

**PERCEPTIONS OF DEATH AMONG THE MEGALITHIC
COMMUNITIES IN TELANGANA**

A Dissertation Submitted to the University of Hyderabad in Partial
Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Award of the Degree of

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IN

HISTORY

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CERTIFICATE

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the work embodied in this dissertation titled, “**Perceptions of death among the megalithic communities in Telangana**” is an original research work carried out by me under the supervision of **Professor K. P Rao**, Department of History, University of Hyderabad, in partial fulfilment of the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy in History.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The history of Indian archaeology resonate the glories and whims of her colonial past. Archaeological enquiries into the ancient past of the country were largely linked to the political schemata of the colonial state. The pre-independent epoch saw the rise of administrators with a spark of interest in Indian antiquities; engage in a dual dialogue between ancient remains and colonial responsibilities. To what extent, this interest was flickered by the genuine passion for digging up India's past is a matter of debate considering that many of these officials and individual agencies were largely out for a treasure hunt. This facet of the colonial mission is further strengthened when we consider the fact that early scholars of Indian origin were adequate as "auxiliaries in such a train of research" but never to be trusted with enquiries by themselves without the supervision of a 'master head'.¹

For the colonial agenda a comprehensive study of the Indian past was necessary to make India legible. At this stage of framing a narrative about the Indian past, history and archaeology were never differentiated. The study into the history of Indian civilization began with the learned societies that sprouted in the colonial centers of power. A brief reading of the early research papers of the Asiatic society will prove that material past always took a back seat while the texts were glorified. In a way, the fascination with oriental studies added fuel to the primacy of texts. The arrival of Alexander Cunningham to the scene saw the institutionalization of archaeological studies which over the centuries have further consolidated its' position and has established itself as a distinct discipline.²

¹K. Paddaya, Expanding Horizons of Indian Archaeology, 'Bulletin of the Deccan College Post-Graduate and Research Institute, vol.62, 2003, pp.291-309.

²Trautmann, Thomas R., and Carla M. Sinopoli, 'In the Beginning Was the Word: Excavating the Relations between History and Archaeology in South Asia', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, vol. 45, no. 4, 2002, pp. 492-523.

It was most often believed that archaeological studies being strictly based on the material remains does not add up to the whole picture. Mostly seen as a corroborating source for literary texts, archaeology had been limited in its potential. Even when archaeology came to the forefront as a major source for interpreting historical processes, the initial studies gave primary importance to the material remains. It was more a study of the artifacts rather than the study of the historical processes that placed it in a particular historical context. However archaeological studies have developed beyond material artifacts.

It is almost impossible to rely entirely on literary sources to reconstruct the past. Most often literary sources can be subjected to interpolations, compilations, artistic exaggerations and often fall susceptible to the interests of a 'power group' especially when it comes to early texts. As a result we conveniently get a glimpse of one side of the story while the big picture remains hazy and imperceptible. This is where archaeology comes in handy. It is especially important to understand that archaeological sources at the first hand assess the material culture of the past. However, it is equally important to acknowledge the recent developments in the field of archaeology which proves that it is a discipline that cannot be confined to the study of material cultures alone. The archaeological remains are more and more exposed to new perspectives thereby throwing light on the cultural and quite interestingly even on metaphysical aspects.

The discovery of the ancient sepulchral monuments in Bangala Motta Paramba in Kerala by J. Babington was the initiation of megalithic studies in the country. The article published by him in 1823, about the Pandoo Coolies of Malabar, prompted a wide array of excavations and explorations in the subcontinent to unearth and understand the diverse yet wide distribution of megalithic structures. Right from the very first article, there was little doubt that these structures were erected as burial monuments a conclusion mainly derived from their affinity with grave goods. Thus, the megaliths were intrinsically linked with the idea of death and funerary customs.

