

Ethnoarchaeology of the Kurnool Cave areas, South India

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Introduction

The archaeological importance of the caves in the limestone country of the Nandyal basin, Kurnool district (Andhra Pradesh State), was brought to light with the excavations of a group of caves, known as Billa Surgam, by Robert Bruce Foote and his son Henry Bruce Foote (Foote 1884, 1885) in the last century. While the recent excavations of a cave called Muchchatla Chintamanu Gavi (now labelled MCG I) and further work at Billa Surgam confirmed the findings of Foote (Murty 1974; Thimma Reddy 1980), explorations in the cave areas disclosed open-air findspots of blade tool assemblages and microlithic assemblages (Issac 1960; Murty and Thimma Reddy 1976) which correspond to the industries designated as Series III and Series IV by Cammiade and Burkitt (1930), and which were recovered by Cammiade from the stratified sequences of Kurnool rivers. These industries, in a pan-Indian Stone Age cultural framework, are now assigned to the Indian Upper Palaeolithic and Mesolithic, respectively. Excavations being conducted by the author at a rockshelter site barely 40m away from the Muchchatla Chintamanu Gavi (hence labelled as MCG II) in the same limestone escarpment are shedding valuable light on the occupational history of the caves and cave areas. The explorations and excavations of the Archaeological Survey of India revealed several Neolithic-Chalcolithic settlements, which sprang up from c.2000 B.C. in the adjacent Kunderu valley (Fig. 1.).

The region under discussion ($15^{\circ} 16'$ and $15^{\circ} 30'N$: $78^{\circ} 30'E$) which is on the fringes of the Erramala range (a chain of the Eastern Ghats) is characterised by karst landforms. With an average annual rainfall of about 700 mm it presents a landscape typical of the semi-arid tropics (Plate 1), and a degraded vegetation (due to human interference) of *Alibizzia-Acacia* series. This region during the present times supports populations geared to dry farming cum pastoralism, sheep/goat pastoralism, and the traditional groups like the Dabba Yerukulas, Kunchapuri Yerukulas and Boyas who are acculturated into the village economy leading a symbiotic life, but still depend on hunting and foraging for their subsistence and exchange.

An appraisal of the archaeology of the region with special reference to two excavated sites, the Late Mesolithic occupation at MCG II and Neolithic-Chalcolithic Ramapuram, in the light of present adaptive strategies, provides a case study to judge the relevance of ethnoarchaeology paradigm in the reconstruction of the past. This exercise supports the assumption that analogical reasoning is a useful research strategy if there is evidence in the archaeological record to

demonstrate a continuity in traditionality from the past to present.

