

ROCK ART OF TELANGANA

*Report of the Minor Research Project (UGC unassigned grants) submitted to School of History,
Culture & Archaeology, P.S. Telugu University, Srisailam.*

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Introduction

The term 'Rock art' is generally used to define several types of artistic examples in the form of painting, bruising, engravings, pecking etc; on bare rock surfaces of caves, rock shelters and isolated rock boulders. These forms of rock art occur in various geologically formations - sand stone, lime stone, granite, shale etc.,

Basically there are two types of rock art. One of them is produced by an additive process i.e. by adding some colour substance to the rock to depict motifs, symbols and figures. This form of art is variously known as pictographs and paintings. Since majority of this form of art occur in caves and rock shelters and which cannot be moved from place to place, it is also known as 'parietal art'.

The second form of art is produced by a 'deductive process' i.e. by removing rock particles from the rock with the help of a sharp instrument, of stone or metal to depict the desired figure, motif or symbol. Though this form of art occurs in parietal context also, in majority of the cases it occurs on stone slabs, bones, ivory, wood and other such perishable materials and objects, which can be moved from place to place and hence known as 'mobile art' or 'mobiliary art'.

The second type of art is known in India under various terms, depending on the technique of execution as pecking, engraving and bruising. In a global context this form of art is known as 'petroglyphic art' in which all types of the above art forms - pecking, bruising and engraving - are included.

The science which studies these art forms of prehistoric times has not been given due importance and recognition. Since its inception, the study of rock art has been a subsidiary discipline to anthropology, ethnology and archaeology (Osaga 1991: 4). Of late, the need to recognize rock art as an independent scientific discipline is being stressed (Bednarik 1990 a; Osaga 1991; Kumar 2000). Scholars began to express the opinion that the term 'rock art' is vague for the new scientific discipline. As alternatives to the term 'rock art', several new names are being suggested. 'Rupestrian archaeology' (Anjelo fossati et. al 1990a) is one such term coined for a methodological approach to rock imagery and to stress its vital role in archaeological discipline. Rock/rupestrian refers to the support on which representations were made. Osaga (1991 : 3 - 12) felt that the term 'rupestrian archaeology' is still vague and did not adequately define the discipline.

As an alternative he coined the term 'pefology' to define the new discipline in which the first letter 'P' stands for petrolyphs and pictographs, 'E' for engravings on rock, bone, ostrich egg shells and other surfaces, 'F' for figurines of bone, ivory and other materials, 'O' for ornamental objects of any material provided that the study of these objects only involve

engravings and paintings on them. Joining the first letter comes 'pefo' and the science which studies these phenomena would be 'pefology' (Osaga 1991 : 7).

Other names/titled for the new discipline of rock art are "palaeoart/purakala" (Kumar 1990), "Cognitive epistemology/cognitology" (Bednarik, pers. Comn to Osaga 1991) and "visual and material imagery" (Conkey 1987 a: 413).

In this context it should be mentioned that the attempt by the rock art researchers to get an identity and a new name for their discipline is not well received in the professional archaeological circles who say that there is no need for a new name or title replacing rock art and that the study of rock art in isolation is not possible. They stress that rock art can as well grow as a sub - discipline of archaeology (Bahn 1990).

Rock art Research in India

It is now firmly established that the occurrence of rock art is a global phenomena and the Eurocentric origin theory of rock art is challenged and it has been shown that rock art is an outcome of the cognitive capabilities or *Homo Sapiens sapiens* independently in various parts of the world. (Ucko & Rosenfeld 1967 ; Bednarik 1990 b; Marshack 1972; 1979; Williams 1981; 1982; 1983 for example).

Rock paintings were discovered in India, much before their discovery in Europe, as early as 1867 - 68. A.C. Carlylle was the first to report their discovery in the Central Indian Vindhyan hills (Neumayer 1983 : 1; Mathpal 1984 : 12). Since then a number of scholars have been working on rock art in the fields of discovery, study and analysis and as a result of that the list of rock art sites steadily expanded and thus for about 400 rock art sites with more than 3000 painted rock shelters spread over the entire subcontinent have been recorded (Kumar 2000). However, the research in its proper sense began only after the discovery of Bhimbetka group of rock art sites in 1957.

Trends in research : First phase (1867 - 1957)

The emphasis in rock art study during this phase is on the discovery of rock art sites and description of rock art therein. These brief and descriptive accounts (Cock burn 1883;1889; Anderson 1918; Brown 1923; Munn 1935; Silberrand 1939; Smith 1906; Francke 1952; Foote 1916; Ghosh 1932) are vague and confined more or less to the description of themes, colour schemes of the paintings, geographical/location details of the rock art sites and the prehistoric remains in and around the rock shelters. Some times identification of the animal species in the paintings comprised the core theme of the paintings (Cockburn 1883). Questions of chronology, phases in rock art, styles and superimpositions of rock art were hardly looked into and it is obvious in this formative stage of rock art research. It is rather surprising that the opportunistic lead given by A.C. Carlylle and his recognition of the prehistoric nature of the rock paintings he discovered was not

carried forward and very soon the study of rock art receded into the dark recesses of Indian archaeological research dominated by the study of temples and other such monuments. Gordon (1958) although discussed rock art in a separate chapter, keeping in tune with the archaeological knowledge, dismissed the prehistoricity of rock art as a mere conjuncture. He dates the earliest rock art tradition in India to 7th - 8th C.AD. It was not until the discovery of 'Bhimbetka', now a household name for rock art in India that the research began to pick up momentum.

Second phase (1957 - 2003)

The discovery of Bhimbetka group of painted rock shelters by V.S.Wakankar in 1957 gave a new lease of life to rock art research in India. Interest among the archaeologists, ethnographers, art specialists and anthropologists in rock art grew and a comprehensive study of hitherto known rock art sites along with a deliberate intensive search for new sites began in the right earnest.

Some characteristic features in the progress of rock art research can be made out. The emphasis on the discovery and recording of new sites continued (Dikshit 1958; Jadia 1962; Kathuria 1975; Rao 1962; Sharma 1957 to mention a few). However, even in these brief reports effort by the investigators to give maximum information can be seen with regard to the rock paintings - a marked development from the earlier type of reporting. This phase witnessed publication of as many as 5 books and more than 250 articles were presented / published in national and international seminars, conferences and workshops and journals. Many painted rock shelters were excavated during this phase. Portable art objects were first discovered during this phase and subsequently a systematic problem oriented exploration for portable art sites was carried out (Kumar 1989; 1990). Broadly speaking the major trends of research in this phase can be outlined as follows.

1. Devising systematic data recording methods (Mathpal 1984; Ray 1984; Neumayer 1983; Wakankar & Brooks 1976; Chandramouli 1989 a; Parimoo 1984).
2. Conducting excavations in rock shelters, classification of rock paintings on stylistic basis and cross comparing the rock art data with data from excavations (Wakankar 1975; Mathpal 1981, 84, 85, 87; Pandey 1975; Misra et.al 1977; Sali 1984).
3. Systematic exploration for portable art sites (Kumar et.al 1988, 1990; Sonawane 1987; Wakankar 1985, 87).
4. Geomorphological study of rock art sites and the interpretation of contemporary climatic conditions (Badam and Sathe 1991; Rajaguru 1984; Joshi 1984).
5. Study of pigments of the paintings (Rai & Gopal 1987).
6. Regional studies in rock art (Rajan 1991; Sundara 1992; Pradhan 1990; Chandramouli 1994).
7. Formation of research organizations (Pandey 1990; Kumar 1990 a).

8. Application of scientific methods to solve the chronological problems and dating the petroglyphs and paintings (Kumar 2002; Bednarik 2002).

Recently an international gathering of scholars and scientists have come together to make a systematic and scientific study of rock paintings and to solve the question of dating them through scientific methods (Kumar 2002).

Rock art research in South India

Rock art in South India was recognized by antiquarians as early as they were discovered in Central India (Neumayer 1988: 23). The earliest discovery of petroglyphs (bruising) on the Kuppallu hill in Bellary district was made by Fawcett (1892), Bruce Foote later discovered some more bruising and engravings at the same site (Foote 1916 : 87-88). Fawcett also discovered rock carvings in Edakal cave in the Khozikode district of Kerala (1901: 409-21). He gave a good analytical description of the rock carvings as also the local tribal religious practices as some sort of an ethnographic analogy.

Munn (1934: 124-131) was the first to record the rock paintings in South India in the Hire benakal hills and gave a brief description of these paintings (1934: 244-46). Later Sundara (1968, 1974, 1987) discovered more painted rock shelters in the same region and gave detailed description of the paintings with some discussion about their chronology (1984, 1990). Gordon (1951, 1958) discovered engravings at Kuppallu and at Kannehalli village near Bangalore. Allchin (1960) recorded a number of rock paintings at piklihal. The book of Allchins (1968) set aside an entire chapter for rock art. But their discussion of rock art is highly tentative and most of the arguments revolve around pottery paintings.

Nagaraja Rao (1965) discovered 3 painted rock shelters near the excavated site at Tekkalakota. Paddayya (1968) recorded a few bruising from 5 sites - Mallur, Naradgi - Karikal, Vitragal, Hebbalbijurg and Kupgal in the Gulbarga district of Karnataka. Some of these bruising were earlier reported by Mahadevan (1941).

In all these writings, which are either brief reports or short discussions in the books on archaeology little attempt has been made to analyse the rock art and almost all of them confined to mere description of the sites and rock art therein.

Mathpal (1984) discovered some very important mesolithic paintings at Aregudda and Hiregudda near Maski in Bellary district. The theme of these red colour paintings include masked hunters with spears tipped and barbed with microliths chasing animals like deer and cattle. They are the only ones of their kind so far discovered in South India.

At the present state of our knowledge there are about 50 rock art sites in Karnataka 3 in Kerala and 30 in Tamilnadu (Rajan. Pers. Comn, Neumayear pers. Comn).

Rock art research in Andhra Pradesh

Rock art research in Andhra Pradesh didn't attract the attention of the scholars until recently. Barring a few reports of the discovery of painted rock shelters in the annual numbers of *Indian Archaeology - A review* (1959-60; 63-64; 64-65; 67-68; 73-74; 74-75; 76-77; 77-78; 1983-84) no detailed study has been attempted. A brief account would suffice to highlight the major aspects of rock art research in Andhra Pradesh. The earliest report of the discovery of painted rock shelters was made in 1941 (Krishnamurthy 1941: 55-89). This report is about the geology of parts of Mahaboobnagar and Gulbarga districts, which contain a brief report of megalithic burials at Dupadugattu and rock paintings at Sanganonipalli. It is very much heartening to note that even in this early report, meticulous recording of the rock shelter location, shape and direction, its local name and other such details have been taken note of which is not to be seen even in the later reports of *Indian Archaeology - A review*, which contained only a brief description of the rock art site devoid of any substantial details.

The first and only book that discussed the rock art of Andhra Pradesh was that of Krishna sastry (1983). He discussed the rock art of known sites at that time, and dated them to neolithic, megalithic and historical periods. Since the thrust of the work is on the proto and early historical periods of Andhra Pradesh the rock art data has not been analyzed critically, nor the known rock art sites were intensively studied.