Our present-day understanding of the concept of death and methods of disposal of the dead could be traced back to the Neanderthals. These ceremonial burial rituals which saw the light in the middle Paleolithic period sure give us a foundational

understanding of the idea of death. The erection of huge stone structures as surface markers over the burials which eventually became a customary practice was observed throughout the world at different epochs in time but with similar architectural features. The erection of stone structures of varying types seemed to be a practice that does not have regional boundaries. The megaliths are thus found spread across continents with merger regional variations.³

A compound word with Greek affinity, the term “megalith” is divided into two separate words with “*mega*” meaning huge and “*lithoi*” meaning stone. Hence the term simply signifies a huge stone structure. The term megalith is understood as “*a grave or memorial erected in stone, whether dressed or in its natural form containing, enclosing or erected over the funerary assemblage.*” In that sense megaliths are essentially connected with lithic appendages. The common features of the funerary assemblage, concepts, techniques of construction, etc. also lead to the inclusion of graves without lithic appendages in this category.

The most fundamental aspect that frames our understanding of the megaliths is that these structures do not symbolize a particular culture or a single cultural unit. Though there are certain variations in the mode of construction of the burial, the megalithic culture shows identical characteristics, which are observed universally. It was this resemblance in burial culture that has led to a common nomenclature of a ‘megalithic culture’. The earlier attempts to identify the megalithic monuments in the global level, as a part of a single cultural whole had been nullified. The regional variations are accounted for separately and the multiplicity of megalithic cultures worldwide has been acknowledged.

A general overview of the megaliths that have been identified so far in the Indian subcontinent is imperative before we move further into the studies regarding these monuments. It is quite vexing when we realize that even this is a complicated task because of the variety of the megalithic structures strewn across the subcontinent. The

³Vinay Kumar, ‘Origin and Authorship of Indian Megaliths’, in K.N. Dikshit and Ajith Kumar (ed.), *The Megalithic Culture of South India*, New Delhi, The Archaeological Society, 2014, 334.

typological classification and the complexity of the distribution of the megalithic monuments will be addressed in detail in the coming chapters.

Objectives of the study

The present study aims to understand the perceptions of death among the megalithic communities in Telangana, based solely on the material remains excavated from various sites spread across the region. The study will also look into how such perceptions of death had played a vital role in shaping the social systems within the community and why a morbid affair such as death might have played a vital role in the integration of society.

Methodology

The methodology that is followed in this thesis is interpretative archaeology. An attempt has been made to give meaning to the material remains as excavated from the megalithic sites in relation to their context. Interpretative archaeology moves away from a superimposed theory that gives meaning to the material remains and attempts to construct narratives that allow the past to present itself. With an aim to maintain objectivity, this approach helps subordinate groups to empower themselves and to develop their own senses of past. The study uses external arguments only to a small extent and is focused on deriving internal arguments to arrive at plausible interpretations. This approach to archaeology increases the sense of the ‘other’ as it is an ongoing process and there is no definitive conclusion. Acceptance of this ‘other’ is a major advancement in archaeological enquiry where material remains are analyzed not to explain the cultural context but to attempt to understand it, which may or may not be true.⁴

Limitations of the study

Explorations and excavations on archaeological sites is a tedious process and it is quite evident that it takes time and effort to carefully unearth whatever has survived the wrath of nature and time. Most of these materials remains would already have been

⁴Ian Hodder, ‘Interpretive Archaeology and Its Role’, *American Antiquity*, vol. 56, no. 1, 1991, pp. 7-18

corroded by the time they are discovered. The added burden of most of the sites being ravaged for treasures posits a grave problem. Understanding a material culture without corroborating literary sources, have always been a complicated task. It further complicates the research when one is trying to understand the very ideas behind their actions which manifest itself in the material remains. Therefore, the study does not in any way attempt to provide explanations or conclusions, but only tries to provide possible interpretations.

The lack of clarity and inherent contradictions in primary sources proves to be quite vexing. Inaccessibility to many of the important sites in the region severely limited the possibility of field visits. As most of the sites were a part of salvage excavations, much of the excavations might have been done in a hurry which has proved hazardous to the study.

Sources of the study

For this study, the megalithic structures themselves and their grave content served as the primary source of information. Indian Archaeological Reports, individual excavation reports and field visits have provided first-hand information essential for the study. Due to their enigmatic nature, the megalithic structures have been studied voraciously ever since they were first discovered. The study has utilized the full potential of such secondary sources to address the problem of the megaliths.