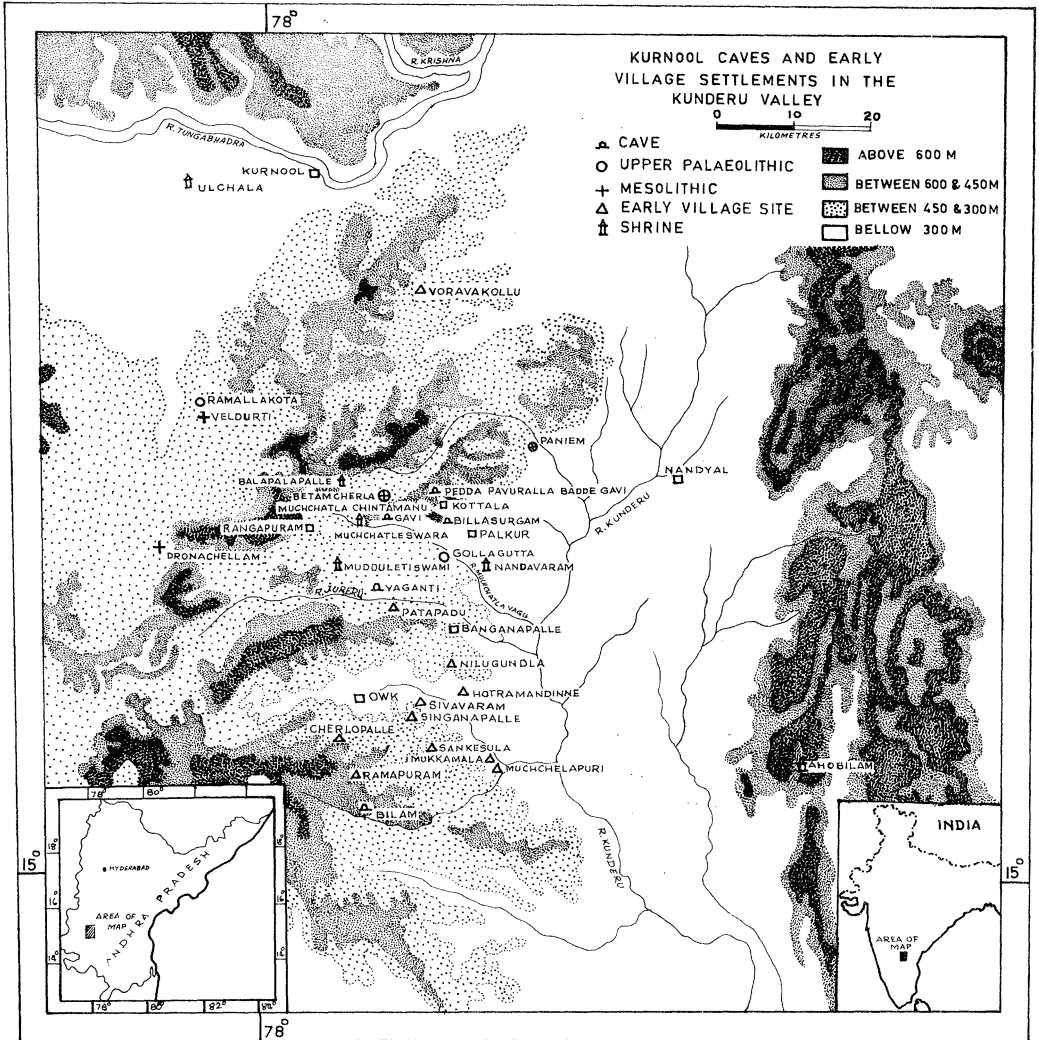


Figure 1 Map showing the cave sites and Neolithic-Chalcolithic settlements in the Kunderu valley mentioned in the text.

Hunter gatherer prehistory of the cave areas

The occupational history of the cave areas is best revealed in the excavations of MCG II. The sequence at MCG II, known thus far (the excavations are still in progress and are confined to the periphery of occupation), constitutes: (1) Upper Palaeolithic 2.20 m (and possibly extending below) to 1.60 m; (2) Mesolithic 1.5 m to 1.35 m; and (3) Late Mesolithic 1.35 m to 0.20 m having culture contacts with the Neolithic-Chalcolithic of the Kunderu valley. Burnt

clay samples from the fireplace in Upper Palaeolithic MCG II gave a TL date of $17390 \pm 10\%$ B.P. (Nambi and Murty 1983); and a plausible age falling in the range of c. 8000 B.C. to c. 5000 B.C. can be tentatively suggested for the Mesolithic occupation, on relative grounds, in the context of the few radiocarbon dates of the Indian Mesolithic. A red ware Chalcolithic potsherd from the Late Mesolithic has given a TL date of $1850 \pm 20\%$ B.C. (Nambi: personal communication). As space does not permit a detailed account, suffice it to say that the cave occupations and open-air occurrences of the Upper Palaeolithic and Mesolithic represent short-term campsites (at Gollagutta, opposite Sanyasula Gavi and Muchchatla Swami Gavi), a transient encampment (MCG I), a long-term residential base (MCG II) and fleeting transitory loci (sporadic nondescript confines with a very low artifact content on the plateaux).



Plate 1 Landscape of the cave areas. MCG II rockshelter is indicated by arrow.

The lithic component of the Upper Palaeolithic technocomplex (Plate 2) is characterized by parallel sided, pointed and irregular blades; retouched blades; partially backed blades; a few burins and chisel-edged core implements; side, end and notched scrapers; worked nuclei; irregularly worked flakes; used flakes; and debitage; while the bone artifact component (obtained from MCG I) comprises perforators; scrapers; chisels; scoops; shouldered points; spatulae; worked bones and bone blanks. The Mesolithic (Plate 3) is marked by a predominance of backed blades and bladelet elements (backed points, obliquely blunted blades, lunates, triangles and trapezes) of high technological perfection. The other lithic forms of the Mesolithic are scrapers; worked flakes; worked nuclei, a shouldered arrowhead on limestone; a perforator with needle-sharp end on limestone, finished by grinding; and delicate parallel sided bladelets struck from fluted cores of finest quality. In addition to these, there are sling balls, quartzite hammerstones and grindstones. Though a few bone blanks are present (at MCG II), no finished bone tools have as yet been found, and there are possibilities to expect, in future excavation, not only bone tools but also hafted tools. The raw material for the Upper Palaeolithic and Mesolithic is chiefly chert; the others being quartzite, jasper, quartz, chalcedony and limestone.

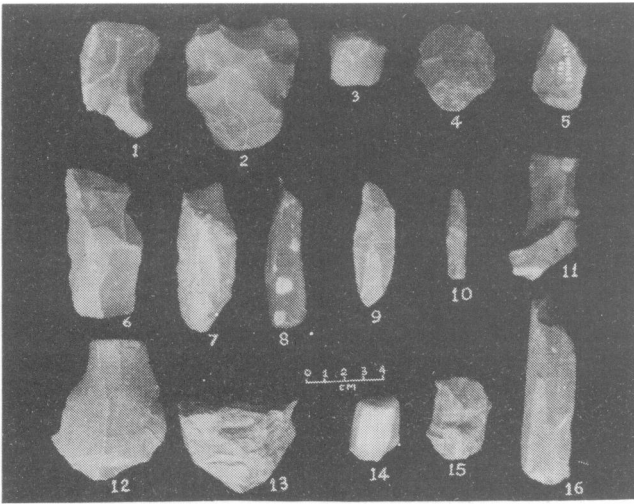


Plate 2 Upper Palaeolithic artifacts from the cave areas. 1-2, notched scrapers; 3-4, steep scrapers; 5, burin; 6-10, blades; 11, plunging flake; 12 and 15, flakes; 13-14, cores; 16, worked nodule with a chisel edge (4, 7 and 12: quartzite; 3, limestone; rest on chert).