The present investigator is the first to attempt a micro level study of a rock art site - Kethavaram in Kurnool district, for his M.Phil dissertation (1986) and carry the work further covering all the rock art sites of Andhra Pradesh for his Doctoral thesis. Although the rock art sites of Telangana were covered in my study of 'Rock art of Andhra Pradesh' (1994;2003), two new sites were reported later, which are covered in the present work. Also my earlier analysis of the rock art of Telangana has to be modified in the light of the new discoveries. Hence this present study.

This study is presented in 6 chapters. In this first and introductory chapter a review of literature on the rock art research in a pan Indian perspective is given; the research output on rock art in South India is dealt with separately.

In the second chapter the climate and environment of the Telangana region is described including drainage, soils, geology, flora and fauna.

The third chapter deals with the sites and the rock art therein.

In the fourth chapter the chronology of the rock art of Telangana is relatively attempted taking into consideration the 'internal analysis' of the rock art data, corroborated by the circumstantial archaeological/artefactual/material evidences.

The fifth chapter is about the 'Interpretation of rock art'. This perplexing problem is hypothetically dealt with taking into consideration the thematic and contextual situation of the rock art. For a conceptual appraisal the theories of interpretation are briefly discussed.

The sixth chapter contains the broad conclusions about the study of rock art of Telangana.

A detailed bibliography is appended in the end.

Environmental Setting

The Hyderabad plateau consists of mostly of peneplains developed in the old gneissic rocks. This region lies between the Godavari and Krishna rivers and west of Eastern ghats. The average elevation of the region is 450 - 600 m above mean sea level and it has a gentle slope from west to east. The general feature of this plateau region is senile peneplains intersected by broad, open and almost completely graded valleys. Some of the hill ranges from the west intrude into the region. The Nirmal hills in the Adilabad district, Sirnapalli hills in the Nizamabad district, and the Devarakonda - Bhuvanagiri hills in Nalgonda district belong to this category. The Balaghat hill ranges run from Maharashtra upto the central portion of this plateau region.

The area between Hyderabad, Warangal and Khammam is known as the 'Golkonda watershed', which divides the Krishna - Godavari deltas. Another watershed is the region between Bhima and Godavari rivers, a great swelling upland reaching 750 m above mean sea level at some places. In this plateau, the area between the Godavari and its tributaries - Penganga, Veinganga and Pranahita - is the only fertile black soil region.

Drainage

Godavari, the biggest river in Andhra Pradesh, enters the state near Basara in Adilabad district. The main tributaries of this river are Manjira, Pranahita, Penganga, Veinganga and Indravati flow through the Telangana region. Another big river, Krishna enters Andhra Pradesh at Alampur in Mahaboob Nagar district. The main tributaries of this river in the Telangana region are Dindi, Musi, Paleru and Munneru. These tributaries are purely seasonal in nature, which almost dry up during the dry season.

Soils

The soils in the Telangana region are predominantly black soils. These soils are rich in calcium and potassium, but poor in nitrogen. Irrigation is not needed much in this region as the black soils retain moisture for a long time. The next type of soil found at some pockets of the Telangana region are red soils. This kind of soil is deficient in organic matter and poor in plant nutrients but rich in phosphoric acid. But unlike the black soils, the moisture retaining capacity of the red soils is poor and hence irrigation is a necessity for these soils.

Climate

The climate of Andhra Pradesh in general may be described as tropical - monsoonal type. Differences of rainfall are both regional and seasonal and are more pronounced than differences of temperature. The slight regional differences of temperature are due to differences in altitude and the geographical location, with respect to the sea. In the Telangana region at places

like Bhadrachalam in Khammam district and Ramagundam in Karimnagar district, the average maximum temperature in the month of May is 45° - 48° C. and the minimum temperature is 12° - 14° C.

Rainfall

Like the rest of the Indian states Andhra Pradesh also suffer due to the vagaries of monsoon. More than half of the state receive less than 88 cm of rainfall and the variability, region wise is very high. The south - western monsoon (June - October) and the north - eastern monsoon (August - October) bring much of the rainfall to the Telangana region. The average rainfall in this region increases from 77.5 cm in Mahaboob nagar district to 102.5 cm in the northern districts, but the annual fluctuations are considerable, which vary from 22% to 25%. In Adilabad district, the average rainfall is as high as 115 -130 cm but the average rainfall in the Telangana region in general is 70 - 90 cm.

Geology

The majority of geological formations in the Telangana region are of the Archean group. The Archeans can be divided into two major groups namely 1. the Dharwars consisting mainly of schists and 2. The peninsular granite complex comprising the granites and gneisses. The schists are earlier formations into which the granites intrude. The Archean deposition was followed by the purana era, during which rocks of the Cuddpah and Kurnool systems, together known as puranas were deposited. Rocks of both these systems were deposited in a vast basin referred to as the 'Cuddapah basin', which extend into parts of Nalgonda, Mahaboob nagar, and Warangal districts. These rock formations consist of shales, limestones, quartzites and dolerites traversed by basic igneous dykes and sills. Thus, the geology of Telangana region in majority consists of granites and gneisses and to some extent limestones, quartzites and dolerites.

Flora

The forest cover of the Telangana region can be categorized as follows.

Tropical Dry Deciduous Forests

Those areas receiving higher precipitation have this type of forest cover. Adilabad and Warangal districts of Telangana contain this type of forests. The floral types include teak (*Tectona grandis*), Chirimanu (*Anogeissus latifolia*), Maddi (*Terminalia tomentosa*) Anduga (*Boswellia serrata*), Bamboo (*Dendrocalamus strictus*), *Terminalia arjuna*, Yegi (*Pterocarpus marsupium*) Tellabillu (*Chloroxylon swietenia*) Tunki (*Diaspyros melanoxylon*) Mohua (*Madhuca latifolia*), Kalivi (*Sterculia urens*) Gumpena (*Lannea grandis*), Burugu (*Salmalia malabaricu*), Jittegi (*Dalbergia latifolia*), soperu (*Dalbergia paniculata*) and *Syamida febrifuga*.

The lower canopy consists of kodesa (*Cleistanthus colinus*), usiri (*Emblica officinalis*), aracia sundra, *mimusops hexandra*, *Memecylon edule*, gotti (*Ziziphus xylopyrus*), chirangi

(*Buchanania latifolia*), rela (*Gussia figtula*), karinga or dikamalli (*Ixora parviflora*, *Gardenia lucida*), sandal (*Santalum album*) occur only in Zahirabad range.

The common shrubs namely tangedu (*Cassia auriculata*) danti (*Gymnosporia montana*), gubathada (*Helicteres isora*), istaripala (*Holarrhena antidysenterica*) tella sana (*Grewia hirsuta*), jaji (*Woodlindia floribunda*) and parijatam (*Nyctanthes arbor-tristis*) occupy the ground storey.

Deciduous Forests

Those areas receiving less and scanty rainfall have this type of forests. There are differences in composition of species and density of occurrence between different regions mainly due to the soil conditions and variations in precipitation. The Nizamabad district, parts of Mahaboobnagar (Nallamalais), Karimnagar and Warangal districts have this type of forest cover. The floral types of the deciduous forests are *Acacia leucopholea*, *Albizia amara*, *Angoecissus latifolia*, *Boswellia serrata*, *Buchanania angustifolia* (Pedda morali), *Ceistanthus collinus*, *Dalbergia chloroxylon*, *Dalbergia paniculata*, *Hardwickia binata*, *Lagerstremia parviflora* (Chinnangi), *Lannea coramandalica*, *Premna tomentosa*, *Pterocarpus marsupium*, *Sterculia urens*, *Soymida febrifuga* and *Wrightia tinctoria*.

Among the bamboos, *Dendrocalamus strictus* is very common, while *Bambusa aurindinacea* is only occasionally found in very moist localities.

Scrub Thorny Thicket Forests

Those minor species growing on the slopes of the hills, foot hills and plains belong to this category. The main variety in these forests is the thorny thickets. Parts of Hyderabad, Medak, Mahaboobnagar, Khammam and Nalgonda districts have in majority this type of forest cover. The chief species the thorn forests are *Acacia lactum* (pukitumma), *Acacia sundra* (sundra) *Carissa carandas* (kalikaya), *Acacia leucopholea* (tella tumma), *Dichrostachys cineraria* (velturu), *Flacourtia ramontchi* (kanregu), *Gymnosporia montana* (pedda chinta) *Prosopis spissigera* (jammi), *Pterolobium indicum* (korinda), *Randia uliginosa* (adavi manga), *Scutia indica* (konkimullu), *Ziziphus jujuba* (regu), *Ziziphus xylopyra* (gotti), *Ziziphus oenoplia* (pariki), *Albizia amara*, *Canthium parviflorum*, *Diospyros melanoxylon*.

Besides these species moderate representation of *Alangium lamarckii*, *Azadirachta indica*, *Canthium didymum*, *Dolichandrone crispa* (nerwothi), *Dolichandrone falcata* (wethi), *Gardenia gummifera*, *Hugonia mystax* (kakibira), *Ixora parviflora*, *Maba buxifolia*, *Mimusops hexandra*, *Strychnos nux-vamica* and *Strychnos potatorum* is also found in the thorn forests.

As per the 1984 - 85 census the total area under forests in Telangana is 54.4% of the total land area. District wise Khammam stands first with 52% of forest land while Nalgonda comes last with 6.9%.

Fauna

The abundant wild life that existed half a century ago was gradually depleted by human encroachment into the natural forests. At present the wild life is surviving in the game sanctuaries and wild life reserves in the state. However small game animals continue to survive in almost all the districts of the state.

The Carnivores

Tiger (*Felis tigris*), panther (*Felis pardus*), wild dog (*Cuon alpinus*), sloth bear (*Melursus ursius*), are surviving in Mahaboobnagar, Karimnagar and Adilabad districts where the forest cover is dense and allow the tiger territory of 35 sq.km each. Hyaena (*Hyaena hyaena*), fox (*Vulpes bengalensis*), jackal (*Canis aureus*), wolf (*Canis lupus*) and porcupine (*Hystrix indica*) are found in all the categories of forests of the state. They can be seen even in the country side preying upon the domestic animals.

The Herbivores

Of the herbivores spotted deer (*Cervus axis*), Nilgai (*Boselophus tragocamelus*), sambar (*Cervus unicolor*), black buck (*Antelope cervipora*), chital (*Axis axis*), wild sheep (*Civis cycloceros*) and hare (*Lepus timidus*) are found in good numbers and herds throughout the forested terrains and semi forested country terrains.

Of the winged game spotted dove, ring dove, peapowl, red jungle fowl, bush quail, green pigeon, partridge are found in various parts of Telangana. Other commonly observed birds are bulbul, blue jay, crow, common myna, parakeet, malabar hornbill, wood pecker and common vulture.

The Sites and the Rock art

Karimnagar district

Rekonda (18° 14'N; 79° 16'E)

This village is in the Husnabad taluk of Karimnagar district about 25 km south - west of district head quarters. From Husnabad it is about 10 kms to its north.

The site is about 5 kms west of the village. At the foot of a hillock locally known as Nallakonda (Black hill) and near an irrigational tank, on two flat topped granite boulders two large sized bruising are found (Fig.2). They consist of a sword wielding warrior, a shield (?) and a geometric figure, on two coarse grained granite boulders. The human figure with a sword (1.80 x 0.75m), revealed process of repatination. Above his head is another bruising of a conical object (55 cm x 24 cm). On another boulder nearby is the bruising of a shield, roughly rectangular in shape, the lower end being conical (100 cm x 45 cm).

