



## Discovery of new Rock Art site in Talakona Valley in Chittoor District, Andhra Pradesh

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### ABSTRACT

*The present paper is based on recently explored new rock art site in Talakona valley. The discovered rock art is sketched in white pigment on open air lime stone boulder. This rock art site is located in the dry deciduous forest in Talakona valley in seshachalam hills in Chittoor district of Andhra Pradesh. This paper interprets the rock art, and discusses about the rock art site, social and economic activities of the present communities inhabiting around this rock art site. This paper is also gives broad discussions about the archaeological evidences found around this rock art site.*

### Keywords: Rock Art, Dolmens, Chronology

#### INTRODUCTION

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. They are mostly available in the form of sketches and paintings in sandstone rock shelters, open boulders, caves and megalithic burial sites use natural dyes for drawing. Rock art is the symbolic representation of socio-cultural, socio-economic, socio-political and socio-religious aspects of the past communities. Through the rock art, we can able to understand the adaptive strategies and human-environmental relationship of the past. The earliest aesthetic expression of the world is rock art. It serves an important source material to understand the mental world of the prehistoric people. It provides an insight into the bygone age (Rajan K.2009). Rock art thus give tremendous clues to portray the living pattern of the people of the past.

Rock art is an important part in the lives of the people of the past. Early man started drawing on the walls some 40000 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 this 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). These are the broad prehistoric periods during which rock arts are found in abundance worldwide. There are several types of rock art but rock paintings, rock engravings and rock brushings are more usual. According to the existing literature, the rock art represents the graffiti consisting the domestic fauna, scenes of hunting, dancing, pastoralism, and food production, as well as religious and military imagery. Art is also often produced in the domestic context in India by women, as part of ritual, healing, or apostrophic, auspiciousness - producing, or decorative activities (Boivin 2000). There are diversities of views expressed by various scholars on the rock art. Some of the researchers have indicated that much of the imagery is symbolic, broadly relating to ritual activities (Neumayer 1993). Some other researchers suggest that increasing abstraction in style relates to a move away from rock art with an ostensibly straightforward narrative function toward the creation of rock art with more symbolic, ritual purposes (Chandramouli

2002). Any how rock art is the universal medium of understanding the past.

The discoveries of Indian rock art sites were reported by Henwood in 1856 and the first petroglyphs were recorded by Archibald Carlleyle in 1867-1868 at Almora, Mirzhapur district of Uttar Pradesh (Chakravarty and Bednarik 1997; Chakravarty 2003). Later on there are number of discoveries are noted on rock art in India. After the discovery of the rock paintings in Bhimbetka by V.S. Wakankar in the 1950s, rock art research in India became a considerable focus on the exploration, documentation and classification and analogies with ethnoarchaeological studies. However, there are many rock art sites available in remotest places hidden beneath dense forest or inaccessible hill terrains. So, there is a need to discover the hidden rock art sites and study new things intermingled in the cultures of rock art to reconstruct the exact reasons and cultural beliefs behind the rock art cultures. Rock art heritage of India, remains an infant as per recording and rediscovery of rock art sites, hitherto, the present study is an attempt in this regard.

The present explored rock art shelter is situated at 'Yanadodi Gundu' near Talabodu area towards north about 2 km to O.S.Gollapalli in Yerravaripalem mandal of Chittoor district in Andhra Pradesh. The Rock Art Site namely 'Yanadoni 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 well known Talakona perennial waterfall.

#### Geo and Bio-morphology of Talakona Valley

The region Talakona is located at a distance of about 65 km from north-west direction to Tirupati. Talakona is known for thick forest and the etymological explanations given to the name Talakona is that, it constituted threshold of the seven hills of Thirumala. There is a waterfall known as siddhodhara tirtham in Talakona valley. The height of the fall which is perennial is about 60.96 m. The movie makers are frequently visit the place for shooting movies because the valley contains luxuriant evergreen dense forest and presents grand natural scenery. There is ancient shrine of siddheswara in the valley and the devotees gather here in large number on every day in general and Mahasivaratri day in particular.

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 main soil type is red sandy loam. The valley drained by Talakoneru, Gajjaleru, Arlapenta vanka, Jollu vanka and Kappaleru and these streams flows 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 fauna of this region is very rich with various species of animals belonging to class mammalian in particular. The annual rainfall is 934 mms. The minimum, maximum and mean temperature of this region is 12.50 c, 44.20c and 36.50 respectively.