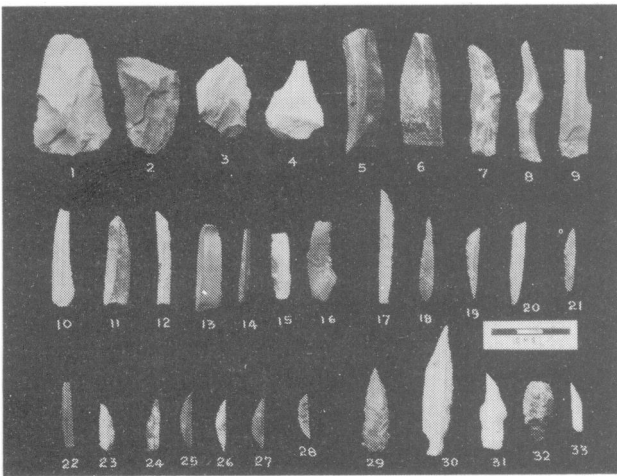


Plate 3 Mesolithic artifacts from MCG II. 1-2, worked nuclei; 3-4, flakes; 5-7, 9-16 and 31, blades and bladelets; 8, plunging flake; 17-28, backed bladelets; 29, unifacial point; 30 and 32, tanged points (tip of 32 broken); 33, perforator finished by grinding (30 and 33: limestone; 31: quartz; rest on chert).

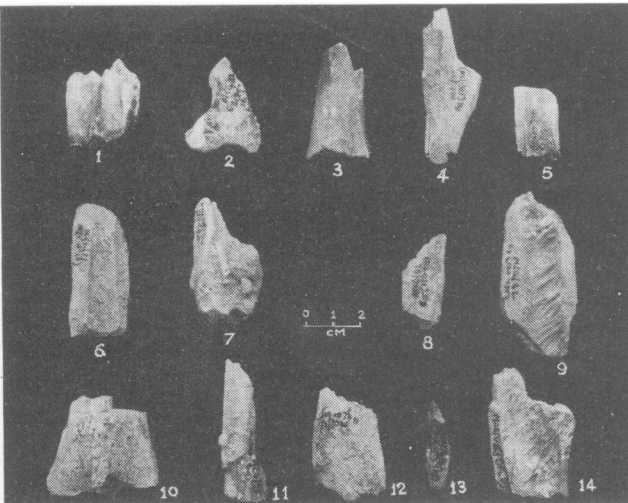
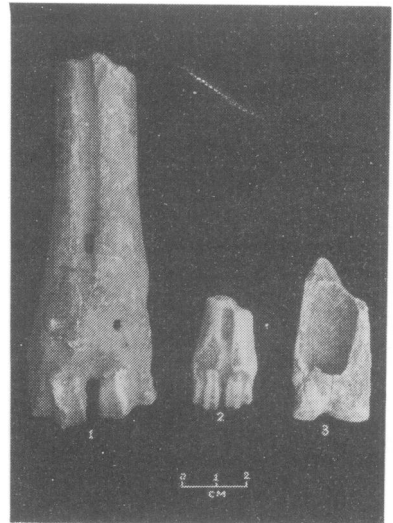


Plate 4 Bone remains from Late Mesolithic MCG II. 1, tooth; 2, hoof, broken; 3-14, bones with cut and chop marks (2, 5, 10-11 and 14, partially burnt).

Plate 5 Broken long bones from Late Mesolithic MCG II.



Considerable quantities of chert and jasper nuclei, quarried from the banded limestones were brought to the cave occupation (MCG II) during Upper Palaeolithic and Mesolithic and there is evidence to suggest that these were fire treated for artifact production.

