

Faunal icons in 19th century ceiling paintings in Sri Lanka

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Abstract

Sri Lanka has a rich tradition of paintings since Pre- historic period. Sinhalese paintings adorned the surface of a variety of buildings, celestial places, shrine rooms and object to fulfilled religious and artistic's purposes. Sinhalese maintained a continuous tradition of decorating the interior and exterior surface of buildings by carving, molding and painting. Different religious themes were identified in the walls of the viharas, image houses, and Devices. The forms of animals, totemistic symbols, Plant and flowers, geometric patterns had been used in the decorations and compositions. I studied these paintings, especially the faunal icons in the 19th century in Uva cave temple ceiling painting in which way the artists' used it. Field work, Literature Survey and Photography were used as methodologies in this research. Most of this cave ceilings have been adorned and ornamented with decorative faunal designs evolved through generation of Buddhist art tradition

Key word: *Paintings, adorned, surface, Faunal, decoration*

Introduction

The art developed as a part of the culture in every civilization. Paintings were considered as one of the most effective medium of human expression to convey the spirituality of religious thoughts and the philosophical speculations of culture. Historical records said that, the paintings were executed not only on the walls of buildings, but also on cloth of which nothing has been preserved as it was not strong enough to withstand the destructive effects of climate and vandalism of human (Geiger: 1950).

Uva is a one of the large province in Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka had developed a tradition of paintings as an essential requirement for fulfilling the religious needs. Sri Lankan cave temple paintings also fulfilled the religious practices and requirement of Buddhism. Initially, the art of wall painting was introduced by the craftsman by themselves. In the same era in India, classical lines based on literary imagery was developed. In Sri Lanka, the indigenous form of popular art continued to be practiced by the artists. These paintings appear two forms of Buddhist art. One is the indigenous

traditional form and another one is the imported classical form. In this research, I discuss the background of the faunal icons and the following methodology.

Many researchers have discussed regarding Kandyan paintings, but none of the researchers mention Buddhist paintings of Uva Province. Because in this time, Buddhism too was experiencing considerable difficulty in maintaining its spiritual values and practices. As the kings faced political problems during this era, they didn't have much time spent on development of

Temple paintings. Their main aim was the establishment of the kingdom by shifting the Capital until the establishment of the kingdom at Kotte. During this period painting has survived just sufficient to decorate the palace and Court, Image house and Viharas. But, Most of the art material including paintings suffered wanton destruction at the hand of Portuguese invaders. So, paintings were neglected and forgotten.

But, a revival of art coincided with the revival of the Buddhism, in the 18th and 19th centuries, paintings began to reappear. The temples of the Kandyan period came to be painted in the indigenous style and the coastal belt also developed this style with some European influence. This influence was affected the Uva cave temples paintings (fig 1).



Fig. 1. Horse in Ceiling Paintings at Rakkithakanda Temple, Uva

This humanization of animals by identifying in their natures, or imputing in them qualities of men renders these animals symbolic of human beings in society. Mainly we can see effected in Uva Wellassa rebel influence in this paintings.

The main objective of this paper is to discuss how Sri Lankan artist uses faunal icons in cave temples ceiling paintings in Uva Province.

Methodology

In this research, I followed the three types of methodology. The sample selected from the Uva Province. Uva province covering the two administrative districts. There are Badulla and Monaragala. There is ten individual site reported as belonging to different Eco zones in this study.

Literature survey

Reporting was followed in a number of steps. Especially collecting published and unpublished references on Sri Lankan Temples paintings and rock art paintings was an activity which was carried out at the outset of the research. The aim was to measure the width and depth of these temples ceiling paintings covering this study.

Fieldwork

A considerably extensive sample of the site was selected for the field visit. It covered 10 individual locations from two administrative districts enveloping two ecological regions in the country. The selected sample is 50% of the total number of the sites so far recorded.

I followed the two major steps during this fieldwork in order to maintain the documentation. The attributes taken into consideration during the documentation were the dimensions of ceiling paintings, Orientation of the ceiling paintings, Use the colors of the ceiling paintings, nature of the rendering and the state of preservation. Besides, the dimensions relation to the spatial aspect of the place where the image was executed were recorded.

Photography

The second step was the photograph recording for a professional camera. Under the low light conditions inside the painted and ceiling paintings in the cave temples. Certain distortions in the pictures were subsequently corrected using Photoshop version 8.0. During this research, I was taken 1500 individual pictures.

