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2018

- ANNAMAR TEMPLE AT VEERAPPUR THE TEMPLE OF KONGU HEROS** 646
T. Indirani, Assistant Professor of History, Thiruvalluvar Government Arts College, Rasipuram. Namakkal District
- PASUPATHA SECT UNDER THE CHALUKYAS OF KALYANA** 649
Iranna Pattar, Professor and chairman, Dept. of History and Archaeology, Karnatak University, Dharwad
- FUNERARY MONUMENTS: A STUDY OF MEGALITHIC TRADITION IN EASTERN DISTRICTS OF TELANGANA STATE** 653
Jakkula. Somaiah, Research Scholar, Dept. of Ancient History and Archaeology Acharya Nagarjuna University, Guntur, A.P
- A STUDY OF KORAGAS-THE PRIMITIVE TRIBE OF TULUNADU** 657
G.V. Jinu
- ROCK ART OF LOWER GODAVARI VALLEY IN KOTHAGUDEM BHADRADRI DISTRICT OF TELANGANA STATE** 660
K. John Milton, Assistant Professor, Dept. of History, SR & BGNR Govt Degree College, Khammam, Telangana
- ANNALS OF MURUKAN IN PARIPĀTAL** 662
K. Karuppusamyandian, Ph.D. Scholar, Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai - 625021, Tamil Nadu
- JYARS - ARE THEY UNIQUE TEMPLE OFFICIALS IN TIRUMALA AND TIRUPATI TEMPLES** 664
Dr. D. Maddilety, Ph.D. Research Scholar, S.V. University, Tirupati- 517 501
- SUFISM IN SOUTH INDIA: EXPLORING THE LITERARY ELEGANCE AND THE MYSTICAL EXPOSITION OF MAPPILA SUFIS** 666
Meer Abul Hussain, Guest Faculty, History, Directorate of Distance Education, Maulana Azad National Urdu University, Gachibowli, Hyderabad - 500 032
- CONTRIBUTION OF IBRAHIM QUTB SHAH TO THE TELUGU LITERATURE DURING QUTB SHAHI PERIOD** 670
Dr. Mohammad.Osman Pasha, Assit. Professor of History, PG and Research Dept. of History, Islamiah College (Autonomous), Vaniyambadi, Tamilnadu
- ALTRUISM WAS VOLKSGEIST - A FOLK BELIEF IN ANCIENT TAMILAGAM (with special reference to Hero-Stones)** 672
Dr. K. Murugan & P. Basith Assarani, Assistant Professors, P.G & Research Dept. of History, Islamiah College (Autonomous), Vaniyambadi-635752, Vellore (D.T), Tamil Nadu

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ROCK ART OF LOWER GODAVARI VALLEY IN KOTHAGUDEM BHADRADRI DISTRICT OF TELANGANA STATE

K. John Milton

Introduction

Rock art is an avenue to walk through the archaic expressions of human societies as well as their culture and traditions. It is the earliest known aesthetic expression of human world. The term 'rock art' is used to define the prehistoric art in the form of paintings, bruising and engravings on bare rock surfaces of caves, rock shelters and on isolated rock boulders in open air¹. Rock art is an important source to understand the past cultures, apart from other important archaeological sources such as bones, pottery, tools, weapons, ornaments, and other relics of the past societies of which the archaeological record mainly consists of. As there were no writing systems developed during the period of Pre-literate societies, archaeological sources are the principal way to study these cultures. In this context, rock art assumes special significance, particularly where other archaeological sources are silent. In such situations this non-verbal language, communicated through an everlasting medium, provides insights into the world of the bygone era and often provides important clues to unlock the riddles of the past. Thus the importance of rock art as a source to explore the human past has been realized by scholars very recently. Now the rock art studies have been getting momentum to add another dimension to explore the human antiquity- particularly in India.