The most valuable evidence to shed light on the hunter gatherer subsistence strategies in prehistory of the cave areas is the faunal remains. Among the several species of wild fauna known from excavated cave sites (Lydekker 1886; Murty 1975), the most important for their food value found in Mesolithic and Late Mesolithic MCG II are: jungle cat (*Felis chaus*), porcupine (*Hystrix crassidens*), black naped hare (*Lepus cf. nigricollis*), ox (*Bos* sp.), buffalo (*Bubalus* sp.), nilgai (*Boselaphus tragocamelus*), chinkara (*Gazella gazella bennetti*), blackbuck (*Antilope cervicapra*), Fourhorned antelope (*Tetracerus quadricornis*), sambar (*Cervus unicolor*), chital (*Axis axis*), barking deer (*Muntiacus muntjak*), mouse deer (*Tragulus cf. meminna*), Indian wild boar (*Sus scrofa cristatus*), pangolin (*Smutsia gigantea*), monitor lizard (*Varanus dracaena*), and a few bones of birds and dermal scutes of Chelonia. As the members of Antilopinae and Cervinae have disappeared from the cave areas, the Dabba Yerukulas and Boyas depend on the small game like porcupine, hare, pangolin, jungle cat, monitor lizard, and a variety of birds. They also hunt the wild boar when it is sighted in the scrub jungle of the low hills. Dabba Yerukulas and Boyas use a variety of hunting contrivances like net traps (for hare, porcupine, jungle cat and birds), spring traps (for jungle cat), gravity traps (for porcupine) and multiple noose traps (for birds). Manufacture of these items involves considerable wood work, bamboo work and cord work, as the case may be. Hunting aids once made are used for several years with occasional mending when they are damaged. And another method of hunting is by chasing and stalking the exhausted animal. Dabba Yerukulas and Boyas no longer use the bow and arrow as a result of their acculturation into the village economy as marginal enclaves, and the disappearance of big game must have also quickened the process. Nonetheless, traditions do reveal that bow and arrow must have been an important weapon in the ethnohistory of this region: Boyas had a great reputation as expert archers and they played a very important role in medieval warfare. Also the Telugu literary work *Kālahasti Mahatmyam* (16th century A.D.) enumerates different types of hunt. However, for the Chenchus and Chenchu Dasaris inhabiting the Nandyal forest where big game is available (though forest laws now forbid hunting), bow with an iron tipped arrow is a very important hunting tool. They use two types of arrows: *potu ammu* (male arrow) and *penti ammu* (female arrow). *Potu ammu* which has an elongated iron arrow point is used for hunting small game like hare, monitor lizard, jungle cat, immature barking deer, giant squirrel (*Ratufa indica*), civet cat (*Viverricula indica*), mongoose (*Herpestes edwardsi*), jungle fowl (*Gallus sonneratti*), pea fowl (*Pavo cristatus*), etc. *Penti ammu* with a triangular, barbed, iron point is for hunting big game like nilgai, chinkara, wild boar, and also for small game like porcupine and mouse deer. Both types of arrows are used for langur (*Presbytis entellus*). That the antiquity of bow and arrow possibly goes to the Upper Palaeolithic times is attested by two tanged arrow points, one of bone in the Upper Palaeolithic at MCG I and the other of limestone in the Mesolithic levels of MCG II. The unretouched, robust, parallel sided blades with pointed ends, if mounted as arrow points may as well serve the function of *potu ammu* of the Chenchus. The lacquers from the nests of tree ants (on *Acacia sandra* and *Dalbergia paniculata*) may possibly have been used for hafting (and also for making composite tools), as is the case with Chenchus today. The traditional behaviour of these people provides hints as to the various possible alternatives of hunting and meat food procurement methods in the prehistoric past. These could be: (1) hunting game by chasing and stalking

(as for example like the Dabba Yerukulas and Boyas), or felling the prey, after a chase, with bow and arrow (Chenchus); (2) ambushing the game at water holes (Chenchus); (3) net hunting of small game, use of traps for small game and use of net traps and noose traps for birds (Dabba Yerukulas and Boyas); and (5) opportunistic scavenging. the Chenchus drive away the dholes or tigers when they are feeding on the carcass (with the vultures perched on the tree tops disclosing the killsite below), and retrieve the leftovers (even putrified meat is consumed by them without any reservation). If the reasoning that the varied game represented in the cave occupations could not have fallen a prey without the use of specialized hunting aids is logical, then it can be conjectured that prototypes of some of the hunting contrivances of the ethnographic present were perhaps known during Stone Age times. If that could be so, the lithic elements of the Upper Palaeolithic and Mesolithic technocomplexes (especially the amorphous forms like the heavy worked nuclei, irregular flakes, and the scrapers) might have been used as adzes for cutting wood and bamboo, for splitting bamboo to obtain staves of different sizes for traps and for bow and arrow, as planning tools, spoke shaves, etc. Some of the blades and backed blades could have been used as knives in cord work (cords made of plant fibers and strips of barks) for the manufacture of nets. In the backed bladelet element of high technological perfection of the Mesolithic can be seen the possibility of manufacture of extractive tools like harvester sickles and knives for gleaning grains of wild grasses like *Themeda quadrivalvis* (widespread in the cave areas) before the awns shatter; and the grindstones present in the Late Mesolithic proved indirect evidence for the possible processing of grain foods. Though microwear studies help to decide whether an artifact type is used for working on wood, bone or other object, or for cutting grasses, it is difficult to reconstruct the hunting contrivances and other extractive tools. However, scores of central Indian prehistoric rock paintings which depict hunting scenes and a variety of bows and arrows (Wakankar and Brooks 1976; Mathpal 1984) are a valuable source of information in this context.