Except these bruising no other form of rock art is found at this site. There are a few broken sculptures and siva lingas at the outskirts of the village. The bruising in the depiction of sword and shield indicate their historical antiquity.

Regonda (18° 07'N; 79° 08'E)

This village is located about 10 kms to the west of Husnabad, the taluk headquarters in Karimnagar district.

The site was reported by Krishna Sastry (1983). It is located about 1 km south east of the village in the granatoid hillocks in the midst of a good forest cover. There are two rock shelters in these hillocks facing east. One of them contain paintings. Unfortunately, this rock shelter was converted into a temple by constructing enclosing walls around this cave - like rock shelter. The interiors are lime washed thus obliterating the valuable paintings for ever.

The site and the paintings in the rock shelter along with the surface material evidences were discussed in some detail by Krishna Sastri (1983). "The paintings are of red ochre and consist of a group of tall men, some vertical lines intersected by long or short horizontal lines at the top indicating head and hands of the humans; nandipada; trident with a long shaft mounted on a box and intersecting a circle below; two little men shown in outline and mounted over a horse of disproportionate size; horizontally placed tridents crossing a vertical line; trident with a small shaft etc., On either side of these symbols are men and women with a long and curling plaited hair" . The author says that many iron working spots were discovered in the vicinity of the rock shelters.

Budigapalli (18° 05'N; 79° 11'E)

I could not visit this site because of the lack of transport facility which was largely curtailed by naxalite menace in the district. The following account is taken from Sastry's book (1983 : 47, 80 - 89, 236).

Budigapalli is a small village in the Husnabad taluk of Karimnagar district about 4 km east of Regonda. The village is surrounded by a ring of hillocks locally known as 'vasalagattu', 'sanjivarayani gattu' and 'venkataiah gattu'. The rock shelter containing paintings is located at the top of the hillock 'valasa gattu' near 'peerla gundu'. The rock shelter is about 1.50 m in height. The paintings are in red ochre and consist of:

1. Two horses with riders possibly holding spears. One of the horses has stripes on the body like a zebra.
2. A horse with a rider on the back.
3. A man in flat wash in standing posture with a long spear in his right hand.
4. Below figure 2 is this drawing which looks like a circle with spokes.
5. At the corner of the rock shelter there is a trident above a circle with radiating lines and two oblique lines below the circle. The trident has a long shaft which bisects the circle and goes below to serve as a third leg in addition to two oblique lines.
6. By the side of the 'trident - cum - sun disc' symbol is a couch with reclining back.
7. The most notable of the paintings from this site is a standing bull in a walking posture with the tail dangling away from the body. The bovine animal is in flat wash with a hefty body, short stumpy horns and a prominent hump. Unfortunately this painting has encrustations of black patches of fungus. In vigour and vitality the bull has parallels only in Ajanta paintings.

Artefactual/Material evidences

At the foot of the hillocks Sanjivarayani gattu and Venkataiah gattu, is a huge megalithic burial complex consisting exclusively of cist burials, most of which are damaged. One of these cists is encircled by sixteen boulders. Adjacent to Valasa gattu is a huge historical habitation mound enclosed by mud rampart with an existing height of 10 m above the surface.

Surface explorations revealed matt-red ware, conical bowls, deep bowls of well levigated clay, sherds of chocolate ware, highly polished black and red ware etc. Some of the pots have nail tip and floral designs.

Two deep rain gullies have been examined. At lowest levels a broken mace head and two neolithic axes were collected. Sastry (1983 : 236) dates the paintings to neolithic and megalithic times. He also dates the Regonda paintings to megalithic period.

Ramagundam (Peddapalli taluk; Karimnagar district)

This industrial and coal mining township is located in the Peddapalli taluk of Karimnagar district about 75 kms from the district head quarters. The quartzitic sand stone hillocks to the

east of the township contain two rock shelters with paintings in red ochre. However, these paintings were heavily encrusted by smoke and soot residues of industrial pollutants making their visibility difficult. On stylistic and thematic grounds the paintings are datable to mesolithic period (Neumayer . pers. comn. 1990).

Khammam district

Ramachandrapuram (17° 15'N' 80° 44'E)

The village Ramachandrapuram is located about 7 kms from Lankapalli, on the Sattupalli - Khammam road, in the Sattupalli taluk. From Lankapalli it is approachable from a diversion road. From Sattupalli, the distance is about 30 kms and from Khammam, the district head quarters. The site proper is located about 3 kms to the south east of the village, in the quartzitic sand stone hillocks in a dense forest.

The hillocks are popularly known as 'Neeladri gullu'. There is a dilapidated Siva temple at the foot of the hillock abutting a perennial spring and a seasonal waterfall.

The hillock raising to a height of about 50m from the surrounding plains contain 5 rock shelters on its flat top. Of the 5 rock shelters three have rock art, while in the fourth only traces of are visible. The fifth rock shelter though an ideal one does not have rock art.

The site at Ramachandrapuram is the only one of its kind in Andhra Pradesh, or for that matter in south India as a whole, where painted petroglyphs occur. Along with painted petroglyphs, paintings also occur side by side.

Theme of the rock art.

Rock shelter 1. Locally known as 'Bayyanna banda' contain badly preserved paintings in red ochre, from which no complete figures could be identified. Only one engraving of a geometric symbol 'circle - with - trident' (32 cm x 17 cm) is clearly visible. This geometric figure is what Sastry (1983) calls as 'Nandipada -cum - sundisc' and 'Trident - with a - sundisc' symbol, found at Regonda and Budigapalli rock art sites of Karimnagar district.

In rock shelter 2 painted petroglyphs of red ochre (deep brownish red in colour) are found in a fairly well preserved condition. The theme of these painted petroglyphs is hand figures, an animal figure, a figure of reptile, one geometric figure of a rectangular box and some faintly visible paintings of some geometric figures. Traces of paint in the engraved figures in light to dark brownish colour is visible. The hand figures are crudely engraved. Some are large and some are small. A total of 15 hand figures of painted petroglyphs are found. The animal figure is difficult to be identified.

In rock shelter 3, which is located about 20 m to the north of rock shelter 2, both paintings and painted petroglyphs are densely distributed. No artifactual evidence is found in

any of the rock shelters. The theme of the petroglyphs, painted petroglyphs and paintings include hand figures, female sexual organs, hoof prints of herbivores (bull) and paw prints of carnivores (tiger ?), geometric figures, honey bees in the shape of 'V' densely depicted one above the other. Interestingly huge honey combs are found high above the overhang of this rock shelter. The painted figures include schematically depicted human figures.

Discussion.

Ramachandrapuram is a unique rock art site in Andhra Pradesh, where painted petroglyphs, besides paintings occur in profusion. Except at one site in Orissa (Pradhan 1990) from no where else in India such painted petroglyphs were reported. Even outside India painted petroglyphs occur very sparingly. They occur at a few sites in South Africa (Thackeray 1987) and Spanish Cantabria (Ucko and Rosenfeld 1967).

The exclusive nature of the rock art of this site makes a comparative/analogical study difficult. As such, till more of such rock art data comes to light, the analysis of these painted petroglyphs should remain hypothetical.

Except the 'circle - with a - trident' symbol engraving, there are no other figures in the rock art of Ramachandrapuram which can be compared with the megalithic art of Andhra Pradesh, found at other sites as Regonda and Budigapalli in Karimnagar district and Naidupalli in Prakasam district. It is further intriguing to note that no material remains occur in or around the rock shelters or in the surrounding forest within a radius of 5 sq.km. The engraving of the God 'Hanuman' indicate that some of the engravings could be of historical times.

Mahaboobnagar District

Bollaram (16° 04'N; 78° 26'E)

This a very small village, on the left bank of river Krishna, a little above the confluence of the rivers Bhavanasi and Krishna in Kollapur taluk. In two rock shelters close to the river bed rock paintings in white colour were noticed. On the smoothed surface on one of the boulders, paintings in red ocure and white colours are noticed. Most of these paintings are defaced but one painting of a bird in a prostrate position with stretched forewings and legs. The colour of the figure is deep brownish red. In another rock shelter human figures and geometric designs are painted in white colour. Subramanyam (1997 : 33) tentatively identifies the paintings as mesolithic based on the discovery of a solitary parallel sided blade in this rock shelter. Pandian (1987) dates the paintings to the megalithic phase. But the style of the paintings as well as theme indicates them to be of historical times. White paintings occur in megalithic and historical period, but the depiction of bird in a prostrate position is very rare in the prehistoric paintings. For that matter except at Kethavaram (Chandramouli 1986) where a bird figure is found in the mesolithic context, no other site in Andhra Pradesh contain paintings of birds. It is likely that

these paintings belonged to the historical times (medieval) when the surroundings were frequented by ascetics and monks.

Mudumula (16° 20'N; 77° 25'E)

This village is located on the left bank of river Krishna in the Makhtal taluk of Mahaboobnagar district. It can be approached from Maganur a village on the Mahaboobnagar - Raichur highway. The region is composed of granite outcrops amidst a dry deciduous scrub jungle. Deforestation might have destroyed good tree cover in recent times. Still, the wild fauna is very rich today. The herbivores in majority are of deer species which appear frequently in small herds. Wild boar, hyaena, fox, porcupine, rabbit etc., are other varieties of fauna in this region.

Artefactual/Material evidences

There is a huge microlithic site in the fields to the south of the village on the bank of river Krishna, on an elevated ground. The site extending over an area of roughly one acre is a huge workshop site. The raw materials are chert, chalcedony, jasper, agate, carnelian and quartz. Many fluted cores are noticed but the finished tool component is meager.

To the west of the village, towards the Raichur road, 4 megalithic cairn circles were noticed. On two of the stone boulders of the stone circle the 'circle - with a - trident' symbol is found engraved. Still further, to the west of the village there is a vast complex of megalithic stone circles, menhirs and stone alignments. There is also a huge habitation mound. Parts of the mound are under dry cultivation. The pottery from the surface of the mound included coarse red ware, black ware, black and red ware and grey ware of the wheel made variety. Bangle pieces of shell and steatite also occur in the surface collection along with large quantities of iron slag. Despite the dry cultivation, the habitation mound of 2.5 m thickness remains largely undisturbed.

The local farmers informed that during the excavation of an irrigational channel which party cut the habitation mound, several pots containing bones along with iron objects were encountered. These could be megalithic urn burials. The megalithis at Mudumula are locally known as 'Banthi - rallu' (ball - like stones) and 'Niluvu rallu' (standing stones). These standing stones are blocks of stone of 4 - 6 m height are without any chisel marks. They must have been quarried by means of fire setting. The huge blocks of stone are arranged in a circular fashion, similar to the stonehenge of Great Britain. Some of them have fallen down. They weigh around 3 tonnes apiece. The habitation mound must be a multiculture one ranging from neolithic to megalithic.

Theme of the Rock art

The rock art at this site is very little comprising mainly of a couple of bruising and engravings on the boundary stones of the megalithic stone circles and adjacent rock boulders and a couple of faint black paintings in a rock shelter. In addition to the bruising of 'circle - with a - trident' symbol, Krishna Sastry (1983 : 47) reported some more bruising and engravings. One

of them is mother goddess figure. The figure has out stretched and upraised hands and the legs are shown apart. The breasts are shown hanging sideways. There is one crudely incised humped bull with an upraised tail, the horns curving forward and genitals prominently shown. In addition to these there are 5 more symbols of 'circle - with a - trident' in different shapes and sizes. I could not locate these engravings and bruising described by Sastry (1983 : 47).