Chapterization

The study includes three core chapters excluding the introduction and conclusion. A historiographical account of the major studies concerning the megalithic structures had been attempted in the first chapter. The chapter titled, ‘Megalithic Paradoxes: A historiographical account of the megalithic sites in Telangana’ is a tribute to all those scholars, antiquarians and even laymen who have contributed even the tiniest piece of evidence to put in the puzzle that is the megaliths. The second chapter titled, ‘The Materiality of Death: Understanding the Material Remains of the Megalithic Burials in Telangana’, has attempted to understand the typological distribution of the known megalithic structures in Telangana. An attempt has been made to compile a list

of the material remains from the excavated sites. The third chapter titled 'Perceptions of Death' underlines the importance of burial structures and funerary customs in interpreting the social fabric of society. The concluding chapter of the study is a brief summarization and opens up a Pandora's Box complexities into the megalithic studies of the country.

Scope of the study

The present study compiles the data from the different megalithic sites in the state of Telangana and attempts to derive possible inferences to the driving forces behind the construction of such stone structures which henceforth will be referred to as 'megaliths.' The megaliths predominantly erected as part of funerary rituals, invariably prove that the megalithic perceptions of death might have played a major role not only during the time of death of a deceased but also in regulating the society and the individual lives of the megalithic builders. The scope of the study is two-fold, the first being that this type of study allows future research to understand the perceptions of death and its evolution especially in pre-literate societies. Consequently, possible interpretations of the functioning of such societies can be derived from an analysis of their mortuary practices, which invariably sheds light on the social and cultural apparatus of the society in question. The study also leaves scope for understanding the megalithic culture in coherence with the possibility of using ethnographic and anthropological sources, which has not been employed in the present study as it goes beyond the scope of the research. The study also suggests the possibility that the megalithic stone structures might not all be directly associated with the cult of the dead and might have served certain specific purposes as well. Such a study might move away from the popular understanding of the megaliths simply as the cult of the dead and might give rise to certain new possibilities for understanding the megalithic communities. The study prompts further research into the possibility of understanding the complex workings of early societies especially pre-literate societies, might be possible through the comprehensive analysis of the mortuary customs.

Chapter 2

Megalithic Paradoxes: A historiographical account of the megalithic studies in India

Ever since its discovery, the megaliths have attracted the attention of scholars from around the world. As early as the sixteenth century people have undertaken the task of examining these stone structures out of sheer curiosity. Inigo Jones, the renowned architect of Whitehall was perhaps the first person to start off a modern critical study into these stone monuments, at least in the European context. His treatise was an account on the ‘Stonehenge’ which captured the fancy of King James 1st. Jones came to the conclusion that the monument was a Roman temple. However this theory was quite vehemently attacked by Dr. Charleston whose study on the monuments of England and Denmark and the considerable similarities led him to the conclusion that this monument was erected at the wake of the decline of the Roman Empire and assumed a local Danish origin to the stone structures. Mr. Webb in response to Charleston’s theory created a ruckus and responded in aggressive passion that the Stonehenge was indeed a Roman relic and opposed Charleston’s theory. Later on it was Dr. Stukeley who connected the stone circles as the temples of the Druids, the priests of the Celtic race. His conclusion that the Druids were serpent worshippers and consequently the Stonehenge; Avebury and other such monuments were in fact serpent temples did not stand ground. However the Druidic ancestry of the megaliths gained sufficient theoretical backing in the years to come and still forms a formidable part of the investigations into the crust of these megalithic cultures.⁵

Independent attempts to study the megaliths have been undertaken over the years. Most of these earlier attempts were exploratory in nature and formed rather hasty judgmental theories. The discovery of new sites on a large scale even in contemporary times has initiated investigations into the megaliths from around the world with renewed passion and critical analysis. Despite the numerous studies that came up during the

⁵James Fergusson, *Rude Stone Monuments In all Countries; Their Age and Uses*, London, John Murray, 1872, pp.61-62. Hereafter referred to as ‘Fergusson, 1872’.

nineteenth and twentieth centuries, whatever is known about these monuments are somewhat scattered and it would not be entirely wrong to say that the studies are still at a stage of infancy.