The meat food processing practices of Dabba Yerukulas and Boyas are of great value in understanding the bone accumulations in the cave occupations. Among the dental remains, for instance, there are some with cut-marks and chop-marks. Dabba Yerukulas and Boyas separate the mandible from maxilla, chop off the teeth from both, and the teeth are discarded right at the spot where the butchery (or processing) takes place, even at the residential base. In the case of maxilla, the muzzle is chopped off, the cranium is pounded into bits and this mash is fried in oil with spices. Mandibles simply roasted on an open flame are consumed with relish. Parts of the carcass with thick musculature, like the limb bones, are cut into chunks along with the inside bone and are roasted/barbecued in an open fireplace. The fireplace is made by arranging boulders vertically in two parallel rows and the fire is made between these two rows. The chunks of meat are pierced on to wands, and these wands are placed cross-wise resting on the boulders, with the meat exposed to the flame. Processed this way, the meat gets roasted, the bone inside (with the grease) gets cooked, and that end of the bone exposed to the flame gets burnt or charred. After consumption of the roasted meat, the bone marrow is consumed either by sucking, or by crushing the bone in the mouth, and hard bones are broken open with a stone. And most of the woods used in such open fireplaces turn into ashes (not into charcoals) when the flame dies down. The presence of burnt and charred ends of bones, ashy patches, considerable quantities of intentionally broken long bones (Plates 4 and 5), and a fireplace in Late Mesolithic levels seemingly made in the above described fashion (Plate 6) but disturbed by later rockfalls, are proof enough to predict a continuity in traditional meat

food processing methods from the past to the present. In the absence of archaeobotanical evidence it can only be speculated that the wild plant foods eaten by these traditional groups were perhaps exploited in the Stone Age past, possibly even on a larger scale (Murty: 1985).

Landscape ecology: present to the past

Explorations of the Archaeological Survey of India (IAR 1967-68) brought to light several prehistoric Neolithic/Chalcolithic sites (Patpadu, Nilugondla, Hotramandinne, Sivavaram, Singanapalle, Cherlopalle, Sunkesula, Mukkamala, Muchchelapuri and Ramapuram) in the Kunderu valley (Fig. 1). A few radiocarbon dates from Ramapuram (B. Narasimhaiah, personal communication), the site most extensively excavated (IAR 1980-81, 1981-82), indicate that the mini-colonization of the Kunderu valley dates to c.2000 B.C. All the prehistoric village sites are inhabited during the present times and their economy basically is dry farming and pastoralism (predominantly cattle and to some extent sheep/goat), as in the prehistoric past. Today limited stretches of low hills (Plate 7), hill slopes and valley bottoms in the vicinity of Stone Age cave sites as at Billa Surgam and MCG I and II, and other open-air Upper Palaeolithic/Mesolithic spots like Gollagutta, Betamcherla, Veldurti and Ramallakota are subjected to dry farming operations. In this context, it is interesting to note that a few polished stone celts typical of the Neolithic-Chalcolithic village cultures of southern Deccan (of which this region forms a part) are found respectively, at Veldurti, Ramallakota, close to the Billa Surgam caves (Isaac 1960); and one broken celt is found on the plateau opposite to MCG II. In addition, leaving aside MCG II which has yielded considerable quantities of Chalcolithic potsherds in Late Mesolithic levels, MCG I has yielded a perforated deep lipped bowl of grey ware in the top levels, and another excavated cave, the Pedda Pavuralla Badde Gavi, has yielded, also in the upper levels, the basal part of a basket-impressed red-ware pot. All these pottery types are known from Chalcolithic Ramapuram. Such evidence, the sporadic dispersal of polished stone celts and pottery in the cave areas, makes it clear that incursions were made by the Neolithic/Chalcolithic groups of the Kunderu valley into the cave areas. As the economies of the Neolithic/Chalcolithic village settlements were chiefly based on farming and pastoralism, it can be expected that these village pastoralists extended their transhumant range into the grassland and forested ecotones of the cave areas, and possibly dry farming operations to limited stretches on the low hills and valley bottoms. And that is the pattern of land use today. The present village Kottala (north of Billa Surgam close to which polished stone celts were found), which is locally called as Kanumakindi Kottala (cattle pen below the ghat) is a small pastoral cum farming village of about 50 households. Cattle of this village remain almost throughout the year in the hilly and mountain pastures and their transhumant range extends well beyond the MCG area. Similarly cattle from several villages (Patpadu, Betamcherla, Dronachellam, Rangapuram etc.) remain in the hilly terrain moving from pasture to pasture. Likewise there are large herds of predominantly sheep (and some goats) whose range extends up to the Nandyal forest.

In so far as the farming operations are concerned, this region with no major irrigation facilities (excepting the seasonal streams and river sides where rice is also cultivated), poor soil cover of red and black sandy loams and chalk soils, and low rainfall is of marginal utility. Dry farming is mostly geared to rainfed gravity flow cultivation of multiple crops (millets and grams). Some of the excavated Neolithic/Chalcolithic sites in this predominantly semi-arid



Plate 6 Fireplace (with ash mixed with sediment) at Late Mesolithic MCG II.

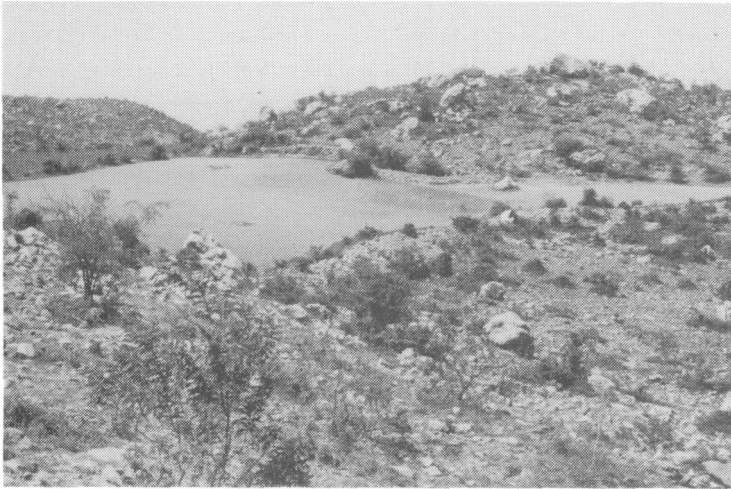


Plate 7 A low hill near Betamcherla levelled for farming.