The paintings are located in the midst of a rock out crop situated in a tank locally known as 'yellamma cheruvu gundlu' (Yellamma tank boulders). The rock shelter is a flat rock out crop that provides no shaded area. The rock is of coarse grained sand stone of brownish grey colour, and contain fragmentary paintings in black colour. The site is located about 2 km north east of the village.

The paintings include a schematic animal figure in outline portion of the head is in flatwash, another animal figure in flatwash with a long neck, a circle - with a - trident symbol partly visible and some other faint traces of thick lines.

This rock shelter is being worshipped in the name of local village goddess 'Maisamma'. The village perform rituals here praying for rains. They also sacrifice fowls and sheep.

Discussion

The rock art of Mudumula can safely be dated to the megalithic period. The petroglyphs as also the pictographs revealed characteristic traits of the megalithic rock art in Andhra Pradesh. Further, the 'circle - with a - trident' symbol occur on the megalithic burials themselves, a feature noticed at other sites such as Chagatur in the same district, an evidence which is clinching to date the rock art of Mudumula to the megalithic period.

Dupadugattu (16° 49'N; 77° 42'E)

The village Dupadugattu is located about 20km from Kosigi, a small town in the Kodangal taluk of Mahaboobnagar district. It is approachable by a diversion road on the Kosigi - Narayanapet highway. From Mahaboobnagar, the district headquarters Dupadugattu is 60 km away.

There are two painted rock shelters close to the village. One is in the granatoid hillock to the east of the village. The other is in a small rock out crop to the south west of the village. The present day flora and fauna is negligible. The flora is confined to a few thorny thickets and seasonal undergrowth while the wild fauna is almost absent. Krishnamurthy (1941 : 85) reported some megalithic cairn circles here but I could not locate any. The villagers are also not aware of any burial monuments. No other artefactual remains have been found.

Theme of the Rock paintings

At the centre of rock shelter 1 there are several superimposed paintings in red ochre out of which 3 animal figures can be made out. One of them is a humped bull figure in outline. The hump is low and the lower portion of the body is not clearly visible. The horns are crudely shown and one of them is short. This figure is faintly visible. Below this painted figure two schematic animal figures are drawn, superimposed by thick lines of the same colour. Besides these there are some more schematic animal figures and geometric line drawings of two inverted 'V' shaped lined, curved lines, etc.,

Rock shelter 2 is locally known 'Eddumeti gundu' (rock of bulls). Here also only a couple of complete figures in red colour could be made out. One of them is a humped bull in flat wash. The hump is prominently shown and the snout is roughly rectangular in shape. The front portion of the body is faintly visible. At the right corner of the rock shelter is another outline drawing of a geometric figure in the shape of a stringed musical instrument, which is slightly faded.

Relative chronology

As the number of rock paintings in the two rock shelters here is small, and the complete figures still less, it is relatively easy to make out phases from them on the basis of superimpositions and state of preservation. Using the state of preservation of the paintings as a criteria to distinguish phases on a temporal scale should only be tentative. The reason for attempting this criteria is that when the rock paintings are exposed to the ravages of nature uniformly, their state of preservation must also be uniform. If some are fresh and some are faded, it should indicate a gap on temporal scale between such paintings.

In rock shelter one the animal figures (one humped bull and two schematic animals) are superimposed over faintly visible paintings. Further the schematic animal figures are faded in comparison to the humped bull figure. Also the humped bull figure is partly superimposed over the schematic animal figure. Thus on the basis on superimpositions and state of preservation two phases can be made out in rock shelter 1 paintings. In rock shelter 2 also the humped bull figure is better preserved than some faded animal figures. Thus in the rock paintings of Dupadugattu two phases can be delineated.

As said before no arte factual evidences what so ever have been found at this site. Krishna murthy (1941 : 85) reported megalithic stone circles here, but I could not locate any in or around this site within a radius of 5 sq.km. Thus to ascribe these paintings to any culture period is, and ought to be tentative. The humped bull paintings, are a characteristic trait of the neolithic art of south India as a whole and the humped bull figure here can also be dated to the neolithic period (some neolithic occurrences have been reported at Punjanur about 20km from this site). Among the remaining paintings at Dupadugattu, the deer figures (?) geometric symbols and other faintly visible paintings which constitute the earliest phase of artistic activity here

have some vague stylistic similarities with such paintings in other sites of Andhra Pradesh, which are tentatively dated to mesolithic period. In this case also no artefactual evidences are coming to our rescue. However, at Sanganonipalli, another rock art site about 6 km from this site, an extensive microlithic site was reported (K.S.B.Keshav, Asst. director, Dept. of Archaeology & Museums, Hyderabad pers. Comn). However, there are no thematic or stylistic similarities in the paintings of these two sites.

Sanganonipalli (16° 40'N; 77° 44'E)

This village is located in the Makhtal taluk of Mahaboobnagar district. There is no pucca road to this village, but is accessible by a cart track from Dupadugattu which is about 6 km away. The nearest big village in Vinjamur which have bus facility from Kosigi and Mahaboobnagar towns. This village is found mentioned as a rock art site in the Journal of Geological Society (Krishna Murthi 1941 : 55 - 89). Before discussing the rock art proper it is apt to quote from the report mentioned above: "on the top of the hills forming the Kundapur hill range there is a curiously shaped boulder on the inner surface of which some line drawings apparently done with red ochre were noticed. The boulder is locally known as 'Ratha rasina gundu' (painted rock). The hill is to the south of Sanganonipalli and is called Saliri gattu; the part of the hill where the boulder is situated being known as 'Pangalaraya voddu', just north - west of the hill. The rock is the normal grey and pink granatoid gneiss and the boulder is shaped like the hood of a cobra, presenting a sheltered under surface, the hood forming sort of a roof. On the sheltered surface of the rock as well as on the under surface of the roof like hood portion of the boulder, there are numerous line drawings in brownish red colour. The patterns are complicated and the impressions are fading away into faint markings".

The report does not speak about other rock shelters, water resources, flora and fauna and artefactual evidences. The hillock which is to the south of the village has two more rock shelters - Erragundlu (red boulders) and Jangamadevi gundu (saint's boulder). But they did not contain any paintings. Behind the painted rock shelter 300 m away there is a perennial spring in a narrow crevice. To reach it one has to go down between the boulders 15 m. Several seasonal streams drain the hill and surroundings. The natural vegetation cover as it exists today is of a thorny scrub type. The wild fauna is also limited. Species like deer, rabbit, tortoise are the herbivores, sloth bear, hyaena etc. are the carnivores. Local people say that during the rainy season small herds of deer come to graze on the hillock.

Theme of the rock paintings

This rock shelter is locally known as 'chittari gundu' (picture rock/boulder). The rock shelter viewed from a distance appears like the hood of a snake. The floor of the rock shelter is solid sheet rock which gradually slopes from the northern end towards the outer opening at the southern end. At the southern corner of the rock shelter one can stand and observe the paintings while at the centre of the rock shelter one has to lie on one's back to see the paintings done on the concave surface of the inner ceiling portion. All the paintings are done in red colour.

The paintings consisting of big sized animals are superimposed one over the other in such a way that it is difficult to make out the complete figures. Some of the paintings in this rock shelter are fresh in condition, while some are relatively faded. The painted figures consist of 8 large sized deers some of them complete and some incomplete still some other schematic and stylised. The largest of the deer figures measured 1.55 m x 87cm. One head of the deer figure is drawn from a bird's eye perspective. At the right corner of the rock shelter there are a group of tortoise paintings superimposed and close to each other. On one of them tortoise figure an 'X' shaped design is painted. In another case two tortoise figures are drawn one superimposing the other. One of the most beautiful and best preserved figure of a tortoise is superimposed over a faintly visible tortoise painting. Several faint traces of tortoise figures are noticed at this corner of the rock shelter, often superimposing one another.

Relative chronology

Though the paintings in this rock shelter are very few reconstructing a relative chronological sequence on the basis of superimpositions and state of preservation is difficult, as most of the figures are superimposed one over the other in a confused pattern. On the basis of superimpositions and state of preservation two phases of rock art execution can be made out. One of the fresh looking deer figure is superimposed over a faintly visible geometric figure. The tortoise figures are superimposed one over the other. Below the fresh looking ones several faint traces of tortoise figures are visible. Thus two phases can be made out in the rock paintings of Sanganonipalli. Since the thematic composition in both these phases is the same it can be surmised that both the phases belong to one culture period, possibly mesolithic, with a time gap between the rock art phases.

Artefactual evidences

The surrounding flat top of the hillock where the rock shelter is located does not reveal any artefactual evidence. However, in the fields below, on an eroded surface a cluster of microliths made on chert, chalcedony and quartzite was discovered. The tool typology include parallel sided blades, backed blades, lunates, scrapers and burins, indicating an early mesolithic technology dominated by parallel sided blades. The blades made on quartzite are slightly

patinated while those on silicious stones are fresh (K.S.B.Keshav, Asst. Director, Dept. of Archaeology & Museums, Hyderabad pers, comn.).

DongalagattuTanda (16° 40'N; 78° 38'E)

This village is in the Kalvakurti taluk of Mahaboobnagar district. The site was reported by Mr.K.Ismail of ASI in Indian Archaeology - 1982 - 83 - A Review. The report says that "there is a mesolithic rock shelter with engravings probably filled with ochre representing animals with slender bodies and curved horns". No mention of the artefactual evidences is made in the report. Interestingly, this is the first rock art site in South India where engravings are dated to the mesolithic period. The only reported mesolithic engravings are from Orissa (Neumayer 1988 : 23).

Ranga Reddy District

Kokapet (17° 23'N; 78° 20'E)

The village Kokapet is in the Rajendranagar taluk of Ranga Reddy district, about 10 km north west of Hyderabad, near the Gandipeta reservoir.

The rock shelters occur in the hillock close to the village at a height of more than 120 m from the surrounding plains. The paintings done in red ochre consisted of herds of stag with long curvacious horns and a dog like animal thrawing the way of the stag herd. In another rock shelter, about a kilometre west of megalithic burials, two more rock paintings in red ocure were noticed. One consists of a spiral and the second one is inverted 'V' shaped design filled in with a wavy design, a pattern commonly found in Malwa painted pottery (Sastry 1983 : 47). He dates the stag and associated group of paintings to the neolithic - chalcolithic period on the basis of stylistic similarities in the depiction of stag horns. The artefactual/material evidences in the form of unfinished grey ware and polished stone axes were collected from the visinity of the rock shelters.

Warangal District

Pandavula gutta (Regonda mandal, Warangal district)

Pandavula gutta, in the local name of a coarse grained and weathered quartzitic sand stone hill range, situated about 1 km east of Ravulapalli a hamlet, (of 250 house holds) of Tirumalagiri village (Regonda mandal, erstwhile Parakala taluq) on the Warangal - Mahadevpur road, about 50 kms from Warangal, the district head quarters.

The hill range derives its name 'pandavula gutta', from the historical paintings found in one rock shelter, which the local folk term as the story of Mahabharata. It is interesting to note

that in the Ravulapalli village about 220 families belong to the 'mudiraju' caste, who claim their descent from the solar race of pandavas, and the *gotra* of some of the families is infact 'pandava'. Perhaps, the ancestors of the present day mudiraju caste during historical times might have coined the term pandavula gutta.

