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PRE AND PROTO HISTORIC EVIDENCES OF HUMAN SUBSISTENCE IN THE TALAKONA VALLEY



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Short Profile

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ABSTRACT:

The purpose of this paper is to show the evidences of pre and proto-historic human subsistence based on the explorations conducted in the Talakona valley, a part of well-known Seshachalam hills (Tirumala hills) in Chittoor district, Andhra Pradesh in South India. The valley consisting prehistoric stone artifacts like hand axes and cleavers, caves, rock shelters rock art, megalithic dolmens and Neolithic mortars and ring stones etc. The available evidences suggest that the Talakona valley has human continuity from Lower Palaeolithic period to the present era. This paper is also discusses the ethno-archaeological information of the explored sites and the histories of the place names.

KEYWORDS

Stone artifacts, Caves, Rock Art, Dolmens, Inscriptions.

INTRODUCTION

After discovery of stone artifacts by Robert Bruce Foot (father of Indian prehistory) on May 30, 1863 at Pallavaram in Tamilnadu, Prehistoric research in India became a considerable focus on the exploration, documentation, classification and later analogies with ethno-archaeological studies. The Archaeologist, Anthropologists, Geologists and Sociologists have done an extensive explorations and excavations for understanding the prehistoric human subsistence in various regions across an Indian subcontinent. These discoveries were put India on the world map of prehistory. The research experts categorized the historical time period for the sake of research convenient into Prehistory and History (Protohistory) based on different available evidential clues pertaining to prehuman survival. The prehistory termed due to unavailability of its any written records. The history termed after the period of invention of script. The prehistory of India is divided into the Paleolithic (Lower, Middle and Upper Paleolithic) (Old Stone Age), Mesolithic (Middle Stone Age), Neolithic (New Stone Age) and Metal Age. These three ages are characterized by different types of tools through the different developmental stages of humankind. There is not available any written records to know the prehistory of human settlements in the globe. However, the people of the past have left some evidences of their survival, based on these evidences we can understand the socio-cultural, economic and political system of the past. The present paper mainly focuses on the prehistoric as well as proto-historic evidences found across various places in Talakona Valley in Chittoor district, Andhra Pradesh in India.

There are no previous explorations regarding prehistoric evidences in Talakona Valley except the study of Dr.T.Babji Reddy on Rock Art site exploration and documentation. But in the surrounding areas R.D. Benergy, M.L.K. Murthy, K.Bhskar, V.Rami Reddy, Jacob.S.Jayaraj, K.P.Rao and V.Ramabrahmam (Megalithic burials) were conducted systematic Explorations and Excavations in search of prehistoric evidences in Chittoor district. However, there are many undiscovered prehistoric and historic evidences available in remotest places hidden beneath dense forest and inaccessible hill terrains. So, there is a need to discover the hidden evidences and need to reconstruct the things intermingled in cultures of the past communities. In this regard the present paper aimed to explore and document the pre and proto-historic evidences which are available in Talakona Valley.

THE TALAKONA VALLEY

The Talakona Valley is located at a distance of about 65 km from north-west direction to Tirupati. Talakona forest is one of the areas in Seshachalam or Tirumala hills or *Palakondalu*. Talakona is known for thick forest and the etymological explanations given to the name Talakona is that *thala* means head and *kona* means end in one meaning and valley in another meaning. The Talakona constituted threshold of the seven hills of Tirumala. There is a waterfall known as siddhodhara teertham in Talakona valley. The height of the fall which is perennial is about 60.96 m. There is another fall namely Nelakona. Both falls are sacred one flows water entire the year. Due to its luxuriant evergreen dense forest and presents grand natural scenery several visit this valley throughout the year. There is ancient shrine of Siddheswara in the valley and the devotees gather here in every day in general and large number on Mahasivaratri day in particular. The unique and important flora of the region is red sandal. There are so many rare medicinal plant species found in Talakona forest which are used by the local people for both human and animal medicinal preparations. The fauna of this region is very rich with various species of animals belonging to class mammalian in particular. The main wild fauna of the valley is deer, rabbit, cheetah, elephant, porcupine, *kurupandi*, *yeragandi*, hog, fox, jackal, mongoose, chameleon, Lacertilian, Monitor lizards, *Nalikiri*, *Bapanathondaki*, scorpion, Wall lizards and common garden lizards; Crabs, fishes, frogs, tortoise, rat, and wild cat are the usual wild animals. The snakes like Cobra, Russell's viper, Python, Rat snake, Sand

boa, Green snake and Water snake etc. are commonly found in this valley.