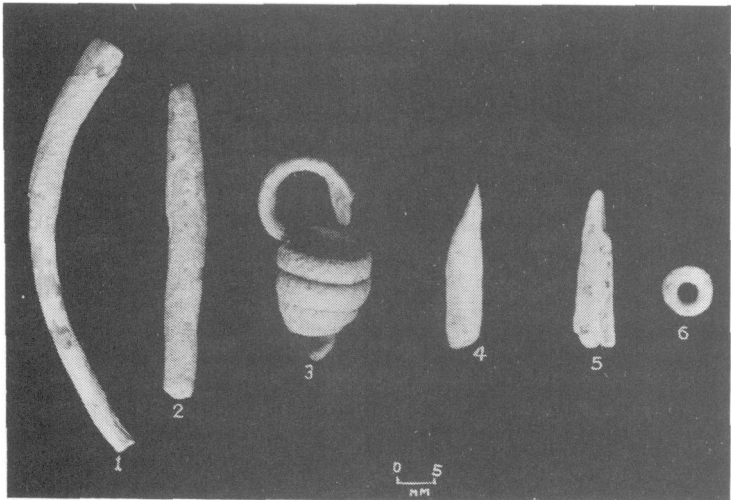


Plate 8 Copper and other objects from Late Mesolithic MCG II. 1, copper bangle, broken; 2, copper antimony rod; 3, copper spiral bead; 4, limestone perforator (enlargement of No. 33, Pl. 3); 5, perforator on bone, tip broken; 6, disc bead.

pastoral country like Sanganakallu and Tekkalakota (Sankalia 1974) which have disclosed levelling of hill tops for settlements and terrace cultivation, suggest a continuity in farming strategies from the past to present. Moreover, most of the crops that are cultivated today in this region, like finger millet (*Eleusine coracana*), bulrush millet (*Pennisetum typhoideum*), foxtail millet (*Setaria italica*), horse gram (*Dolichos biflorus*), green gram (*Phaseolus radiatus*), black gram (*Phaseolus mungo*), field pea (*Pisum arvense*), chick pea (*Cicer arietinum*), etc. were also cultivated during the Neolithic-Chalcolithic times (Kajale 1974).

The domesticated species represented at Ramapuram are (P. K. Thomas, personal communication) cattle (*Bos indicus*), goat (*Capra hircus aegagrus*), sheep (*Ovis aries*), buffalo (*Bubalus bubalis*), pig (*Sus scrofa cristatus*) and dog (*Canis familiaris*); and the wild game is represented by sambar (*Cervus unicolor*), blackbuck (*Antilope cervicapra*), chinkara (*Gazella gazella bennetti*), four-horned antelope (*Tetracerus quadricornis*), chital (*Axis axis*) and porcupine (*Hystrix indica*). This is the pattern at almost all the excavated Neolithic/Chalcolithic sites in the Southern Deccan (Thomas 1974); and among the domesticated species cattle remains predominate. The occurrence of wild fauna at the prehistoric village settlements, if interpreted in a purely archaeological context, gives rise to the misleading assumption that village-based groups were dependent as much on hunting as on farming and livestock. But recourse to ethno-archaeological reasoning provides the right insight to predict meaningful constructs. Today, all the villages in this region (including those where there is a continuity in habitation from the prehistoric times) maintain the required number of cattle, buffalo, sheep, goats and fowls, and the latter three supply the meat food needs of the respective villages. Nonetheless, they procure other meat foods: porcupine, hare and occasionally wild boar (available in the scrub jungle) and the big game like blackbuck, antelope, deer etc. (which fall a prey in chance encounters in the peripheral forests, though rarely); a variety of birds (partridge, bustard, quail, finchlark, jungle fowl and even a pea fowl if chanced upon); fish, prawns and crabs; honey, etc. from the traditional hunter gatherers, who have become, as enumerated by Fox (1969), professional primitives and marginal enclaves of the village economy. If the present pattern is any guide, one can argue that the Neolithic-Chalcolithic inhabitants may not have resorted to hunting as an important subsistence strategy but obtained these meat foods from the Late Mesolithic groups. And there is ample evidence indicating that the latter were inhabiting this region when inroads were made into the Kunderu valley by the village dwellers. The same reasoning can be extended to explain the occurrence of a few remains of domestic pig at Ramapuram in particular, and similar Neolithic-Chalcolithic sites in general, in this region. Today, none of the farmer-pastoralists maintain pigs, and those who are fond of pork obtain it from the Dabba Yerukulas and Kunchapuri Yerukulas. Among the Yerukulas, there are at least 13 sub-groups, each adapted to a specialized economy, symbiotic with the village: for example, apart from Dabba Yerukulas (whose domain is bamboo basketry) and Kunchapuri Yerukulas (loom brushes), there are others like Nara Yerukulas (rope making), Uppu Yerukulas (selling salt) and Yeddu Yerukulas (carriers of merchandise on bullocks). No matter what their specialized economy is, their traditional mode of livelihood is pig rearing. And the evidence from the Mesolithic occupation at Bagor, Rajasthan, dated to c.5000 B.C. (Misra 1973; Thomas 1975) where remains of domestic pig are found along with the wild ones is suggestive that some groups of early Holocene hunter gatherers were adapted to selective taming of animals of food value. On this reasoning, it is possible to conjecture that the ancestral groups of the Yerukula ethnics (perhaps descendants of the Late Mesolithic groups), in the region under discussion,