The site was discovered by Sri K.Ramakrishna Rao of the Dept. of Archaeology & Museums, Hyderabad. Nagi Reddy (1995, 1998) discussed to a certain extent the rock paintings of this site. During my field study I noticed 7 rock shelters in which paintings have been done.

The Site

'Pandavula gutta' a weathered coarse grained sand stone hillock, rises to a height of 150 m from the surrounding plains and runs in a north - south direction, the height gradually receding towards south and culminates about 1 km east of Tirumalagiri village, which is 3 km from Ravulapalli. At the central portion of this hill range rock shelters are noticed both at the foot of the hill and on the plateau above and in the valley between. Of the seven rock shelters two are located at the foot of the hill and the remaining ones on the plateau region. The rock shelters at the foot of the hill contain only faint traces of red paintings. In one rock shelter locally known as 'ongudu gundu' (bending rock) along with traces of paintings microlithic scatters were noticed. The tools, mostly non-geometric in content, were made on chalcedony, agate, chert, quartz and jasper.

The undulating hill range and the narrow valley is covered by thick vegetation of tropical dry ever green and deciduous forests. The forest cover sustain wild fauna in considerable numbers even today. The wild fauna include herbivores like Nilgai (*Boselaphus tragocamelus*), Black buck (*Antelope cervivora*), Wild sheep (*Civis cycloceros*), Hare (*Lepus timidus*), Porcupine (*Hystrix indica*) etc.,. The carnivores include Sloth bear (*Melursus ursinus*), Hyaena (*Hyaena hyaena*), Fox (*Vulpes bengalensis*)etc. The elderly people of the village informed that during their childhood (about 60 years ago) the forest was much dense and even tigers roared in the forest occasionally preying upon the domesticated cattle and sheep of their village. During the mesolithic times, the whole Regonda region must have been a dense forest.

Water resources at the site are almost perennial, bearing water upto 9 months in a year. There is a perennial spring on the top of the hillock locally known as 'potaraju chelama'. Near one rock shelter, in a rock crevice locally known as 'chirutangandu kunta' water is stored throughout the year. A seasonal stream locally known as 'panduvula vagu' contain water in small pools upto the month of March. In these water pools even today wild rice (*Zizania aquatica* : *Dussa vari*) grow between August - January.

The Rock shelters and the rock art

As said before two rock shelters at the foot of the hill contain only traces of paintings and one of them 'ongudu gunda', besides traces of paintings in red colour, revealed microliths also. The tool typology of the microliths indicate their non-geometric nature.

Rock shelter 3 (Eduru pandvula gundu)

This rock shelter is located at the top of the hill facing west and gives a commanding view of the plains below. It measures roughly 20 x 20 metres and provides a shaded area of about 2 m in front. No floor deposit occurs in this rock shelter as the floor is of sheet rock gently sloping outwards. This rock shelter is locally called as 'edurupandavula gundu' (facing pandavas rock), as it is located in front of the foot path from the village.

This is the most densely painted rock shelter at this site. About 50 painted figures and several faintly visible ones are noticed. All the paintings were done in red ochre of different shades.

The theme of the rock paintings consist of herbivores mostly deer species. Other animals like langur, tiger, porcupine, mangoose, boar and fish. Besides these, anthropomorphs, human figures, a peacock, a boar, indeterminate animals geometric figures etc. are also found.

On the basis of state of preservation and superimpositions two phases can be delineated from the red paintings of this rock shelter. At the many places dark brownish red deer figures overlap, light brownish red, faded deer figures. In some of the paintings the artist appears to have tried to replicate the nearby previous painted figures. The figure of a boar is very stylistically depicted with rectangular designs over the body in dark brownish red colour. Behind it a deer figure in light brownish red colour is also done with the same type of body design. Langurs are shown realistically with long tails.

The human figures are shown in various postures, standing near the animals and in praying posture. A row of 15 human figures hand in hand between the legs of huge deer figure (105 cm x 50cm) in a group dancing posture is a very interesting composition and is the only one of its kind in the rock art of Andhra Pradesh.

The peacock figure is finely depicted with all the body details. Although a peacock figure is found in the Kethavaram (16° 43'N;78° 12'E) paintings (Chandramouli 1986) also it is small in size devoid of bodily details as seen in this figure. The mangoose is also finely depicted close to a natural crack in the rock, which gives the visual impression to an observer that the mangoose is trying to hide below the rock. Fish figures in the paintings of this rock shelter are exclusive to this site. Although a fish figure is found in the Kethavaram rock art also, stylistically they are different and also are done in black colour. In the depiction of the fish also, the attempt of the artist to replicate the previous ones as in the case of deer figures, is visible.

The anthropomorphs have stylistic similarity with those at Chintakunta and Kethavaram (Chandramouli 2002). The geometric figures are a few and consist of triangular shaped lines one over the other and criss - cross patterns etc.

Rock shelter 4 (Janke mukku gundu : long nose rock)

This rock shelter is located on the top of the hillock in a narrow valley behind rock shelter 3; to its north east about 300 metres away facing west. The local name 'Janke mukku gundu' (long nose rock) is given to this rock shelter because of two natural deep holes in the rock wall which look like nostrils of the nose. There are only 4 deer figures and one human figure in this rock shelter. All of them are in dark brownish red colour, except one small dog figure, which is faded and light brownish red in colour. The deer figures are similar to those in rock shelter 4.

Rock shelter 5 (Mungisa gundu : mangoose rock)

This rock shelter is located to the north east of rock shelter 4 about 800 metres away facing north. This rock shelter gives a commanding view of the plains below. It is an ideal rock shelter giving a shaded area of 5 metres all around. But only two faintly visible painted figures are noticed. One looks like a mangoose (hence the local name to the rock shelter) and the other animal is depicted as if trying to catch the mangoose by its neck. Both the painted figures are light brownish red in colour.

Rock shelters 6 & 7 (Pandavula gundu; Kunthi gundu)

These rock shelters (by which this site is known) are located in the southern portion of the hill about 1000 metres away from the rock shelter 3. The first one faces east and the second one south. In the pandavula gundu rock shelter traces of red colour paintings are visible. However, it is famous in the surrounding villages for the fresco panel of historical paintings done in several colours on a lime mortar back ground. The villagers identify them as scenes of Mahabharata. But they are badly mutilated by fungus and also human vandalism. The kunthi gundu rock shelter on its southern face contain a series of negative hand prints in red colour. There are more than 60 such hand prints. Besides these a 9th - 10th century AD label inscription reading "Sri Utpatti pidugu" (Nagi reddy 1995) is also found. Inside this deep and narrow cave like rock shelter (one has to crawl on all four to reach the inner portion), two small stone sculptures of female deities are being worshipped even today. Several stone structures of historical times are found all around these rock shelters.

Chronology of the rock art

Of all the questions with regard to rock art the most problematic is its dating. Until recently the dating the rock art is only done in relative terms. Recently scientific dating methods are being applied to date the rock art in absolute terms. These methods were still at an experimental stage. For the relative dating of rock art the following aspects are taken into consideration. They are:

1. *Thematic content*
2. *Superimposition*
3. *State of preservation*
4. *Colour scheme*
5. *Archaeological evidence.*

In a given situation, all these aspects will some times be needed together to relatively date the rock paintings. Let us briefly discuss each of these aspects as to how far they will be useful in answering the problem of dating.

1. Thematic content

The thematic content in the rock art of Telangana mainly consists of animal figures such as deer species, humped bull (*Bos indicus*), hare, rabbit, mangoose, porcupine, dog, tiger etc., and birds such as peacock, human and anthropomorphic figures, hand prints and geometric figures. In the petroglyphs, humped bull occupies the predominant position, besides other animal figures such as deer, horse, dog etc., Besides these animal figures, human figures occupy an equally prominent place, numerically, in the thematic content of the petroglyphs; they are shown in various activities - riding horses, facing each other with weapons, holding or standing near animals, in praying posture etc. Geometric figures are less in number in the petroglyphic art, and wherever they occur they seem to be impregnated with symbolic and cultic meaning. This is particularly so in the case of the symbol 'circle - with a - trident', which occurs profusely in the petroglyphic as well as pictographic content of the paintings.

The thematic content of the paintings and also the petroglyphs, is useful for understanding their chronological position. Paintings of the deer figures occur in the earliest phase of the rock art data in Andhra Pradesh as a whole. Besides deer figures other wild animals such as hare, rabbit, mangoose, porcupine, birds etc., human and anthropomorphic figures occupy the next place. None of the animals in the first phase of painting activity are domesticated. The animals are painted, realistically and often at higher reaches of the rock shelter wall. All of

them are wild species. None of them are extinct and are seen even today in almost all the rock art sites. As such the pleistocene origin (upper palaeolithic) of the rock art tradition in Andhra Pradesh is ruled out. Then to which archaeological culture they belong to ? These animal and associated paintings indicate a hunting - gathering economy of their authors. In all likelihood the deer and associated painting may be said to belong to mesolithic phase, the stone age phase, more frequently found on the archaeological evidences in rock art sites. All the paintings of deer and associated figures are done in red colour.

Humped bull is the characteristic trait of the South Indian neolithic. In the excavations humped bull remains occupy the predominant position. In the paintings of humped bull and associated figures red colour is used. In the humped bull paintings phase there were no wild animals, where ever they occur they are schematic or stylised but never realistic as in the case of the first phase of rock paintings. Petroglyphic art, consisting of humped bulls in majority occur side by side with the paintings. The predominance of humped bulls in both paintings and petroglyphs, indicate a settled way of life, incipient agriculture and animal husbandry and hunting gathering. In the red painting phase of humped bulls, human figures occur in association with humped cattle. Petroglyphic art as well as paintings of black, white and red colour continue and in another phase contain only geometric figures and symbols. The horse and horse riding and fighting human figures with swords and shields, bow and arrow indicate the emergence of iron tool technology associated with huge burial monuments of the megalithic. This iron age art is almost exclusively petroglyphic in content. In the final phase of the rock paintings and engravings painted inscriptions, religious symbols, horse and elephant riding human with swords and shields, religious symbols such as swastika, eternal knot etc., narrative scenes of human processions indicate the historic period both early and medieval. Some of the historical paintings contain scenes of Mahabharata as at Pandavula Gutta in Warangal district. The animal figures in this phase of rock art activity are always drawn stylistically, and often they are so schematic that the identification of the species becomes impossible. Thus on the basis of the thematic content, 4 phases of painting activity can be traced.

1. *Hunting gathering phase* - Deer and associated human figures. All the animal figures are of wild life and none domesticated. Human figures are shown in isolation, never as hunter. The deer figures are drawn naturalistically. All the paintings are in red colour. No petroglyphs are found in this phase.
2. *Food producing phase* - Humped bull figures and associated schematic deer figures. Domestication of animals such as bull and dog. Petroglyphs make their appearance in which

also humped bull figures predominate. The anthropomorphic figures are less in number compared to the previous phase along with geometric symbols. Human figures with bows and arrows appear in this phase.

3. *Metal - using phase* - horses, iron tools of offensive nature such as swords, lances, shields, bows and arrows, human figures brandishing these weapons, in praying posture before geometric symbol etc. Both petroglyphs and pictographs display these themes. The colours used in the paintings are white, red and black in that order of preference. Narrative scenes are the characteristic feature of this phase.
4. *Historical phase* - horses, elephants, warriors, humans riding the animals, painted inscriptions, religious symbols, signify the historical phase of painting activity. Animal figures as well as human and anthropomorphic figures are very schematic. In the advanced phase of historical paintings scenes of Mahabharata, Brahmi and Kannada inscriptions occur.