Geological formation of this area consists of Archeans, Eparcheans, unconformity puranas and quaternary deposits which are considered to be the ancient most land formation in the world. The valley drained by Talakoneru, Gajuleru, Arlapenta vanka, Jollu vanka and Kappaleru. All the streams flow towards west direction. There are a number of seasonal water falls, lakes and hill streams in this valley. The vegetation of the valley belongs to the dry deciduous scrub savannah and tropical thorny types which consist of a variety of floral species. The annual rainfall is 934 mms. The minimum, maximum and mean temperature of this region is 12.50c, 44.20c and 36.50 respectively.

History: Specific historical studies on Talakona region are absent. From a reading on the historical past of Chittoor district, it appears that the influence of various dynasties that ruled the district and its adjoining area is not found on Talakona region. The Andhra Pradesh District Gazetteers (Chittoor) 1979 do not mention Talakona in the chapters on "History". Possibly Talakona, being an isolated area and rugged in its terrain, the area would not have attracted the attention of various dynasties. The presence of Palegars, which being recorded for other places in the district, is completely left out for the villages in Talakona valley in the Gazetteer's account.

The historical account of Talakona is almost confined to the Shaivite temple and this historical information itself is very scanty. There is some evidence to suggest that SriKrishnadevaraya of Vijayanagara dynasty might have traversed through Talakona as it was considered to be the threshold to the abode of Lord Venkateswara during his seven visits, during the year 1513. However according to a Telugu news report (Sakshi, 11, Feb 2010), Talakona temple was constructed during 1733. The temple was said to be constructed by the devotee namely Appaswamy and the land was donated by the Dora of Nerabylu-a village adjacent to Talakona. Only this much of historical information is available on Talakona (Reddy T.B: 2012).

According to the tribal people and the traditional medicine practicers, they were observed moving plant locally known '*kodipodhuguchettu*' (this plant appears like hen and moves with chick like young plants just like hen and chicks). They were also observed a plant that produces lighting in the night times it is known Sanjeevi/Agnipullangi at peddhabhucherri area in Talakona forest and the other plant locally known '*peddhapothirillichettu*' produces sound just like snake are also seen in Mabbhukona and Avvacharikona near Tirumala. Sometimes the traditional practicers collect these herbals with systematic manner for using in magico-religious practices.

PREHISTORIC EVIDENCES

Chittoor district abounds in several prehistoric sites. The 'surface finds' at several places in the district reveal that prehistoric cultures existed, particularly palaeolithic and megalithic cultures. However, no systematic explorations were conducted till date in Talakona region, though the researcher for the present paper has explored systematically a rich archaeological evidences pertaining to Palaeolithic, Neolithic, Megalithic and Historic period in Talakona Valley. There are five naturally formed caves were explored in the valley. The prehistoric tools like hand axes and cleavers are also identified in the nearest places of the caves. The Megalithic dolmen type burials, Neolithic ring stones, pestles are identified in the agricultural fields nearer to the caves. An age old inscriptions were identified nearer to Talakona water fall, Ayyagari palli and near V.R.Agraharam. The prehistoric rock paintings were identified in white and red pigments. Each of the explored evidences is described as follows:

Evidences of Palaeolithic Period

The term Palaeo means old, lith means stone. It is an initial phase in the human development stages. The main tool types of this period found in the valley are different types of hand axes, cleavers and flakes. The hand-axes and cleavers made of a hard rock called quartzite. The man in prehistoric time used these stone artifacts to dig out tubers and roots from the soil, butcher animals he had hunted and take out the meat, and so on.



