

**SCRIPT OF THE COMMENTARY ON
THE TOUCH SCREEN VIDEO CLIPS ON SOME
ROCK ART AND CAVE ART
SITES IN TAMILNADU**



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Front Cover: *Vellerikombai* Rock face (*Ezhuthuparai*)- Rock Art,
Nilgiri District, Tamilnadu.

Back Cover : *Urdhvatandava Siva* Sculpture, *Kudumiyanmalai*,
Pudukottai District, Tamilnadu.
Circa 17th - 18th Century AD.

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PREFACE

The Rock and Cave Art Gallery is a unique effort to simulate reality and present it in a Museum Gallery. It commemorates the completion of 150 years of the founding of the Government Museum, Chennai (Madras).

The research team of Curators, some of the staff of the Government College of Arts and Crafts at the initiative of the Principal and the Commissioner of Museums (the writer), the last sometimes in indifferent health, travelled to Rock Art sites in Tamilnadu, many of which are located in highly inaccessible hilly locations. For example, *Vellerikombai* in the *Nilgiris* is about 14 kilometres by trek into deep forest involving steep climbs and sheer drops. The team also visited other states like the Indira Gandhi Museum of Man, *Bhopal*, the famous *Bhimbetka* caves near *Bhopal*, the Rock Art Society of India at *Agra* and the museums in *Delhi* to gather material both knowledge (textual) and visual material. Internet sites like the *Lascaux* Cave in *France* were also browsed to see their presentation.

The gallery cannot capture reality since simulation has its limitations. Therefore we have presented the actual sites with detailed explanations as video clips. This also brings the team's visit and its experiences as a documentary.

Since visitors may like to take with them a copy of the video clips in book form along with the material it presents, we are bringing this out as a publication. This will also be good reference material for scholars.

Chennai - 600 008,

30.11.2002.

(Dr.R.Kannan, Ph.D., I.A.S.)

COMMENTARY ON THE TOUCH SCREEN VIDEO CLIPS ON SOME ROCK ART AND CAVE ART SITES IN TAMILNADU

We now show video clips of the important places visited by the research team from the Government Museum, *Chennai*. Extensive research and field visits preceded setting up of the Rock Art Gallery in the Government Museum, *Chennai*.

Now you see a video clip of our team members including the Commissioner of Museums Dr.R.Kannan, I.A.S. climbing to the petroglyph site, *Perumukkal* near *Tindivanam*, which is one of the three petroglyph sites in India. The petroglyph is in a cave near the top of the hill. *Perumukkal* also has a temple which dates from the *Chola* period. Construction lasts right up to the post *Vijayanagara* period. Parts of the temple are in need of renovation. The temple itself is not under the protection of the State Department of Archaeology but the petroglyph site is. Professor Madhivanan sees in these petroglyphs, which are made of cupules i.e. scooping out of rock by small rocky stones, figures, which show the *Ramayana*.

We now take you to the next site, *Kizhvalai*, 22 km from *Villupuram*. It has a pyramid like entrance made of huge rocky boulders. We see the team members including the Commissioner

going through that cave on all fours, because of the inaccessibility of the cave. You see the red ochre Rock Art which is very old and some symbols, the cross symbol closed on both sides, that you see, is supposed to be the forerunner of the Indus valley script. There is a figure on horseback, two people leading the person riding on the horse back.

This is a Rock Art site, *Alambadi*, which is a little further from *Kizhvalai* on the same Villupuram Gingee Road. This site is famous for its x-ray paintings, which are supposed to represent a prehistoric anatomy class. The stairs, which you see, are from a modern day temple, which has somehow crept into this protected site. The x-ray paintings are supposed to depict the internal organs of animals and it is felt that some teacher is teaching them to the students. *Charaka* was a great surgeon and *Susruta* was a great physician in India, but they are of the historic period while this Rock Art is from the prehistoric period.