Widely understood to be structures erected for funerary or memorial purposes these stone structures can be mapped all over the world with an antiquity that spans for centuries. With its early beginnings in the Neolithic period and extending up to the historic times, erecting stone structures as part of a funerary or memorial custom is still a prevalent practice among different communities in the world.⁶ Whether we can call all such communities as megalithic communities is a dilemma still confusing archaeology.

Megalithic structures in India are only a mere dot when we place them in a global context. Over the centuries a hoard of literature has come up concerning the various aspects of the megalithic structures from all over the world. Indian archaeological studies have taken up the cause of the megaliths ever since their discovery. Megalithic studies now boast of a massive literary corpus which consists of the early accounts by administrators, individual excavation reports and catalogues of explored and unexplored sites.⁷

A study of the historiography of the megalithic monuments in the Indian scenario would inevitably touch upon the questions of the origin and authorship of the megaliths, the proposed time period, the issue of assigning a nomenclature to these structures, the subsistence pattern, the cultural milieu, the comparative lack of habitation sites in par with burials and the age old proposition of the introduction of iron in South India. Thus, for a culture that has left behind no literary evidences it is quite normal that several debates and controversies still shroud the existence of these megalithic monuments in a complicated cape.

The very term ‘megalithic’ is controversial as have been observed earlier; those sites with no megalithic reminiscence are also classified as ‘megalithic monuments’ solely based on its contents. Similarly the cromlechs and closed cromlechs excavated

⁶Purushottam Singh, *Burial Practices in Ancient India*, Varanasi, Prithivi Prakashan, 1970, p. 72.

⁷Robert Sewell, *List of Antiquarian Remains in the Presidency of Madras*, Madras, Government Press, 1882, pp.1-407.

from certain areas in the Deccan have so far not yielded any grave appendage, but are also included in this category of ‘megaliths’ due to their similarities in stone structures.⁸ This confusion regarding the nomenclature of the megalithic monuments is best addressed by Leshnik. Since there is no equivalent term which can be used as a substitute to include all the megalithic typologies found in the present area of study, the term ‘megalith’ is applied to refer to all stone monuments with grave appendage and prescribes megalithic characteristics, without any exclusions.⁹

The early studies concerning the megaliths in the Indian subcontinent were divided into three centers of development largely understood as the peninsular, extra-peninsular and north-eastern India. The traces of left behind by the megalithic culture have been found mainly concentrated in these areas. The extra peninsular India comprised of the north and north-western borders and fall in Baluchistan, Baluch and Persian Makhran.¹⁰ One is to be fooled if one believes that atleast in these three different complexes there is a kind of uniformity which bind the megalithic structures together. But this is not the case. There are inherent differences not only between these three complexes, but also among the different megalithic sites in a particular region. Even more vexing is the fact that there exist numerous variations even within a single burial site. However the mode of disposal of the dead, the grave goods attached, the architecture of the monument, the directional basis, the decorative patterns on the lithic appendage etc; all contribute to the unique nature of these megalithic sites. Thus a comprehensive and comparative analysis of the different megalithic sites in the Indian subcontinent is a ‘herculean task’. Just like how the sites are scattered all over the subcontinent, the materials and excavation reports span over centuries of archaeological research strewn over a vast expanse of time and area.

⁸Captain Meadows Taylor, ‘Megalithic Tombs and other Ancient Remains in the Deccan’, *The Journal of the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, vols. III – IV, 1862, pp 35-38. Hereafter referred to as ‘Captain Meadows Taylor, 1862’.

⁹Lawrence Leshnik, *South Indian Megalithic Burials: The Pandukal Complex*, Wiesbaden, Franz Steiner Verlag, 1974, pp.1-2. Hereafter, referred to as ‘Leshnik, Pandukal Complex’.

¹⁰K.S. Ramachandran, *A Bibliography on Indian Megaliths*, Madras, Government of Tamil Nadu, 1971, pp.1-2.

The historiography of the megalithic monuments in the country is a historiography of contradictions and speculations. A majority of the documentation of the megalithic sites are restrained to confined geographical regions. A major drawback of this method is that it is confined to cataloging only with chances at an interpretative study to a minimum. But this is in no sense a critique to their immense contribution to the field of megalithic studies. The antiquarian era of Indian archaeology is what probed future studies and enquiries which in due course provided further impetus and inspiration. Any future work on the quest to understand the megaliths would not have been possible without them.