Thus, on the basis of thematic content of the paintings 4 phases of painting and art activity can be delineated.

2. Superimpositions and state of preservation

This criteria is also useful for categorizing the rock art phases. This criteria can be used to corroborate the phases made out on the basis of the thematic content. The basic premise, in considering the superimposition for answering the question of chronology, is that if two paintings are superimposed one over the other, the one in the lowest position indicate that it is earlier than the painting superimposing it. However, the gap between these two paintings in terms of age, can only be indicated relatively. The state of preservation of the superimposed painting can be of some utility. If the superimposed painting is faded and the superimposing one is fresh, then it can be said that the superimposed painted figure is relatively older than superimposing one. If the thematic content also varies in the superimpositions, then it can be safely identified their relative antiquity in terms of prehistoric phases. The basic premise again in considering the state of preservation in the question of chronology is that when the paintings in a rock shelter are exposed to the ravages of nature uniformly, their state of preservation must also be uniform. In the paintings if same figures are fresh in condition and some are faded then this state of preservation must indicate their relative age.

3. Colour schemes

Some times the colour scheme of the paintings will also be useful in identifying the age of the rock paintings. In the paintings depicting the hunting gathering economy of the authors, only the red colour is used. In the paintings of the food producing economy also red colour is used in majority of the cases. Occasionally white colour is also utilized. In the metal using culture phase, the paintings are done in white, red and black in that order of preference.

4. Archaeological evidences

Circumstantial archaeological evidence from the surface, in and around the rock art site or within the rock shelters is useful to arrive at a relative dating of the rock art phases. This evidence however, is useful as a corroborative to the classification made on the basis of themes, colour schemes state of preservation and superimpositions.

Thus for dating the rock art of any region in India, the above criteria are used by the scholars. Let us now turn to the rock art of Telangana. An attempt will now be made to date the various phases of rock art from various sites. The classification of the rock art phases has already been done while discussing the rock art themes of individual sites.

At the present state of our knowledge there are 17 known rock art sites in Telangana. They are Bollavaram, Dupadugattu, Dongala gattu tanda, Jupalle Mudumula and Sanganonipalli in Mahaboobnagar district, Edthanur, Sivaru, Ramachandrapuram and Wargal in Medak district Budigapalli, Regonda, Rekonda, and Ramagundam in Karimnagar district; Ramachandrapuram in Khammam district, Kokapet in Ranga Reddy district; and pandavula gutta in Warangal district. Of these 17 sites, Ramagundam, Jupalle and Dongalagattu tanda are not included in this study as they are not studied in detail. The remaining 14 sites are taken up for chronological analysis, albeit tentative and relative.

Mesolithic rock art

As discussed above the rock art themes which in majority depict post pleistocene fauna comprising of fleet footed animals such as deer species, rabbit, tortoise, mangoose, porcupine, birds, human and anthropomorphic figures and geometric figures done in red colour can be dated to the mesolithic period. This classification is also substantiated on the basis of superimpositions, and state of preservation. The mesolithic rock art is found both in a single culture as well as multi culture contexts. Sanganonipalli and pandavula gutta sites are exclusive mesolithic rock art sites, while at Budigapalli and Dupadugattu mesolithic rock paintings occur along with rock paintings of other culture phases.

At Sanganonipalli the deer figures are large sized done in thick lines of red ochre. They are very stylistically represented and are superimposed one over the other, making it difficult to make out the complete figures. In addition the deer figures are as large as 1.8 m in length. They are done with a single brush stroke as can be identified by the thinning of colour pigment at the ends. Along with these large size deer figures, in thick outlines, there are tortoise figures done in flatwash, smaller in size (53 x 25 cm). These are located at the corner of the rock shelter. Some of them are faintly visible while some are fresh in condition. Also some of the fresh ones are superimposed over faintly visible tortoise figures. All are done in red colour. Sanganonipalli is the only rock art site in entire Andhra Pradesh, where exclusive mesolithic paintings are found. The archaeological evidences at this site in any form are absent. However, down the hill, an eroded surface of the fields, mesolithic tools have been noticed, comprising of parallel sided blades, lumates, scrapers, burials etc. It is likely that the mesolithic people used there rock shelter above the hill as camping places.

That there is a gap in the mesolithic occupation of this site can be gleaned from the state of preservation of the paintings. In the tortoise figures, some are fresh and several are faintly visible. The fresh looking ones are superimposed over the faded ones. The same feature of fresh and faded figures is noticed in the case of deer figures also. Similar feature is noticed in the mesolithic rock paintings of Kethavaram rock art site in Kurnool district. Interestingly the gap in the mesolithic occupation of the Kethavaram site is observed not only in the case of paintings but also in the mesolithic stone tool industry. In the stone tool clusters located in the open air context on the top of the hillocks there are both fresh looking tools as well as patinated ones. Both the fresh looking as well as patinated tools belong to the non-geometric microlithic category but the patinated ones are relatively large sized and are made on quartzite and chert; while the fresh looking tools are made on a variety of silicious stones such as crist, chalcedony, jasper, agate etc. Thus on the basis of state of preservation of stone tools as well as rock paintings two phases were delineated in the mesolithic rock paintings of Kethavaram. The same features is noticed in the mesolithic rock paintings of Sanganonipalli also. In view of the absence of human figures, anthropomorphs and geometric figures in the Sanganonipalli mesolithic rock art, as noticed in the mesolithic rock paintings in other sites of Andhra Pradesh, the Sanganonipalli paintings of deer and tortoise figures can be dated to the earliest phase of mesolithic art in Andhra Pradesh.

Another exclusive mesolithic rock art site in the Telangana region is the pandavula gutta in Warangal district. Here in four rock shelters mesolithic rock paintings were noticed and in two

more rock shelters historical freshcous datable to late medieval period are noticed. The mesolithic rock paintings of pandavula gutta, similar to the Sanganonipalli rock paintings consist in majority of large sized deer figures. But the similarity in rock art themes between these two sites stops here. Even in the depiction of the deer figures there is a striking difference. The deer figures in pandavula gutta are done in flat wash and are very naturalistically depicted in comparison to the Sanganonipalli examples. In addition to the deer figures, the red colour mesolithic rock paintings of pandavula gutta depict a variety of themes : animal figures like mongoose, dog, tiger, fox, monkey, aquatic animals like fish, human and anthropomorphic figures and geometric figures. There is one interesting composition of 15 human figures shown hand in hand in a ritual scene below the huge deer figure (90 x 50 cm). The deer figure is very realistically drawn. All these paintings depict the hunting gathering way of life have both fresh and faded figures in them.

Coming to the archaeological evidences, in one rock shelter a large number of microlithic material, both tools and debitage have been noticed. The lithic industry consist of parallel sided blades, lunates, triangles and trapazes, scrapers etc., made on silicious stone such as chert, chalcedony, asper and quartz. The red colour paintings of pandavula gutta can safely be dated to the late phase of the mesolithic in view of the thematic and stylistic diversity. The tortoise figures of the Sanganonipalli paintings may chronologically go well with the pandavula gutta examples.

In addition to these two exclusive mesolithic rock art sites, at Dupadugattu in Mahaboobnagar district, the earliest paintings in red colour consisting of very faintly visible animal and geometric figures are datable to the mesolithic period.

Neolithic rock art

The neolithic rock art is found in two sites, Budigapalli in the Husnabad taluk of Karimnagar district and Dupadugattu in the Kodangal taluk of Mahaboobnagar district. The neolithic rock art at these sites is characterised by humped bulls, the hall mark the neolithic art - both petroglyphic and pictographic - of South India as a whole. At Budigapalli a humped bull is very realistically drawn in flat wash along with some geometric symbols and human figures datable to succeeding culture periods. In view of the state of preservation of this humped bull figures it can be dated to the neolithic period. The circumstantial archaeological evidence revealed neolithic axes and wheel make pottery at the lowest level of habitation mound. At Dupadugattu also the humped bull figures are realistically drawn in flat wash. However no arte factual material datable to the neolithic period have been found in or around the rock shelters.

Megalithic rock art

The majority of the rock art sites in Telangana contain paintings and petroglyphs datable to the megalithic phase. As many as 8 sites contain megalithic art. They are Bollavaram and Mudumula in Mahaboobnagar district Budigapalli and Regonda in Karimnagar district Ramachandrapuram in Khammam district, Edthanur, Warangal and Sivash Venkatapur in Medak district. The megalithic art contain in majority geometric symbols human figures, anthropomorphic figures, animal figures such as horse etc.

Among the geometric symbols, which comprise the majority of the megalithic rock art - both in paintings and petroglyphs - the 'circle - with a - trident' symbol occupies an important place. This symbol is an exclusive symbol of megalithic art of Andhra Pradesh. In the rock art sites of Telangana this symbol is, in the rock shelters in association with human figures stylistically drawn as at Regonda; on the megalithic burial monuments as at Mudumula and Budigapalli. In the Regonda paintings the circle - with a - trident symbol is depicted in a ritual scene in which several schematically drawn human figures (with long bodies) are dancing in front of this symbol. Almost similar scene of ritual dancing is noticed in the petroglyphic art of Naidupalli rock art site in Prakasam district. Here in front of this symbol several ithyphallic human figures (with heads shown in a horizontal line) are dancing. It becomes clear that this symbol is impregnated with some cultic/religious meaning which is not understandable to us at the present state of our knowledge. It is not out of context to mention that this symbol is actually found on the burials of megalithic period on the orthostat of the cists and boulders of stone circles.

In addition to this geometric symbol, the thematic content of the megalithic art contain human figures in a variety of postures and activities - riding animals both humped bull and horses, facing each other with swords and shields etc., The anthropomorphic figures are rare and in one case - on the orthostat of a cist burial at Chagatur in Mahaboobnagar district and anthropomorphic is stylistically shown with horizontal lines on the triangular shaped body legs, hands and head. Other geometric figures include eternal knot etc.

Archaeologically it is well understood that megalithism continued well into the early historical period and it is for this reason that we come across religious symbols in the megalithic art.

Historical rock art

As emphasised earlier, the megalithic rock art contained historical elements and to demarcate the megalithic and early historical phases in rock art should only be tentative. The co-existence of megalithic and early historical cultures side by side could have resulted in the cultural, religious and trade exchanges and these manifest in the religious symbols in the megalithic art. The paintings in white and red colours depicting horse riding warriors with swords and shields found in the rock paintings of Budigapalli and Regonda may belong to the early historical period. The bruising of huge human figures with a sword and that of a shield on another boulder found at Rekonda in Karimnagar district could be of late medieval times. The circumstantial archaeological evidence of medieval temples and sculptures may be taken as a clue to date the bruising of this site.

The frescoes of pandavulagutta done in a variety of colours - red, white, yellow, blue, green and orange depict scenes of kings, gods and goddesses, court, horse riding warriors, palaces etc., in horizontal lines of composition. These are drawn over a thick coating of lime plaster. These frescoes are very badly damaged both by natural agencies such as moisture and fungus and human vandalism. The locals call them the stories of the epic of Mahabharata and due to these frescoes the site got its name - pandavulagutta (the hill of the pandavas).

