

Pre-History of Tulunadu

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Archaeological exploration over last two decades from the Department of Ancient History and Archaeology of MSRS College has been successfully expanding the historical understanding of Pre-History of Tulunadu. New Discoveries has spread light on importance of Pre-History and culture of coastal Karnataka which has created a strong foundational knowledge base for the future study in the field of Archaeology and Pre-History of the region. In this auspicious occation of celebrating an international rock art fest in a rock art site we present you with a brocher of rock art of Tulunadu.

Rock Art of coastal Karnataka

Rock Art in coastal Karnataka has seen continuous discoveries over five decades starting in the 1970s. P Gururaja Bhat first discovered petroglyphs at Basrur, Udipi district, followed by A Sundara discovering them at Bole, Uttara Kannada district. In their footsteps, B Vasanth Shetty discovered rock art at Gavali, Udipi district and HR Raghunath Bhat found them at Sonda, Uttara Kannada district. Along the west coast, both to the north and south, significant rock art discoveries have been made. In Goa, PP Shirodkar has guided the discovery and exploration of Pansaimol, Kazur, Mauxim, Kuradi and others. Sindhudurg and Ratnagiri districts of Maharashtra have also yielded some sites, while discoveries of a similar nature have been made in Ettukudukka in Kannur district of Kerala. Over the last two decades, the Dept. of Ancient History and Archaeology, MSRS College has spearheaded the discovery/exploration of sites in Subrahmanya and Athur-Kundaje of Dakshina Kannada district, and Buddhana Jeddu, Gavali, Avalakki Pare and Palli of Udupi district.



Fig. 1: Cave of Altamira, Spain (credit M. Sanz de Sautuola, Wikimedia Commons)



Fig. 2: Rock art at Sanganakallu, Bellary District (credit Robert Bruce Foote Sanaganakallu Archaeological Museum, rbfsam.com)



Fig. 3: Bull on a stand, Buddhana Jeddu, Udupi District (credit T. Murugeshi)

The motifs in rock art of coastal Karnataka have many similarities with those of Goa and Kerala in style, theme, and subject. This calls for a reconsideration of the west coast of India as a separate region to better understand its rock art. In the case of Karnataka, ethno-archaeology of living traditions can contribute to a better understanding of the prehistoric past. The rock art here is found on open boulders and laterite surfaces. The rock art consists of figures of humans, animals, among which the bull is predominant, geometric designs such as spirals and mandalas, and cup shaped cupules. Bull worship was a popular cult in the Deccan from the Neolithic period, as can be seen from the rock art at Sanganakallu. Bull worship seems to have been popular the world over, from as far as Altamira in Spain to Bhimbhetka in central India. However, bull worship survives in coastal Karnataka as a living cult, especially in the region of Udupi district and the sites mentioned above. There are hundreds of tribal cult centers where wooden bull statues are found. They are closely associated as a counterpart of the fertility goddess of the tribal sanctuaries, with the bull's sexual organs prominently shown in the rock art as well as the tribal figures. Thus the bull cult which might have originated in the Neolithic-Chalcolithic periods continues to be in vogue despite influences from various religious sects such as Shaivism, Vaishnavism, Buddhism and Jainism during the historic period.

Introducing the Fests Site

Avalakki Pare is a village in Udupi district, about 14-15 km from Kollur on the way to Kollur from Kundapur. It is located inside the Mookambika Wildlife Sanctuary and is a place frequented by wildlife. It was discovered and explored in Feb. 2019 by the Dept. of Ancient History and Archaeology, MSRS College. The very name of the site is connected to the prehistoric artifacts found here. Only in the region containing the rock art and nowhere else, white quartz like 'avalakki' (poha, or flattened rice) is found. Thus the name translates to 'plateau of flattened rice'. Despite the presence of these microliths, no microlithic tools have been found so far. However, more than 100 tools have been found, which corroborating other evidence suggests a food gathering society dateable from the late Upper Palaeolithic to the early Mesolithic (6000-10,000 BC). These other pieces of evidence include the fact that the rock art features mostly hunting scenes. In particular, looking at bull hunting helps in a comparative study of this site with other rock art sites nearby such as Buddhana Jeddu and Gavali. At Avalakki Pare, bulls are hunting objects, while they are objects of worship at the latter two sites. This might indicate an earlier date for Avalakki Pare. Another peculiar dating object is in the cupules or cup-like depressions in the rock. The placement of four cupules in two rows with two additional large holes, suggests an archaic form of the game now popularly enjoyed as 'chennemane' in Karnataka. In Gavali, two rows of seven holes each correspond with the game as it is played today, suggesting once again an earlier antiquity for Avalakki Pare.