Figure-1: Hand axe

The ethno-archaeological studies suggest that, in the Palaeolithic period, food was obtained by hunting animals and gathering edible plants and tubers. The stone hand axes and cleavers are identified near to Nelakona, Talakona waterfall and along the sides of its streams. Some pear shaped hand axes are identified in Siddhalagandi area, mokalarevu and bandlarevu in Talakona forest, Kodonikanju near O.S.Bandakadapalli of Gundalabailu, Chinthagunta, Nerabylu. The nearest famous Palaeolithic sites like Tirupati

Yerpedu, Renigunta, mallavaram and vedhullacheruvu are located in Chittoor district. There is no C-14 dating method to estimate the exact date of these stone tools in this valley. In the Palaeolithic site at Attirampakkam of Thiruvallur district in Tamilnadu, carbon dating has been done. For the date of Attirampakkam stone tools, two types of dating methods were done in France at the request of Shanti Pappu, an excavator of this site. The stone tools found at Attirampakkam could be dated to 1.5 million years. The methods used were paleomagnetic and cosmogenic nuclide burial dating methods. The tools found in this valley are similar to the tools found in Attirampakkam, so these tools have an age of 1.5 million years.

Evidences of Rock Paintings/Rock Art

The term rock art is popularly used to define prehistoric art in the form of paintings, brushings and engravings on bare rock surfaces of caves and rock shelters and on isolated rock boulders in the open air (Chandramouli, 2003). Rock art or cave paintings are the artistic expressions of early human beings or fashioned vibrant images on rock surfaces painted ages ago. Rock art is the symbolic representation of socio-cultural, socio-economic, socio-political and socio-religious aspects of the past communities. Rock art provides an insight into the bygone age (Rajan K. 2009). Rock art thus gives tremendous clues to portray the living pattern of the people of the past. Early man started drawing on the walls some 40,000 years ago

B. P. (Before Present). Nevertheless cultural traits perhaps continued even into the following Mesolithic age 12000 to 10000 B.P. we can understand through these paintings that in this era ancient man domesticated animals and expanded his activities. In the Neolithic age (8000 to 6000 B.P.) the final prehistoric phase dawned with the discovery of copper during the Chalcolithic era (6000-5000 BP).



Figure-2: showing horse rider, warrior with shield and sword, beak headed man and other geometric symbols

The rock art site is located at 'Yanadodi Gundu' near Thaalabodu area towards north about 2 km to O.S. Bandakada Palli and 2 km west to Ayyagari Palli in Yerravaripalem mandal of Chittoor district in Andhra Pradesh. The Rock Art Site namely 'Yanadhoni Gundu' is laid in reserve forest and it is open access view of rock shelter; it is laid 20 km away

in west direction from Talakona waterfall. The local people called the rock art consisting stone boulder as 'Yanadhodi Gundu'. Yanadi refers to the Schedule Tribe and 'Gundu' refers to a big boulder. According to the oral histories of the local people some years ago a *Yanadi* man (Yanadi is traditional hunter-gatherer tribe) live under this rock shelter alone hence it is called 'Yanadhoni Gundu'. (Reddy T.B: 2013).

The painted rock shelter is the formation of limestone open access boulder. The graffiti are painted on the ceilings of the rock shelter with white pigment (Kaoline) depicting as a horse rider holding a sword with one hand and shield with another hand. In another depiction a warrior on the ground held a sword with one hand and shield with another hand. A withered another graffiti depicts as a battle scene in which a group of warriors fighting each other with the swords and shields. A circle-with-trident (Locally known as *Peeru*) and some unidentifiable geometric symbols are also found. One of the geometric symbols is in triangular shape and it is filled with dots. A unique depiction showing a man wearing a bird headed mask with prominent beak. In one of other graffiti depicts as centipede (*Jerry*). All these graffiti are drawn in a single line and only with white colour. The specialty of the rock art in the present discussing site is there is no graffiti having head, fingers and other important organs of the body. The entire shape of the graffiti was drawn with lines only. We can identify these pictures based on the shapes of hands and legs.

Based on the depicting graffiti, symbols and other available evidences around the site these paintings are belong to Megalithic. These paintings are similar to the paintings identified by K.T. Gandhi Rajan discovered in Kongar Puliyakulam near Madurai in Tamilnadu.