This is *Vellerikombai* Rock Art precipice, which is seen in the far distance. Now it comes into your view. It is in the Nilgiris. Reaching it involved an arduous trek of 14 km for the team. It involved trekking through forest country and the Commissioner is pointing out the distant rock.

Two team members nearly died. Here we see the Commissioner of Museums and the team trekking through the thick forest, where there is no path.

In this scene, we see an altar for a spiritual sacrifice which is more fully described in the book on 'Holistic Dating' written by Dr.R.Kannan, I.A.S., Commissioner of Museums in 1999. He is pointing out various parts of that drawing here. These are two figures in white ochre. The part in red ochre is from an earlier period than white ochre. This is a shepherd with a staff, which is also shown in our Rock Art Gallery. This is a goat or a ram of the prehistoric period and these are two stars or two human beings depending on one's point of view. The plus sign, which we see, is the prosperity sign which has again been described in the book by the Commissioner of Museums.

This hill is from *Iduhatti* again in the Nilgiris, which was not such a hard trek through forest. This has a rock art site. At the base of this mountain, at a sheer drop, we come to the site. We find the team members pointing to the Rock Art. Here the Commissioner is pointing out various Rock Art figures.

This is a *Trisul* or three pointed sign which also becomes the sign of the *Saivites* later. We can see people and Lord *Siva* have the *Vibhuti*

mark on the forehead even today. This shows that this Rock Art site forms a link with the prehistoric past. This painting, surviving even today is an organic link with the past. It shows that the same people are in existence today, who keep their own culture, unlike in South America where the old culture has been destroyed by the Spanish Conquistadores. Indian culture survives for more than 15,000 years or 25,000 years in an unbroken link with our prehistoric past.

This is the Rock Art site in *Gudiyatam* in Vellore District. This is a red ochre painting, which is from a very early period. It shows figures similar to the one we see at *Iduhatti*, which seems to indicate that *Kizhvalai*, *Alambadi*, *Iduhatti*, *Vellerikombai* all show a common civilisation and their symbols also have a link with the Indus Valley civilisation symbols which came later. This shows that there is a Pan Indian Civilisation. The civilisation was a continuous one and not discontinuous as in some Western Countries. It was not brought by invaders from Asia to the west of the sub continent or Europe as 19th Century historians would have us believe.

This is from *Chenrayanpalli*, which is another Rock Art site near *Gudiyatam* in Vellore District. All these Rock Art sites are fairly inaccessible. This made the Government Museum, *Chennai* to bring them to you to have easy access at *Egmore*

within the city. Here white ochre figures, which are considered to be of a later period, are seen. We see geometric patterns like the *kolam* designs of today. It is also shown in the gallery. These are x-ray drawings with the plus prosperity sign already seen in *Vellerikombai*. The x-ray drawings have been seen in *Alambadi*, which again reiterates the point of a common civilisation. This shows a horse figure. Can anybody say that horse was not indigenous to India after this evidence? This is a figure riding on a horse.

This is the *Brahadambal* Temple, which is the titular Deity of the erstwhile *Pudukottai* royal family. Here we see paintings from the *Ramayana* from the later *Nayak* period circa 18th Century AD. These are mural paintings, which are at the later end of the continuum, which we referred to earlier, of the *Ajanta* paintings. These are seven Goddesses or *Saptamatrikas* carved out of rock, which is cut-in architecture. This temple is partially structural and partially cut-in architecture like the caves at *Mahabalipuram*.

This is the famous *Sittannavasal* cave temple in *Pudukottai* District. Carving of beds starts from the 3rd Century AD onwards for its use as a *Jain* centre. But these paintings are from the 7th and 8th Century AD. These paintings are in the spaces in the corbels on the beams near the pillars on the roof. They are murals (*fresco-secco*) with the same

dyes and forming the same pattern, as the *Ajanta* paintings. They date from the 9th Century onwards.