Fig. 4: Figures of humans and animals, including bull on open laterite surface at Avalakki Pare (credit Prof. T Murugeshi)

Other sites in coastal Karnataka

Buddhana Jeddu is the local name for a site in Karkunje village in the Mookambika Reserve Forest. The area where the rock art is found is called Bimana Pare or 'big plateau'. It was discovered, explored and excavated over three years from 2009-2011 by the Dept. of Ancient History and Archaeology, MSRS College. The rock art is engraved on both sides of a natural crack in the rock, and includes humans, animals, pairs of human feet and geometrical designs. The figures are executed in thick and lucid lines. In some cases, figures slightly overlap one another and their relative chronology can be assessed. Geometric designs such as spirals are prominent and can be seen in the figure dubbed as 'bull on a stand' (Fig. 6). Among the animals are beautifully executed deer, peacock, and the bull or bison. Comparing the rock art to designs found in an amazingly wide region across different periods, the design is dateable more or less to the Upper Palaeolithic period. In seasonal explorations, Neolithic celts and other tools have been discovered. Taking all these factors, human activity at the site might belong to the Neolithic-Chalcolithic periods, or the early Iron Age.



Fig. 5 & 6: Human figure, spiral designs at Buddhana Jeddu (credit T Murugeshi)



Buddana Jeddu Team

Gavali is a similar large site, located 38 km south east of Kundapur in Udupi district. It was first discovered and reported by B Vasanth Shetty in 1983. Here, large granite boulders are found spread on the open ground. In the middle of a small stream, on a boulder is a life-sized standing bull facing east. A smaller bull is also drawn facing this bull and westwards. The anatomical features of the former bull are boldly outlined and it seems to have a divine character. Its horns are fashioned elliptically and the tips are joined together. Within this, there is an oval shape designed with a vertical straight line in the middle and a horizontal line cutting it, which seems to be a *yonis* symbol. The bull has a prominent hump, a long slightly raised tail, and an erect penis and testicles. In the smaller bull, the hump is less prominent, and its forelegs and hind legs are fused and extended to form an intricate design. Such a design is also found at Sonda. On another bull half buried in the ground, a life sized bull is engraved on the exposed part similar to the first bull. Near it is a double row of cup marks, referred to above as resembling the wooden set of 'chennemane', a folk game with religious significance.

Bole is situated near Ankola in Uttara Kannada district. It was discovered accidentally and reported in the press in 1975, after which A Sundara visited it. On the laterite surface, he identified animal figures including two bulls facing each other, a deer, a snake, an elephant, a fish and a rectangle divided into four blocks. Based on the stylistic features, he dated it to the Chalcolithic-early Megalithic period.

Sonda is also located in Uttara Kannada near Sirsi. Today, it is a famous Vaishnava, Shaiva and Jaina center. The engravings were discovered by H Raghunath Bhat but studied and published by A Sundara. It consists of line drawings of bulls, whose legs are extended and joined together to form mandalas. At the end of this row, a human torso seems to be engraved.

Mandarti is located 20 km north east of Udupi and is a famous Shakti center. To its south, there is a big boulder on a granite hill which has engravings of a circle with three lines and some cup marks. At **Palli** in Karkala taluk and at similar art is found. **Subramanya** in Dakshina Kannada district is a famous Naga center, where on the left bank of the Darpana Tirtha stream, behind the temple are some distinctive counting marks. **Athur-Kundaje** in the same district is a megalithic site with rock cut caves. Curiously, unlike any other site, a large circle is engraved in the rock to indicate the site of one of the caves. These sites were discovered and explored by the Dept. of Ancient History and Archaeology, MSRS College.