Red ochre paintings

The red ochre rock paintings identified at Jandla village at a distance of 20 km from the above said site and 5 km from Piler. The rock paintings were brushed at 'Yerukula gundu in the hummock locally known Jurapothula gutta. The meaning of the name of rock art site Yerukula *gundu* refers to 'Yerukula is the schedule tribe and gundu mean boulder. According to the local people in the past some unknown persons buried huge treasure under this rock art consisting boulder. For unearthing the treasure from beneath the boulders in the past practiced sacrifice of a pregnant woman and drawn the symbols of these circles and semicircles with her blood on the boulders. The graffiti depicts as circles and semi circles. All the graffiti painted on open rock boulder at west side. The circles and semi circles are the signposts of the day to day rising stages of moon in the west (According to Hindu calendar a month is divided into two portions namely *Shukla or shudhapaksha* and *Krishnapaksha or Bahulapaksha*. each portion consists of 15 days. In *Krishnapaksha* the moon rises from east side and in *Shukla/Shuddha paksha* moon rises from west side). The style of the paintings appears as the learning stage of the rock art culture. There is no carbon dating methods found in this valley to know the exact age of these red ochre paintings. But, similar rock painting found in the nearest state in Bhanpura area of Madhya Pradesh revealed the C-14 age is 35000 years old. Generally the rock art belongs to upper Palaeolithic period between 50,000 B.C. and 30,000 B.C.

Caves:

A group of caves inhabited by ancient humans has been discovered in the valley. The caves are namely Nallakanamu nearer to Buragallu, Thalabodi and Kothulgutta near O.S. Bandakada Palli, and another cave near to Gaddamvari Palli in Yerravri palem were identified.



Figur-3: A cave locally known Appaswmi Gavi near Talakona water fall

The stone artifacts such as Pebbles, Hand Axes, flakes and cores are identified nearer to the caves. The stone tools found around the caves are the chief characteristic tools of Paleolithic period. A cave namely *Appaswamygaviis* located nearby Talakona waterfall. There are a series of caves found beside Appaswamy cave. In one of the cave various figurines of Gods were carved. These carvings show that the caves in Talakona valley have been grown as the centers of religious yogic meditations. The inscription in Telugu language regarding the temple was also identified in the caves.

Megalithic Burials

The Megalithic burials such as dolmens, cist and ruined cairn burials are accompanying with an ancient temple of Lord Venkateswara on the rock mound hillock locally called Vekatapuram gutta nearer to Nerabailu village. The carved icons and allied pictographs on the temple showing it is supposed to be constructed during the period of Sri Krishna Devaraya of Vijayanagara kingdom. The another site having underground stone box type dolmens were identified at Aravavandla palli but these are disturbed due to agricultural extension activities. The similar type dolmens also found nearer to Talakona at Gulla banda near Peddakurava palli in K.V. Palli Mandal, Devandla palli in Pincha and Ontillu in Piler mandal.



Figure-4: Megalithic burial at Venkatapuram gutta near Nerabailu village



Figure-5: The Historic Lord Venkateswra temple at Venkatapuram gutta near Nerabailu village

INSCRIPTIONS

Three inscriptions were identified in the valley. Among these three inscriptions, one inscription is identified at an open boulder nearer to Ayyagaricheruvu in Gundalbayalu region, the second one is on a rock surface adjacent to a tank namely Ramadasuchuruvu nearer to V.R. Agraharam but this inscription is withered due to weathering and agricultural harvesting activities by the farmers on this rock surface. The above said inscriptions are supposed to be the details of the tank excavation and its donors carved during

Vijayanagara period.



Figure-6: Inscription at Talakona

The other inscription in Telugu language found at very nearer to Talakona water fall. This inscription was carved upside the cave entrance. According to the oral histories as well temple records and the style of the letters the inscription was carved in the Telugu *Vikari* year, Margasira month, 10th day of *shuddhapaksha*(Monday) in 1719. This date reveals the foundation (*Shankusthapana*) of Lord Siddheswara in Appaswami temple in the cave.

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CONCLUSION

The Talakona Valley has huge amount of prehistoric evidences such as hand axes, cleavers, rock paintings, caves consisting prehistoric tools, dolmens and inscriptions. The rock paintings of this area show the socio-economic conditions and the megalithic dolmens revealing funeral system of the past people. There are some evidences regarding ancient stone paved horse routes and ruined chalets in the forest shows the historic continuity. The available pre and protohistoric evidences suggest this valley has great continuity of human subsistence from the past to present through various human developmental stages.

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