The sum up this discussion of the chronology of the rock art of Telangana it should be stated that the classification and dating of the rock art phases to the Mesolithic, Neolithic, megalithic and historical periods is tentative and may need changes in future studies when new rock art data comes to light.

Interpretation

Ever since the discovery of rock art in various parts of the world, it has been the endeavour of scholars to interpret the meaning of rock art depictions i.e. to answer the question as to why the prehistoric people resorted to paint or engrave on the walls of rock shelters and in deep carves, and the consequence of this inquiry led to the formulation of various theories, in the light of which scholars world over has been trying to interpret the rock art data.

Even though the discovery of rock art in India was made much earlier than the European palaeolithic art, or the art of the Australian aborigines, or the art of the Bushmen of Southern Africa, the research output with respect to the interpretation of rock art is badly lagging behind. On the contrary, in Australia, Americas, South Africa and Europe significant studies have been made and several theories of interpretation were put forth.

Although in recent times there has been a severe criticism of the ethnocentric theories of art origins, it was in Europe in the 19th century, that the theories of interpretation were advocated and were adopted by scholars in various parts of the world, until recently. In India too all the scholars tried to study the rock art in the light of the theories proposed in the European context (Mathpal 1984; Neumayer 1983; 1989; Chakravarty 1984 for example). As such it would not be out of place to briefly review the theories of interpretation, as a background to the analysis of the rock art of Telangana.

Before going into the review of the theories it should be kept in mind that there are two divergent schools of thought in the rock art scholars with regard to origins of art : one school argues that during prehistoric times a common mental template was operating and governing the prehistoric mind uniformly throughout the world. This is manifested in the occurrence of uniform palaeolithic industries throughout the world, and rock art traditions. On the other hand opponents of this school, who see this theory as euro-centric and biased, and argue that the evolution of rock art is the outcome of the various distinct forms of *Homo sapiens* and is independently developed in various parts of the world. This school of thought argues that comparisons and analogies between various rock art traditions of the world is not admissible as they are widely separated in terms of time and space. There are logically valid points in both these arguments. Let us now discuss the various theories of interpretation of rock art and critically evaluate each of them. Then an attempt will be made to interpret the rock art of Telangana.

Art for Art's sake theory

This is the first theory to explain the meaning of rock art. After the establishment of the knowledge that palaeolithic man was responsible for works of art, it became essential to explain how such an apparently 'advanced' activity of beautiful rock art depictions in deep caves could have existed among such obviously 'primitive' people. Some scholars have tried to explain the phenomenon of palaeolithic art in terms of exceptionally rich environmental conditions. The abundance of wild game fauna could have made economic activities so easy that they had plenty of leisure and that leisure was the nourisher of arts, and that rock art served the purpose of ornamentation. Some have maintained that human beings have an inherent wish to express themselves artistically, apart from all material consideration. According to the proponents and supporters of this theory there are no hidden meanings in rock art execution and the rock art themes depict the inner urge of palaeolithic man to portray the animals he hunted, or living with, in a realistic manner (most of the early advocates of this theory are French archaeologists (Ucko & Rosenfeld 1967)).

Sympathetic magic theory

Towards the end of 19th century a great change took place and the first analytical modern primitive life appeared coinciding with the first reliable studies and reports on the every day life of life of tribes which could still be studied by ethnographers. These studies have highlighted the complexity of the thoughts and actions of the primitive tribal groups, and warned at the dangers of wide generalisations about primitive cultures. As a consequence of the knowledge of religious practices and cultic rituals of these primitive tribal groups many rock art scholars who were earlier argued for 'art for art's sake theory', began to accept that there is a lot of unexplained meaning and symbolism in prehistoric rock art, and turned to interpret it in the light of the ethnographic knowledge of religion and ritual practices. Thus evolved the 'sympathetic magic' theory.

The 'sympathetic magic' theory is based on three points related to the occurrence and themes of prehistoric art 1. That most of palaeolithic were of animals, 2. That only animals which were potential food were ever represented and 3. That the palaeolithic representations were placed in contexts which were difficult of access. Drawing parallels from Australian Aboriginal art and other tribal groups of America and South Africa, the theory of 'sympathetic magic' was put forth. There is a wide spread belief among living primitive tribal groups in sympathetic magic by which the human could control over, or at least exercise a fundamental influence on, whatever the subject was represented in the art. According to the supporters of this hunting magic theory, in the depiction of game animals, the prehistoric man believed that it could increase the

number of food animals available to them, or could gain control and facilitate capture of the already available food animals. In side by side of the game animals the occurrence of predatory animals such as tiger posed a problem to the hunting magic theory. To evolve this riddle, some new concepts were added. In the increase ceremonies and hunting magic of food animals the idea that the sympathetic magical rites were also directed to the destruction of beasts of prey. The coexistence of carnivores along with herbivores thus in no way conflicted with the hunting / sympathetic magic theory as "people who seek possession of animal of their quarry to ensure success in the hunt and also expect to gain the qualities of predator through its image and in this way be endowed with its skill in catching game" (Ucko & Rosenfeld 1967: 130).

Also included in the sympathetic magic theory are the paintings and engravings of female figures, figurines of an ivory and bone, depictions of genital organs of the females etc., The idea behind these depictions is that the population of the females would increase. It was also interpreted that the depiction is in view of their observation with the procreative activity be it the animal or human kingdom. Certain geometric symbols such as tectiforms were identified as schematic representation of female element, and that the caves having such female element in paintings and engravings as sanctuaries. The superimposition of the same figure of symbol are over the other is interpreted, on ethnographic lines, as with the intention of drawing the mystical power of the previous painted image on the new one. The hand prints and drawing, both negative and positive, were interpreted as been made offer soon magical rituals in the caves. In the context of the Australian aboriginal art the hand prints were regarded as the signatures of the individual artists.

To sum up this brief discussion on the various theories of interpretation proposed in the context of the European rock art especially that of France - cantabrian cave art it should be mentioned that until the later part of the 20th century, all over the world, the same theories have been used to interpret the rock art of respective regions. The arts of art's sake theory influenced the scholars of Africa (Willcox 1984) and America (Halverson 1987) even into the later part of the 20th century. Although there has been a heated discussion and argument about the validity of various theories and the relevance of ethnographic analogies in the interpretation of rock art data, no conclusive answer have so far been found as to which theory is on relevance. But the consensus is that no single motive or meaning can be found in the rock art depictions and several motives can be said to have influenced the outcome of rock art depictions.

In the Indian context, scholars have tried to interpret the rock art in the light of the European theories of art for art's sake hunting magic/sympathetic magic. Mathpal (1984) sees

hunting magic motive behind the Indian rock paintings while Neumayer (1983) support art for art's sake theory. In his later work (1989) however, he appears convinced of the magical motive behind the Indian rock art. Some other scholars (Chakravarthi 1984 for example) have advocated the utilization of ethnographic parallels in the Indian context for analogical study and interpretation of rock art. However, scepticism prevails over the applicability of the ethnographic rock art data for interpreting the prehistoric rock art. The problem becomes more confounded as the present day tribals who inhabit the vicinity of rock art sites (and themselves practice art execution abbit different in form and context) does not accept any sort of relationship with the prehistoric art. The ethnographic analogy thus becoming meaning less, the only way out for interpreting the rock art is the resort to the application of other theories discussed above, in the study of the rock art of Telangana. But, before attempting the interpretation of rock art of Telangana, it would be apt to discuss its broad characteristics to have a better perspective of various aspects of the rock art corpus which would be useful in the interpretation.

Characteristic features of Rock art of Telangana

Mesolithic phase

The Mesolithic rock art of Telangana, in its thematic context, comprise animals of deer species - the hall mark for the identification of Mesolithic phase - and other animals like mangoose, torroise, carnivores like tiger and birds. Human figures and anthropomorphs and geometric figures comprise the rest of the themes. All the paintings of the Mesolithic phase are done exclusively in red ochre of various shades. The deer figures at Sanganonipalli paintings are very large and are done in outline, the rendering is with a single brush stroke beginning with the head and proceeding with the body portion. The fluidity of brush movement is very obvious from the gradual thinning of colour pigment towards the end of the body of the painted figure. The deer figures at pandavulagutta are equally large but are done in flat wash. There are also other animal figures including deers, mangoose, fox, tiger, monkey, peacock etc., which are smaller in size and are both in outline and flat wash style. In the depiction of a large sized deer figure in flat wash, a group of 15 human figures hand in hand are depicted.

One more worthy feature in the Mesolithic rock paintings of Telangana is that no hunting scenes are depicted although game animals occur. The deer figures are everywhere drawn in isolation. The human figures are no where depicted as hunters, nor do they hold any bows and arrows. Female depictions are absent. Domestic activities are equally absent. The human figures are depicted in various postures and styles but never involved in any sort of activity.

One important point to note here is the nature of occupation at the rock art sites during the mesolithic period. Sanganonipalli, in the vicinity of rock art locates, no mesolithic tools were found and at Pandavulagutta is - one rock shelter only few scatters of microliths are found. This indicates that during the mesolithic period the occupation of the rock art sites, was seasonal and intermittent. This feature is also noticeable in the density of rock art depictions. At Sanganonipalli, the well preserved painted figures does not exceed 15 in number leaving aside partly visible ones and patches or paintings. At Pandavulagutta, similarly the total number of mesolithic paintings does not exceed 35 painted figures.

Superimpositions in the mesolithic art of Telangana is one of the most interesting features. At Sanganonipalli several tortoise figures are superimposed one over the other. Similarly the deer figures at Pandavulagutta are superimposed over faintly visible figures, of the same animal, stylistic and thematic heterogeneity is another characteristic feature of the rock art of Telangana.

Neolithic phase

The rock paintings of the neolithic phase in majority depict humped bulls, in association with or without human figures. All the paintings are done in red colour. The thematic and stylistic heterogeneity of the mesolithic rock art is taken over by thematic homogeneity of humped cattle in the neolithic phase. In neolithic rock art of Telangana some minor stylistic variations can be observed in the depiction of physical features of humped bulls such as hump, horns and body. Petroglyphs make their appearance in the neolithic phase elsewhere in Andhra Pradesh but they are absent in the neolithic art of Telangana. The neolithic rock art sites of Budigapalli and Dupadugattu have exclusively humped bull figures in the neolithic paintings. Both are multicultural sites where preceding and succeeding cultures of the neolithic are represented in the rock art.

Megalithic phase

The majority of the rock art of Telangana is datable to the megalithic phase. The megalithic art is mostly symbolic in nature; although animal, human and anthropomorphic figures continue, they are secondary in nature and significance. Petroglyphs occur in the megalithic art of Telangana and in the petroglyphs also, symbolic figures are predominant. The human figures both in paintings and petroglyphs are either shown in isolation, in pairs or in association with symbols. The most commonly occurring symbol in the megalithic art is the 'circle - with a trident' symbol not only in Telangana rock art sites but also elsewhere in Andhra Pradesh. This symbol occurs both in paintings and petroglyphs. At Mudumula and Chagatur this symbol occurs on the megalithic

burial monuments. That megalithism continued into the historical phase indicate that some of the megalithic art could be of the early historical times.

Historical phase

The historical paintings art identifiable by religious symbols , animal depictions like horse and warriors and geometric symbols. The red colour paintings at Regonda and Budigapalli, Mudumula and Bokaram, may be dated to the historical times. The bruising of a warrior with a sword and shield may be of the medieval times. The multi colour prescoes of the pandavulagutta along with a series of hand prints in red colour may be of late medieval times. The historical paintings are narrative in nature and does not contain any naturalistic elements.