Nature of Rock Art

Two forms of rock art is found at both these sites. Pictographs style of art is one and another style is petroglyphs. Apart from this a rare style of art form i.e. painted petroglyphs also noticed here. This kind of art noticed only at Neeladri rock art site in Khammam district of Telangana

state and in Odisha². However these painted petroglyphs eroded very badly and it is very difficult to identify the motifs of this art style here. Besides this among the pictographs and petroglyphs, the painting (pictographs) motifs are dominant form of rock art on both of the rock art shelters here. However as painted petroglyphs, the other two art forms (Pictographs and petroglyphs) of rock art also eroded. Apart from this, some of the painting motifs have been redrawn by the ancient man where, after motifs drawn by their predecessors earlier, were also vanished in course of times. This kind of activity is known as superimpositions in rock art traditions. The rock art here was badly damaged due to the erosion activity. The walls of rock art shelters were suffered from differential weathering and its feldspars have been eroded and the quartz which has remained has a porous texture. Narrow bands of amphibolites were also found in the lower altitudes of the gneiss. Due to this erosion activity many motifs were badly damaged. Despite of all this, few of motifs have survived here and in well preserved state. All the paintings here are found in red ochre colour. It is observed that the brush as well as finger was used two draw the images on both of the rock art sites. Apart from this the pecking and bruising techniques have been noticed in motifs of petroglyphs and the red ochre colour was used in painted petroglyphs found at both of these rock art sites.

The rock shelter of Peerolla loddi is located above 150 feet MSL and the wall of the shelter faces east to the hill range of Musamma guttalu, situated about 3 km long from Kothuru village. A brook namely Peerolla vorre flows on eastern front of this rock shelter from south to north and merges in Pedda vagu. This rock shelter

measures 30 feet in height and 120 feet in length. On the wall of this huge rock shelter, motifs were drawn at 50 feet breadth from south to north direction. These motifs were drawn at the height of 3 feet to 12 feet from the base. There were 41 ochre coloured paintings found here, among those only 10 painting motifs were legible and one painted petroglyph (breast shaped image) was noticed. Painting forms were more in number when they are compared to the petroglyphs. There are 25 petroglyphs found here and 13 are legible. They are in shape of female vulvas. Petro glyphs were drawn on southern and northern ends as well as on bottom of the rock shelter wall. Apart from this there are three shallow pits observed on the surface of the rock shelter in a triangular position.

Among the pictographs found here are human images, breast and vulva shaped images, paddy sheaves, monitor lizard figures, reptiles, and anthropomorphic figures. On the other hand only vulva shaped petroglyphs were found on this site. Apart from these, breast shaped and red ochre colour painted petro glyph also found here as earlier said. Paddy sheaves, breast and vulva shaped paintings were more in number and again and again these pictures were redrawn in red ochre colour. These super impositions are clearly visible on the shelter wall. Another interesting feature is, the paddy sheaves, breast and vulva shaped paintings were drawn as they were merged with each other image or in sometimes very close to each other figure. The vulva shaped petroglyphs also drawn in same way as these vulvas are merged with the pictographs of paddy sheaves.

Devarlamorey - Rock shelter

Another site Devarlamorey (which means The abode of Gods) rock shelter is located above 180 feet of MSL and the shelter wall is facing western direction in the hill range of Musalamma guttalu, situated about 4 km long from Choppala village. Pedda Vagu, a rivulet flows on northern front of this rock shelter and joins the Godavari river. This rock shelter measures 32 feet height and 125 feet in length. On the wall of this huge rock shelter, motifs were drawn at 53 feet breadth from north to south direction and at the height of 3 feet to 09 feet from the base of this rock shelter. There were 35 ochre coloured paintings, among those only 15 painting motifs are legible. Here also painting forms were more

in number when compared to the petroglyphs. There are three petroglyphs found here. Only one petroglyph is legible and it was depicted as spoked wheel. Apart from this, numerous microliths such as backed points, lunates, triangles and trapezes of chert, jasper, and chalcedony and quartz material were found on the surface that is beneath the floor base of rock shelter wall.