#### Site History

The rock art shelter is locally called as 'Yanadodi Gundu' Yanadi refers to the caste and 'Gundu' refers to big Boulder. According to the oral transmission of the elders some years ago a Yanadi man (Yanadi is traditional hunter-gatherer tribe) live under this rock shelter alone hence it is called 'Yanadoni Gundu'. The raw lime (Sunnapu Rayi) deposits are found around the rock art site. In the previous days the surrounding villagers were collected the raw lime boulders and prepared limekiln for their house construction and other domestic uses.

#### Flora around the Rock Art site

The flora was recorded 20 m radius around the rock shelter. The vernacular names of the available plant species around the site are Juvvi, Bagi, Sallayi, Uttareni, Tulasi, Yerri narava, marula mathangi, Banda Ulava, Yerra Cheeki, Tangedu, Pal-leru, Maddi, Ulindha, Bikki, Boda gaddi, Musti, Billi, Buruga, Atiki, Gorigi, Thuniki, Sandra, Pachari, Maredu teega, Kup-pinta Chirla, bandaruru, nagiri,gyadari, sara, danti, dusara, vempali, velithuru, podapatri are the common flora. There are number of unidentified plants are also found around the site.

#### Fauna

The main domestic fauna of the villages around the rock art site are cow, buffalo, sheep, goat, cat, cocks, pig and dog. It is evident that the ass was used for transport the cloths by the washer men to washing spots. The horse and donkey were used for traveling and transport their goods by the mobile population. The deer, rabbit, cheetah, fox, jackal, mongoose, chameleon, Lacertilian, Monitor lizards, Naliki, scorpion and 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 snakes around this site.

#### Archaeological Assemblages around the Rock Art Site

A rich archaeological evidences pertaining to Palaeolithic, Neolithic, Megalithic and Historic period are found in surrounding areas of the rock art site. There are five naturally formed caves are found, in which two caves are at the distance of 500m approximately to the rock art site and three caves are found at the distance of 5 km towards south in the place namely Kothulagutta. The Megalithic burials such as dolmens are located at Gadimadugu beside Talakoneru (stream) near Aravavanda Palli at a distance of 5 km towards south to the rock art site. Neolithic ring stones are also identified in the agricultural fields near to the rock art site. An age old inscription is found on the rock sheet surface at Ramadasu Cheruvu (Tank) near V.R. Agraharam towards south at the distance of 6 km from the rock art site. This inscription is withered due to weathering and agricultural harvesting activities by the farmers on this rock surface. The stone artifacts such as Pebbles, Hand Axes, flakes and cores are also found around the site at the distance of 100 m and these are the chief characteristic tools of Paleolithic period. There are some evidences regarding ancient stone paved horse routes and ruined chalets in the forest and also some stone blinders (for hunting purpose) are available. The available evidences suggest that the area has great livelihood continuity from the past to present.

Nearest megalithic rock art site was identified at Mallaiahpalli with few figures of the white ochre depicts in the Talakona valley site, which is at a distance of 50 km to Mallaiahpalli.

In addition to that, a rock art site found near Ubaramadugu locally known as Dongalagundu is located east of Varadaih-palem in the Kambakam reserve forest. The site Dongalagundu is located approximately 95 km from Talakona valley. Here the rock surface bear Megalithic paints in white ochre, resemble some of the styler of Talakona valley. This shows that Megalithic cultures in Chittoor district play a prominent role in South India.

#### Social setup and economy in nearest villages

The social setup around the rock art site comprised several castes like reddy, Kamma, Balija, Kummari, Kamsali, Uppara, Mutharasi, golla, boya, Yekula, Ediga, madiga, Mala, mangali, vadde, chakali, Sugali, Yanadi, and muslim. Caste hierarchy is very much prevalent. Caste under endogamy is strictly observed. People observe caste based relationship in the matter of food (cooked and raw) and water. It is observed that the caste based occupations are very much in vogue. Reddi, Kamma and Balija are the agrarians and dominant castes. Gollas, Sugali and Yekulas are a shepherd caste possess animal husbandry beside agriculture, Boyas and Yanadis are Hunter gatherers. Mala and Madiga are the low social status communities; they are traditionally skin workers and labourers. The caste Kummara is traditional pottery, Ediga are toddy tapers, Mangali are traditional barbers and chakali are washers. In the past the caste uppara used ass to carry salt for mobile business and the caste chakali were also used to carry the cloths to washing places. The caste Mutharasi (according to oral tradition of this caste elders) is the traditional warriors under the kings and Brahmin is the dominant caste and they are traditionally Purohits.