tamed pig prior to their contact with the village based societies.

It is thus plausible that the consequences of the introduction of the village system into the Kunderu valley: demographic increase, infringement into the hilly and forested terrain by the pastoralists with their livestock, and manipulation of landscape for farming, at least partly disrupted the ecological balance of the Late Mesolithic hunter-gatherers and induced re-scheduling of exploitative strategies. But the culture contact with the village system must have initiated proto co-operation, to begin with, between the Late Mesolithic groups and the village people. This could have acted as catalyst in splitting the hunter-gatherers into different kinds of specialized professionals.

And in the Late Mesolithic MCG II there is already evidence pointing out such a contact, in the form of pottery, a few copper objects (an antimony rod, a copper spiral bead, part of a bangle) (Plate 8) and remains of domestic sheep/goat, all known from Ramapuram. Further, throughout the Late Mesolithic occupation levels at MCG II, the artifactual elements are the microlithic tools, and also the remains of wild fauna are numerous, suggesting that the chief subsistence strategy was broad spectrum exploitation. In this context it is interesting to note that at Ramapuram microlithic tools occur in the early phase of occupation but disappear later, while the remains of wild fauna are present in all the phases of Chalcolithic occupation. It can therefore be surmised that there existed an exchange system between the Late Mesolithic groups and the Neolithic-Chalcolithic villages and that the former obtained these items (a few copper objects and pottery) from any of the Ramapuram-like settlements in the Kunderu valley, possibly by bartering meat foods and forest produce for grains and other commodities, as is happening today.

Process of acculturation

These developments in land use pattern, since the introduction of village life into the Kunderu valley, gave a new dimension to social ecology as the Mesolithic hunter-gatherers were drawn into the ambit of village economy. The occurrence of a few remains of domestic sheep/goat in the Late Mesolithic occupation at MCG II is suggestive that the Late Mesolithic groups possibly were initiated to adopt sheep/goat pastoralism due to contact diffusion. There are important oral traditions centered on Birappa (Murty and Sontheimer 1980), the god of the sheep pastoral Kuruvas (who are widespread in the drier Andhra-Karnataka region), which are a source of valuable ethnohistoric evidence shedding light on the emergence of sheep pastoralism as a distinctive economic organization, and as an offshoot of farming cum pastoral system. According to these oral traditions, Birappa (colloquial form of *Bīradēva*: *Bīr*, hero; *Dēva*, god) before he became the god, was the youngest of the seven brothers of a farming family, which immigrated into this region from elsewhere. His original name was Yelanati Reddi (Reddis are the landed peasants to this day). As he is endowed with supernatural powers, his other brothers feel jealous of him and ask him to move into a forested area and cultivate the land. Yelanati Reddi while ploughing the land hits a stone slab, uncovers it, and to his dismay finds sheep in the nether world. The great god Śiva appears to him at this juncture and tells him to rear sheep. From then on, he wanders with sheep for twelve years in the forest; he was not allowed into the settled townships. Ultimately he proves his supremacy and becomes *Bīradēva* (who at some places is identified as *Biralirigeśwara* an incarnation of Śiva). Those who followed Birappa

and his traditions, are regarded by the farming cum cattle keepers (Liṅgāyats) as degraded, impure, the illegitimate children born to the concubine of their god, etc. In fact, the impurity and social stigma attached to sheep pastoralists is apparently to dissuade large scale conversion of farming cum cattle keepers into sheep pastoralists, as the latter is a much more advantageous strategy in the semi-arid grassland ecosystems of the Deccan. Birappa's association with forests and huntresses, and the mock hunt enacted at the beginning of the annual festival of Birappa at Balapalapalle, implicitly underlie the interaction with and induction of some hunter-gatherer groups into the sheep pastoral system. That apart, there are medieval inscriptions indicating the acculturation of traditional ethnics not only as enclaves of the village economy, but also into the state. These inscriptions refer to the subdivision (after occupation) of Boyas such as village Boyas, grassland men, buffalo men, men of the herd and fishmen (Prasad 1978) leaving aside those who became carpenters, blacksmiths and agriculturists (Thurston 1909). An inscription refers to the country inhabited by the Boyas as Bōyavihāradēśa, that a chief by name Mahāmaṇḍalēśvara Gonkaya Bōyaw as a lord of 480 villages, and that he was a servant of the Chola king, Rajendra Chola (c. 11th century A.D.).

