana* part of the pillar is also seen in Pallava temples. Similar motifs are also represented in the Chalukyan temples of Andhra.

The carving of Beki Bhairava motifs on the capitals is a peculiar feature which is noticed as a popular motif in the temples of Orissa. It is a crouching human figure shown frontally on the capitals. Here human head is represented in a terrific form. The same motif is found in the Swarga Brahma temple at Alampur which is dated to later period.

On the *kapota* portion of the façade the vyalavari is impressive one.

Here the lions are shown facing each other with gaping mouths.

The *ganas* in *bhutamala* under the *kapota* are shown frontally. The plabby and pot-bellied figures with a beaming smile are shown carrying a flower garland. This carving as decorative element is common in Andhra from early times.

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