Animals like tiger, deer, antelope, chinkara, goat, fox, gaur and buffalo were painted on the shelter wall here. Hunting scene of a human with bow and arrow is an important painted image here. Another interesting painting is depiction of wheel cart. Deer and antelope paintings are more in number and a deer with its fawn image is also depicted here. Among three petroglyphs found here, there is only one is legible of spoked wheel.

Chronology

Chronological classification of rock art is one of the toughest tasks faced by the scholars working in this field.³ In recent times scholars are attempting for direct dating methods but they were not fruitful. However most of the scholars use the indirect dating method of internal evidences from the rock art and rock art sites supported by archaeological evidences.⁴ Here also the same indirect dating method has been utilized to understand the probable age of these rock art sites.

Rock art at Peerollaloddi represents human aspirations expressed in ritualistic symbolism. Paintings of Paddy sheaves, breasts and vulvas; and superimpositions of same motifs, and often these figures merged with each other on this rock art wall hints that it is a kind of ritual art belonged to the crop harvesting and reproduction aspects. People belonging to this period may have aspired for the increase of crop production as well as their progeny. Their aspirations are reflected on the rock art. This kind of motifs can be attributed to the transitory period of Mesolithic to Neolithic cultural phase. However there are no traces of other archaeological material found on the vicinity of rock shelter to corroborate the age of this period except the assumption based on the rock art itself. Nevertheless the archaeological material remains of the megalithic culture includes dolmens and dolmenoid cists in association with anthropomorphic statues of have been noticed at

the aerial distance of half kilometer long from this rock art site. Scholars believe that people living in this region knew the wild variety of rice crop (*Oryza rufipogon*) by the Mesolithic period onwards.⁵ These rock art paintings can be considered as an important evidence for this assumption.

The rock art motifs at Devarlamorey represent the cultural life from the Mesolithic to the early historic period. Microliths unearthed on the floor of the Devarlamorey rock art shelter is an evidence for its Mesolithic cultural background. The frequent depiction of wild animals supports the same. Painting motif related to hunting scene of a human with a bow and arrow suggests that this art belonged to the age of pre-cattle domestication times of the Mesolithic period. These kinds of Mesolithic age motifs have close resemblance to the rock art of Central India⁶ and there is a possibility of central Indian rock art influence on this area. Another interesting painting motif belonged to the Chalcolithic age is wheeled cart, drawn by two animals probably by bullocks. This is another example as earlier one⁷. These kinds of motifs were numerous in central Indian rock art tradition and they are very rare depictions in south Indian art, during this period. Apart from this, as earlier mentioned - a petroglyph of

spoked wheel is also found here. This motif is similar to Buddhist ritual wheel. This is probably an early historic age art. The Presence of Buddhism in this region is well attested by the Buddhist cave shelter of Karukonda which is very near to this area. This cultural influence may be reflected on this rock art.

Discussion and Conclusion:

The rock art here provides us the clues about the cultural contacts between the Central Indian cultures as well as Lower Godavari region. The painting depictions of hunting scene of Mesolithic period and wheel cart of Chalcolithic period were altogether new to the South Indian rock art tradition. However they are very frequent depictions of Central Indian rock art tradition. Apart from this, the painting of paddy sheaves is another interesting aspect of this rock art here. Though it is a rare kind of depiction and not even noticed in Central Indian rock art sites, yet it is well attested that the Chopani mando and Koldihwa of Vindhyas were prominent central Indian early cultures which were associated with the rice crop⁸. All these evidences prompt us that there was a possibility of cultural assimilations as well as migrations of earlier cultures of Deccan plateau.

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ANNALS OF MURUKAN IN PARIPĀTAL

K. Karuppusamyandian

The Paripātal is a genre of literature of its own standing exclusively dedicated to Madurai and its environs. It consists of totally twenty-two long poems by different authors, apart from

Paripātal-tirattu in eleven poems (grand total 33). Dated during the early centuries of the CE by Tamil scholars such as N. Subrahmaniyan¹, western scholarship would bring it down to 400-