Findings

The definition of the word 'Art' is itself a complex problem. Art is a manifestation or an expression of man's aesthetic sense or spiritual state. Therefore, a work of art is an attempt of an artist to know what his feelings are. Art again is an embodiment of expression of emotions, visions, experience, imaginations inspired by nature, influenced by surroundings and invoked by the creative urge. The skill of art can manifest itself in innumerable ways which can be given individual names depending on the channels of expression. A human being expresses his feelings of both human as well as divine in his work of art. It is noticed that from various emotions and desires of man appeared in the domain of art (K. S. Behera: 1996).

In the 18th 19th century temple Paintings were broadly classified into several animals' figures. There are cult deities, human figures, animal's figures, Birds, flowers, composite and mythical figures, various architectural, floral – vegetal and geometric designs. In the animal, figures constitute by an 18th and 19th century in Kandyan period for the most common theme of decoration in temple paintings. In that case, Coomaraswamy pointed out that, "It is perhaps the animals that are most impressive" (Coomaraswamy: 1906).

Almost for four centuries, even the indigenous style appears to be dominant. It is from the 17th and 18th centuries that example of the work of indigenous painters began to manifest once more. The painters belonged to a different class. They were the craftsman turned painters who were clever in marking silver and gold jewelry carving and decoration.

The new movement commenced with Dowa, Rakkithakanda, Budugekanda, Amaragiriya and Mayuragiriya Cave temples belonged to 18th and 19th century. These vihara ceiling paintings catered to the simple rural folk. The themes appealed to the people because these were popular Jataka stories. The stories were easily understood because the narrative was in indigenous style.

Buddhist paintings assumed a new dimension and form with a strong emotional appeal. The medium was simple. Colors were bold. Stories were popular Jataka stories. All Ceilings were highly decorated. Pictorial representations of faunal icons were portrayed on the ceiling of cave temples paintings for observation by the devotees. Buddhist concepts were given a form and shape in a language of unsophisticated beauty.

Paranavitana and Gunasinghe pointed out "The Kandyan Painters have been masters of decorative design. A good example can still be seen at Diyakelinawala on the ceiling. A design of twisted swans (Hansaputtuva) in the form of a swastika is one of the best. Compare this with the later ceiling design of five swans in a circle at Danture Vihare. We can see these painting Uva ancient cave temples paintings also.



Fig.1. Hansa Puttuwa at Budugekanda Temple, Uva

The paintings of Uva province cave temples belonged to a period between 1771 and 1886. Dearaniyagala pointed out “The clans of artists and artisans are frequently referred to in ancient literature, but individuals are very seldom mentioned and as they never signed any form of paintings or sculpture as in India they are now unknown. This lack of signatures suggests that they functioned as artisans working mostly upon religious edifices and belonged to the Kottal Base or department of Artisans or Chitrakarayo which comprised the Navandanno and Gallado who were subdivided into stone sculptors, ivory carvers, fresco painters, lac workers, and the like. Towards the 17th and 18th centuries the most important centers were in the Matale and Peradeniya districts, but in the 19th century the Anduru Madama School arose near Tangalla and by 1830 had commenced travelling through Ceylon and their places as the Katharagama Devale at Badulla”(Deraniyagala: 1954).

Fresco style is the rock surface is levelled, then cross-crossed with chisel marks to enable the basal layer of mud plaster to grip. This is usually a mixture of rice chaff, termite mound mud, ksolin, coconut fiber, coconut water and palm treacle, and upon this is applied the coating of plaster which is to be painted. Its composition according to the chitrayas at Eratne near Kuruvita is as follows: Tan bark is soaked and allowed to ferment then ground up with chalk or lime, honey, plum treacle or white of egg is then added after which the mixture is either spread over the mud plaster or applied directly upon rock and rubbed to a polished surface, curd was also added to some of these mixtures. The painting is executed upon it before it is quite dry, and sometimes fragment of semi- precious stone appear to have been inserted in the ornaments worn by the painted figures

The paintings of Budugekanda vihara are evidently late nineteenth century executions which have been repainted in mid- twentieth century, as evidenced by the dates given in the legends (2483 B.E= 1939 A.D and 2494 B.E = 1950 A.D). In this temple two layers of paintings were present. The ceiling and the walls were plastered and covered with paintings depicting various decorations. The ceiling has been divided into three sections. The left hand side contains the

flower decorations. The right hand side contains a badly damaged lotus flower decoration. The middle section of the *hansaputtuwa* (Fig.2,3) .