With this brief discussion of the characteristic features of the rock art of Telangana let us now try to interpret the meaning of rock art in various phases in the light of the theories discussed above.

In the mesolithic art although no hunting scenes are depicted the very occurrence of wild game animals especially deer figures may be taken to indicate their hunting magic intension. The theory states that in depicting the game animals the intention is that they will magically influence the proliferation of their population. This extends further and says that the depictions will influence the hunting activity by making available the animals easily for hunting. The carnivorous animals such as tiger and scavengers like fox in the paintings may indicate the intension of the artist to acquite the predatory skills of these animals in his hunting activieyt. The same theory of hunting/sympathetic magic can be seen in the superimporition of the same animal figures. The deliberate superimpositioning of animal figures is done with a view to drawn the magical powers of the previous figures as to the new ones thereby continuing the acquisition of magical skills in hunting the animals. The tortoise figures in the Sanganonipalli paintings further indicate their being on totem symbols. Similar depictions are found in the Aboriginal art of Australia. The Mesolithic rock art in its total zoomorphic nature indicate in majority its magical motive. The anthropomorphic figures further indicate the magical motive as the most important one in the meaning behind the Mesolithic art.

By the Neolithic times, the total dependence of human being on natural forces was lessened due to the invention of agriculture, domestication of animals and pottery. However the Neolithic phase in South India was marked by a partial dependence on hunting gathering activity also. As such the zoomorphism in the rock art continues in the depiction of humped bull realistically shown. The humped bull in its importance as an economic asset to the Neolithic man

might have also been, as a consequence, a significant aspect in the religious/cultic ideas and practices of the society. Hence the exclusive occurrence of humped bulls in the rock paintings. The magical motive of the Mesolithic period might have also continued into the Neolithic period as man is still dependent on animals, although domesticated. The anatomical accuracy of the humped bull paintings indicate the importance the Neolithic man attached to these paintings.

The megalithic art signifies a 'U' turn in the meaning of rock art as the shift from zoomorphism and naturalism towards symbolism and schematization indicate. This may indicate the mental shift of the proto historic man and his perceptions towards rock art. The discovery of iron, settled way of life, development of agriculture formation of craft specialized human groups and urban agglomerations -all might have changed the meaning of rock art. In the symbolism there are indications of crystallization of religious/cultic beliefs. The 'circle - with a - trident' symbol appears to be cult symbol of the megalithic art of Andhra Pradesh; as can be seen in the depiction of human figures in a praying posture in front of this symbol at Regonda. Similar scenes are noticed in the petroglyphs of Naidupalli rock art site in Prakasam district. The perceptible shift of emphasis from game animals to abstract symbols maybe considered as an indication of the change of meaning behind rock art from simple magical motive to complex religious/cultic motive. This could be due to the social/religious and economic developments resultant of the discovery of iron smelting technology.

In this context, it is worthwhile to briefly discuss the meaning of the spectacular painted petroglyphs of Ramachandrapuram rock art site in Khammam district. These painted petroglyphs contain interesting themes like hand prints, female sexual organs, bone like representations, long bodied human/anthropomorphic figures, hoof prints of herbivores and paw-prints of carnivores etc., These so far as thematic content is concerned seem to indicate a hunting - gathering economy of their authors. Comparisons can be drawn from the themes of upper palaeolithic art of the France - cantabrian region of France. However, the circumstantial evidence contradicts any such comparisons and indicate, probably a megalithic date. The repeated representation of female sexual organs indicates the fertility cult. The hoof prints and paw prints of herbivorous and carnivorous animals respectively appear to indicate the motive as information gathering / exchange / transmission so common to all the primitive societies. The anthropomorphs and human figures with their long bodies and limbs too hint at their being as of cultic/religious significance. Unless further evidence of similar painted petroglyphs comes to light and circumstantial evidence, to relatively/absolutely date them, not much can be said about their meaning.

By the historical period, the rock art appears to have changed its meaning from a naturalistic - symbolic feature to the narrative. The historical paintings and petroglyphs depict the mundane narrative scenes of the day to day activities on the one hand and narrative scenes of religious stories on the other and thus need not be considered in the problem of 'understanding' the meaning of rock art, which is very much obvious to the onlooker.

Before concluding this discussion on the interpretation of rock art of Telangana a few words are necessary. Anywhere in the world interpretation of prehistoric rock art is a topic of much debate and controversy. The ethnographic contextual information in Australia, North America and Africa has been of much help in understanding the meaning of respective regions and in drawing analogies in the study of rock art of Europe, despite many controversies. In the Indian context the present day tribes does not accept any sort of relationship with the prehistoric rock art in the vicinity of their settlements. Coming to South India, practically no ethnographic information is available which will be helpful for the interpretation of rock art. In this situation the internal analysis of rock art and the application of various theories of interpretation, have been attempted in the attempt to understand the meaning of rock art of Telangana.

The rock art of Telangana during the Mesolithic phase, in its preponderance of wild game animals seem to have been made with a hunting magic motive. In the succeeding Neolithic phase also the magical/motive seems to have continued although the domestication of animals and incipient agriculture might have changed the perception of the prehistoric man towards rock art. In both the Mesolithic and Neolithic rock art naturalism is the chief characteristic be it wild animals such as deer or domesticated animals such as humped bull. By the megalithic times this naturalism and zoomorphism was taken over by abstraction and symbolism. In the symbolism also some sort of religious/cultic meaning can be visualized. In the depiction of animals such as horse and humped bull the narrative element starts in the megalithic art which in the historical times becomes more prominent.

To conclude, it must be admitted that no single theory or concept can satisfactory answer the many intricacies of prehistoric art, and no single motive can be said to operate in the prehistoric mind in depicting the themes. Both magical motive as well as art for art's sake theory can be said to operate in the Prehistoric rock art. In the end the problem of interpretation of rock art remains hypothetical, tentative and difficult to be solved.

Conclusions

Although the discovery of rock art in India has been done almost simultaneously to that of Western Europe, the rock art research as a whole never attained the same quality in scientific temper. If we assess the state of the art in rock art research from a global perspective, the situation in India appears to lag far behind. Coming to South India, the situation is no good viewed from a pan -Indian context. Whether this is due to the compulsion of research priorities or otherwise, the situation is such that we cannot have a comprehensive picture of rock art of South India on a whole.

It is now universally accepted that rock art is the natural and instinctive cave of the cognitive capabilities of *Homo sapiens sapiens* independently in various parts of the world. It is important to quote here that the theoretical and methodological developments in the rock art analyses throughout the world, until recently, were influenced to a large extent by the research in rock art in European continent; in the light of theories of classification and interpretation of upper palaeolithic art of Franco-cantabrian region of western Europe. This being the global phenomenon, Indian rock art research also progressed in the same lines.

In Andhra Pradesh, the present investigator is the first to make a comprehensive study of rock art. The present study of rock art of Telangana includes two new rock art sites recently discovered. At the present state of our knowledge there are 16 rock art sites in the Telangana region of Andhra Pradesh.

Geographically Telangana region comprises of 11 districts of present day Andhra Pradesh and occupies the entire plateau region between Godavari and Krishna rivers. Geologically the rock art sites are located in the Granite and sand stone/lime stone formations.

The classification of the rock art of Telangana is done taking into consideration aspects like theme, superimpositions, style, colour schemes, state of preservation of rock paintings together with circumstantial archaeological evidences. This tentative and relative chronological sequence dated, in equally tentative tone, to various culture phases in prehistory, protohistory and historical periods.

Dating of rock art of Telangana to the Pleistocene epoch can safely be ruled out on the fauna depicted in rock art did not contain any extinct animals. All the animals depicted in the rock art are post - Pleistocene fauna which can still be seen today in the rock art sites. As such,

taking into consideration the availability of artefactual evidence together with the animal depictions, the rock art activity in the Telangana region can be said to begin with the Mesolithic period.

The Mesolithic paintings of Telangana contain animal figures of deer species in majority. The deer figures of Sanganonipalli and Pandavulagutta are large sized (more than 1 m in length) and these two sites are exclusively Mesolithic rock art sites.

The Neolithic phase of rock art is represented by Budigapalli and Dupadugattu sites. The neolithic rock art is characterised by the uniform depiction of humped bulls in flat wash.

The majority of the rock art of Telangana, quantity wise, belong to the megalithic period. The megalithic art consists of both paintings and petroglyphs, but the thematic content is the same in both the forms of rock art. The characteristic feature of the megalithic art is the preponderance of symbolism over zoomorphic element. The 'circle - with a - trident' symbol - the hall mark of megalithic art of Andhra Pradesh - occurs prominently in the paintings and petroglyphs of Telangana also.

The historical paintings consist of geometric and religious symbols, horse riding human figures and scenes from epics. These historical paintings occur in sites like Bollavaram, Pandavulagutta, Budigapalli and Sivaru Venkatapur.

The preponderance of the animal depictions in rock art during mesolithic and neolithic periods, and the gradual shift towards schematization and abstraction and symbolism in the megalithic art can be taken as indicative of the cultural and technological development and the corresponding change in the mental template and perception of the prehistoric man towards rock art. The megalithic art is ritualistic/cultic in nature and the corresponding historical rock art is just mundane and narrative.

The interpretation of the rock art is the most controversial and problematic in the rock art analysis. However, an attempt has been made to understand the meaning of the rock art of Telangana in the light of various theories of interpretation propounded in the context of European palaeolithic art. It has been found good for the interpretation of mesolithic rock art and to a certain extent neolithic art also. The art for art's sake theory too holds good to a certain extent. By the megalithic times the meaning of rock art seems to have changed from naturalistic animism to abstract symbolism and genesis of codified cultic/religious practices of the megalithic

period have no known theories of interpretations. However, it can be said that the megalithic symbolism replaced naturalistic forms in the prehistoric belief system and the symbols represent totems or cult signifiers.

On the whole the rock art of Telangana have certain unique feature which came out more prominently in an intersite comparison within Andhra Pradesh.

- # The Telangana rock art sites such as Sanganonipalli and Pandavulagattu are uni-culture rock art sites - or feature not found elsewhere in Andhra Pradesh.
- # The bulk of the rock art of Telangana is megalithic which is also unique in the rock art of Andhra Pradesh.
- # Pandavulagattu is the only rock art site in Telangana, or for that matter in Andhra Pradesh on a whole, where prescribes occur in a rock shelter location, datable to the historical period.
- # Ramachandrapuram rock art in Telangana is the only one of its kind in the entire corphs of South Indian rock art South India where painted petroglyphs occur. Only at some sites in Orissa and Bihar. Painted petroglyphs have so far been reported.
- # Generally speaking the habitations, at the rock art sites, right from the prehistoric times down to the historical times, can be classified as seasonal and intermittant. The feature is more conspicuous during the Mesolithic period substantiated by both rock art and artefactual data.

On the whole the rock art of Telangana have certain unique features, not to be found in the other rock art sites of Andhra Pradesh, particularly during the mesolithic phase. This stylistic and thematic diversity is taken over by uniformity by the neolithic rock art. Similarities in them and style are noticeable between various rock art sites of Andhra Pradesh. The only unique feature in the neolithic art of Telangana is the absence of petroglyphs. The common unifying features, particularly in thematic content, continues to grow in the megalithic and historical art, in the symbols and narrative scenes.

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