The major occupations are agriculture, animal husbandry, dairy and labor. The main crops are groundnut, paddy, tomato, sugarcane and tobacco. Along with these crops they also cultivated various crops like sun flowers, chillies, vegetables and many surplus grains like green gram, jowar, Bengal gram, red gram are cultivated as mixed and inter crops. According to the elders some 100 years ago their ancestors were cropped bajra (Sajjalu), korralu, arikelu, Jonnalu as main crops for main food usage. Cattle penning, seasonal mobile grazing and seasonal camp sites for grazing animals inside the forest is common in this region.

#### Rock art Interpretation

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 man riding on the horse wearing sword with one hand and shield with another hand (see Fig-1). In another depiction a warrior on the ground handled a sword with one hand and shield with another hand (see Fig-3). A withered another graffiti depicts a battle scene that a group of warriors fighting each together wearing 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 (see Fig-5). A unique depiction showing a man wearing a bird headed mask with prominent beak (Fig-2) and one of another graffiti depicts as centipede (Jerry) (Fig-4). All these graffiti are drawn in a single line and only white colour was used to draw these diagrams. The specialty of the rock art in the present discussing site, in this rock art any graffiti both human and animal is not having head, fingers and other important organs of the body. The entire shape of the graffiti were drawn with lines only. We can identify these pictures based on the shapes of hands and legs.

#### Chronology

According to Chandramouli the chronology of the rock art is estimated based on the paintings that show graffiti related to fauna, petroglyphs with religious and geometric symbols, pictographical designs, metal weapons and inscriptions. The motifs related to wild fauna belong to the Mesolithic; the paintings with humped bull are dated to Neolithic-chalcolithic; the petroglyphs with the circle-with-trident symbol and other geometric designs are dated to the Megalithic period and the

graffiti showing elephant, horse riding, weapons, religious symbols and inscriptions may date from the early historic to the medieval period.

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, who specializes in art history, discovered them in December 2008 at Kongar Puliyakulam near Madurai in Tamilnadu.

### Conclusion

The rock art site is very near to the caves. A gully flows nearly half kilometer away from the rock art site and the stone tools are found along with the gully (Vanka). The stone artifacts such as hand axes, flakes, blades, pestle and Neolithic ring stones are also found at the nearest places of the caves. One of the religious structures is built with bare boulders and it seems very ancient. The people of the villagers are celebrates religious rites at this place when they started to enter to the forest for hunting or grazing their animals at once in a year. This structure belongs to Akka Dhevathalu (Sister Goddess). The megalithic monuments are also found very near to the site and these monuments are disturbed by treasure hunters. The available evidences at the nearest places of this rock art site suggested the area has rich livelihood continuity from the past to present.



The plate showing the Graffiti depicting as horse rider, warrior and a man with beak Shaped mask, trident and geometric shapes

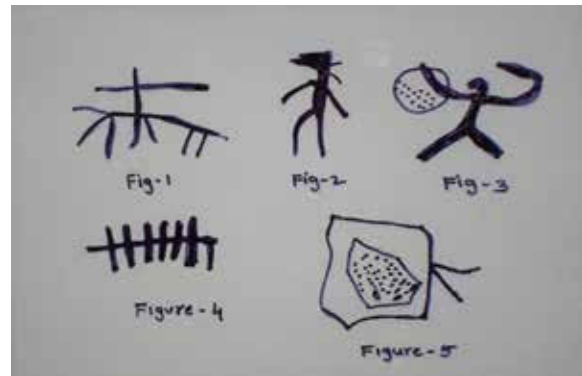


Fig1: A man in horse riding, Fig2: A Man wearing bird headed mask with prominent beak Fig3: A warrior wearing a shield with one hand and sword with another hand, Fig4: A graffiti showing as Centipede, Fig5: A Geometric symbol filled with dots.

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