Here we see, three *Tirthankaras* carved as Bas-relief on the cave wall. This was a great centre for *Jain* ascetics throughout the centuries to meditate. Here we see a mural (*fresco-secco*) painting. A part of it has been obliterated. We see another mural, again a part of it has flaked off and whatever is left has been preserved. This corbelling recalls the *Chola* corbelling with paintings on them but because this is *Pandya* territory, we call them as *Pandya* and date them as around 9th Century AD. There is an inscription of *Ilam Gouthaman* from *Pandya* country. Therefore, this is considered to be the work of the *Pandya* kings and the period is a transition between *Pallava* and *Chola* styles, but in *Pandya* country.

This is a site called *Narthamalai* near *Pudukottai* which is the most ancient example of a *Chola* temple found so far. Nearby there are caves in which there are *Jain*, *Vaishnava* and *Saivite* sculptures. Near the entrance to these caves, there are friezes, which depict carvings of animal figures and so on. The *Jain* sculptures were mostly converted in the 13th Century AD in the later *Pandya* period into *Vaishnava* and *Saivite* sculptures. Now you see the *Sivalinga* in the temple in another cave wherein the *Linga* has been installed in the *Chola* period, which is

earlier to the *Pandya* period. We now see the *Chola* temple, with *Chola* period paintings of Lord *Vishnu* with *Sankha* (conch), a musician and a dancer. This is a portrayal of Lord *Siva* as *Virabhadra*. Similar paintings are found in the Big temple at *Thanjavur*. From this, it is clear that from *Ajanta* through the *Chola* period paintings to *Sittannavasal*, there is continuum in Indian art across time and across space in the whole of India. Now we see, the *Sanctum Sanctorum*. It has a wall enclosing the Deity, which is circular in shape, giving a circular shape to its inner part i.e perambulatory area. The outer structure is in the *Dravida* form of temple architecture of a rectangle.

This is *Tirumalai*, a *Jain* centre consisting of a hillock and some caves in *Tiruvannamalai* District a few miles from *Polur*. In this centre, which dates from the imperial *Chola* period, we see highly artistically carved *Tirthankara* figures, *Bahubali* and beautiful paintings just as in *Sittannavasal*. This is also of the same 9th and 10th Century AD period. We see beautiful trees and natural scenery painted in the mural paintings and stuccowork. This is a mural (*fresco-secco*) painting figure like a *Dwarapalaka*. This is a *Tirthankara* set among several other figures, which are beautifully painted. These are steps leading to the caves, which are quite dark. This is a figure

of *Bahubali* and his two sisters. This is a figure of *Yakshi Ambika* and these are worshippers who come to see *Bahubali*. This shows the three tiered umbrella or *Mukkudai* above the *Tirthankara*. *Tirumalai* was a great centre of *Jainism* and it still is a living centre of *Jainism* with a *mutt*.

This shows *Kudumiyamalai*. This temple also is partially structural and has partially cut-in architecture. This temple has the oldest inscription of the *Sapthaswaras* or seven notes of classical music. The hall, which we now see, is the front pillared hall. From its beauty and style, we conclude that it is of the *Nayak* period (17th or 18th Century AD). Each pillar has got a pilaster attached to it and attached to the pilasters are elaborately carved sculptures of *Rathi*, *Manmatha* and *Ravana*, who is a great *Siva* devotee and others. Here we see *Rathi* and *Manmatha*. On the beams corresponding to the *Yali* layer of the outside wall are friezes of animals and *Devatas* or angels. Here we see the 63 *Saivite Nayanmars* (saints) carved as bas-relief on the hill. Here we see the cut-in architecture of the temple and *Ganesa* carved as bas-relief. These are two *Dwarapalakas* in the cut-in temple below the hill. We now see the earliest example of *Ganesa* with his trunk twisted to the right called *Valampuri* in Tamil. We see members of our team perambulating the temple.