Fig.2. Parrot and Swan in ceiling paintings at Budugekanda, uva



Fig.3. Hansaputtuwa at Budugekanda Temple, Uva

A decorative pattern formed by the combination of *hansa* figures. The central motif is a circle containing a single *hansa*. This is surrounded by four sets of *hansaputtuwa* motif, which is also repeated on the four sides of the panel, thus forming a rectangle frame. Each of the corner space is filled with a single *hansa* figure. The whole scheme is of rich golden yellow on red, enlivened with figures of green parrots inserted on one side of the imaginative designs and compositions found in this series of paintings.



Fig.4. Peacock in Ceiling painting at Rakkithakanda, Uva



Fig.5. parrot in the ceiling painting at Rakkithakanda, Uva

The paintings of Rakkithakanda cave temple are evidently late eighteenth and nineteenth century. The interior of the rock ceiling is lined with a painted row of Geometric patterns, Lotus, creeper design and animal figures. In depicting figures the Sinhala artist did not employ a model for being guided by a series of paintings, they gave expression to the traditional characters of the subject as set out in ancient paintings. Birds, parrot, and peacock are sometimes highly stylized and occasionally natural. The selection of these species is probably due to their use in divination and for religious sacrifices.



Fig.6. Rabbit in the ceiling at Bogoda Temple

The paintings of Dowa cave temple are evidently late eighteenth and nineteenth century. The lower part of the irregular rock ceiling is lined with a painted row of forty six *arahath* holding flowers. The flat wooden ceiling contains three large panel, two of which display conventional designs of rosettes and lotus medallions. The third panel comprises two large medallions filled with scrolls, accompanied by elephant and composite *gaja- vrsabha* motifs formed of stylized floral patterns, all painted against a red background.



Fig. 7. Stylized and floralized Elephant in the Dowa ceiling paintings

An interesting composition of animal and floral combined. The exuberant spirit of the decorative style of the kandyan period is maintained in such designs. Above this painting decorative only creeper design. This type of paintings was seen only Dowa temple.



Fig.8. Gaja - Vrsabha painting at Dowa

A lively depiction of a much favoured and ancient motif of elephant and bull combined. The head stand for both the elephant and the bull which appear to be combatting. This composition represents the central feature of a design in white upon red which fills the ceiling space between two large medallions. Delicate and elegantly curved flowering jasmine creepers constitute a neat triangular framework for this motif.

These painting is dated in the 18th 19th century. It's mean Kandyan period. Two layers of paintings were present at Uva Cave temples. Mainly we can see two type of paintings. One is wall and other one is ceiling. In this paper I discussed the how artist can use the faunal icons Uva cave temples ceiling paintings. The ceiling and the walls were plastered and covered with paintings depicting various Buddhist themes. The ceiling has been divided into sections. After that artist paint in the ceiling.



Fig.9. Ceiling painting at Amaragiriya Cave Temple

In this paintings were very important. Because these paintings mentioned animal figures and dress. Normally kandyan paintings are not showing these dressed animal figure. Some plate showing only. Amaragiriya ceiling paintings were highlighted demonstrate only above the waste. These paintings narrative was in indigenous style.



Fig.10. Peacock in the ceiling at Anaragiriya Cave Temple

An interesting composition of animals and birds shown this painting. In such designs were maintained in Kandyan art tradition. Especially, such painting showed the indigenous style. In this ceiling exemplifying the unorthodox, if not untutored, approach of the provincial artist to the problem of ornamentation. The panel reproduced here, like many other pictorial and animal figures motifs in this temple, is largely unknown in other parts of the island. We can see the horse, birds and peacock figures here. All figures showed the only above the waist.

Conclusion

Finally, the paintings at Uva was quilt was very high. The painters had years of traditional knowledge. The ancient Sinhalese paid more attention to ideals than to realism. This meant beauty in the abstract rather than concrete. The result is the creation of forms of grace. The new movement commenced with Uva Cave temples include in the 17th 19th century. These paintings catered to the simple rural folk in Uva. The themes appealed to the people because these were Jataka Stories. The story was easily understood because the narrative was in indigenous style. However, Kandyan painters are using the furnal decoration to decorate in the ceiling. A number of animals painted in cave ceiling. Especially, we can see the parrot, peacock, rabbit, elephant, horse, owl in ceiling paintings in Uva Cave temples etc.

This humanization of animals by identifying in their nature, or imputing in them qualities of the men renders these animals symbolic of human beings in society. This basis of reference between beast and man required of fable thus renders. So, in the 18th and 19th-century temple Paintings can be broadly classified into several animals' figures. There are cult deities, human figures, animal's figures, Birds, flowers, composite and mythical figures, various architectural, floral – vegetal and geometric designs. In the animal, figures constitute by an 18th 19th century in Kandyan period for the most common theme of decoration in temple paintings.

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