There are other equally interesting mythopoeic oral traditions which are as important as any archaeological evidence to evaluate the processes of cultural change in the ethnohistory of Chenchus. At Ahobilam is the famous temple of the man-lion god Narasimha (popular as Ahobila Narasimha) who is now an important Visnavite god. According to these traditions, Narasimha in his wanderings in the Nallamala forests (the habitat of Chenchus) falls in love with a Chenchu belle. The girl expresses to her father, the Chenchu chieftain, that she wants to marry Narasimha. Since Narasimha is a stranger, he is put to test by the chieftain, to prove his efficiency in climbing precipices and tall trees and collecting honey, digging termite mounds and collecting the queen (called *puttajunnu*, an item of food for the Chenchus), and in hunting. After having satisfied himself that Narasimha could perform these tasks, the chieftain gives his consent for their marriage. The Chenchu girl, as the consort of Narasimha who became an incarnation of Visnu, later became Chenchu Lakshmi. There are excellent sculptural representations at the Ahobilam temple showing the Chenchu girl, wearing a leaf skirt and aiming her bow and arrow as a huntress (Plate 9); and the love episode in which the Chenchu girl is shown leaning on her bow as if a thorn were in her foot and Narasimha is shown as a tiny figure removing it (Plate 10). The Chenchus believe that Narasimha is their brother-in-law and have a special right to enter the temple at Ahobilam, which otherwise has become purely Brahmanical. As enumerated by Stein (1973) with regard to the principal of female deity in South Indian Hinduism, the association with folk religion must be regarded as important; the worship of the goddess has deep roots in prehistoric Indian religion; and that the early folk deities, patronesses of ancient folk religion, later enjoyed a universalization of stature in being made consorts of puranic deities.

The folk parallel for the Brahmanical Narasimha of Ahobilam is Madduleti Narasimha, whose shrine at Madduleti (spelt as Mudduleti in survey maps) was originally a cave (as is the case with Ahobila Narasimha). Madduleti Narasimha is a god of the peasants and pastoralists and in the oral traditions, he is depicted as a notorious robber of sheep, and a hunter. He is not only fond of meat but becomes ferocious by noon if he is not served a meal of meat. Because of this the peasants and pastoralists celebrate a ritual (*jatara*) every Saturday with animal sacrifices (rams, sheep, goats and fowls) and especially in the post-harvest season, the number of animals sacrificed for this god may exceed 500 (according to informants) on each Saturday.

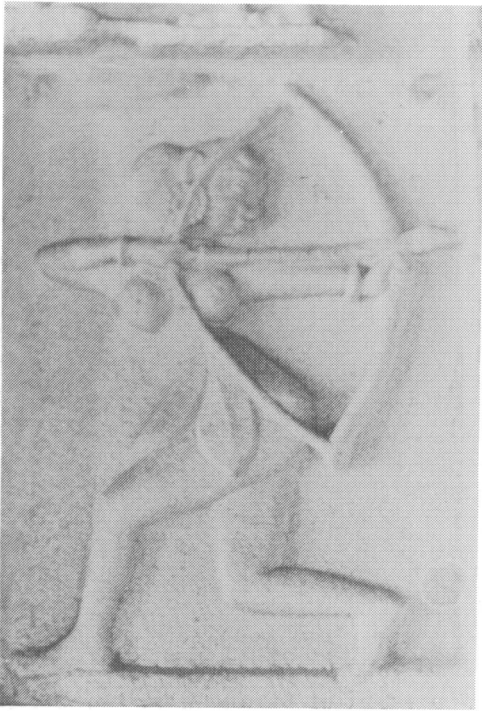


Plate 9 Sculptural representation at Ahobilam temple of the Chenchu girl, wearing a leaf skirt, as a huntress.



Plate 10 Sculptural representation at Ahobilam temple showing Narasimha removing the thorn from the foot of the Chenchu girl.

Notwithstanding the syncretism that took place between the folk traditions and Brahmanical traditions, the aforementioned events reveal the ongoing processes of interaction and acculturation of hunter gatherers with the farmer-pastoral and the later Sanskritic cultures. The archaeological evidence from Late Mesolithic occupation at the MCG II rockshelter site and the Chalcolithic village settlement of Ramapuram, foreshadows such phenomena in the pre-history of this region.

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Abstract

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Ethnoarchaeology of the Kurnool Cave areas, South India

The limestone country in the Nandyal basin of Kurnool district has open-air and cave occupations belonging to the Upper Palaeolithic and Mesolithic periods. During the time of Late Mesolithic occupation of the cave areas, Neolithic–Chalcolithic village settlements geared to farming and pastoral economy sprang up in the Kunderu valley from c.2000 B.C. Ethnoarchaeological approach to the prehistory of this region with special reference to the evidence obtained from the Late Mesolithic occupation at MCG II rockshelter site and the Neolithic–Chalcolithic village of Ramapuram helps to predict that the present pattern of adaptations to landscape ecology, and the exchange system between the hunter gatherers and village groups, have their beginnings in the prehistoric period of this region.