Thus, it is quite clear that the historiography of the megalithic culture in the Indian subcontinent is not a comprehensive whole. The wide dispersal of megalithic structures throughout the country with particular concentration in the peninsular region makes the study of these ancient structures along with the time consuming process of excavations and further explorations a challenging task. Moreover the lack of any substantial pictorial depictions or symbolic references from the artifacts, if any, gathered from the monuments posits another problem. However, years of research has to an extent shed some light on the society and culture of the megalithic people, even though their origin and authorship largely remains a matter of speculation.

Right from the accidental discovery of the hood stones and umbrella stones in Malabar region, we can see that the academic scholarship has vultured around the confusions circling these structures. J. Babington's first report on these ancient sepulchral monuments was largely a brief report of the findings which initially did not incite much excitement in him. He almost immediately established a 'Hindu' origin to these caves on the basis of the finding of an artifact which vaguely resembles the '*trishul*' (a weapon associated with Shiva in Hindu mythology) and dismissed its importance at that.¹¹ Following the lead of Babington, William Logan went one step

¹¹J. Babington, 'Description of the Pandoo Coolies in Malabar,' *Transactions of the Literary Society of Bombay*, Vol.111, 1823, pp.324-330.

further and placed the megaliths of Malabar in a Hindu religious tradition and even traced down the practice to the caste communities of Malabar.¹²

As noticed in the account published by Babington the initial phase of studying the megaliths was largely confined to excavations reports combined with a profound haste to assign an origin and authorship to these structures. A number of antiquarians stumbled upon these stone structures widely dispersed over the subcontinent and struggled to understand their significance in the ancient past of the country. Different theories rose up to explain the origin of these megalithic cultures and their builders. A compilation of some of the major theories with regard to the megalithic studies in the Indian context has been attempted here.

The resemblances between the Indian megaliths and European megaliths have been pointed out even in the infant stages of archaeological enquiries. Capt. Meadows Taylor in the light of his excavations in the Sholapur State megalithic monuments strongly advocated their Druidical ancestry. Taylor's research methodology and mode of excavations are published in a set of three articles which are rather detailed reports of the excavations he had undertaken in Deccan. Not only did he spearhead the excavations in the area, he also systematically gave a very extensive account of the typology, contents, geography and measurements of each monument in minute detail with comprehensive sketches.¹³ In spite of this, one rather serious drawback of Taylor's study is that instead of acknowledging the unique and distinctive nature of the megalithic remains in the Indian context he quite strongly starts off his investigations with the presupposed notion of the Druidic connections similar to the megaliths in England and in India. His observations are strongly focused on reinforcing the Scythic origins of the Indian megaliths and hence he seeks to find more similarities than differences from the stone monuments recovered. But in Taylor's defense assigning an authorship to the megaliths was the predominant quest among the academicians during his time.

¹²William Logan, *Malabar Manual*, vol. 1, Madras, Madras Government Press, 1887, p. 129.

¹³Captain Meadows Taylor, 1862, p.38.

James Fergusson's research was ground breaking in accepting the limitations pertaining to the study of these stone monuments in a global context and acknowledging the lack of studies and gaping holes in the existing theories that encircle these structures in a maze of confusion. Fergusson attempted to look at alternate possibilities for the existence of these burial sites rather than assigning the immediate notion that they were erected for funerary purposes. Fergusson understood the possibility of cairns particularly the ones at Jewarji excavated by Capt. Meadows Taylor to be battlefields due to their disorganized mode of disposal of the dead and avid presence of detached heads with quantities of pottery thrown into the pit. However, Taylor offers an alternate theory for the detached heads as being a pointer to the practice of human sacrifices. In conclusion, Fergusson identifies Rajankollor as a cemetery and Jewarji as a battlefield. He aligns his understanding of the authors of the megaliths with that of Sir Walter Elliot who strongly advocated that the hill tribes of the Kurumbar, who were believed to be immigrants from the north-west, were the actual authors of these structures.¹⁴ Fergusson should be credited with pointing out that all the sites of the megalithic habitants need not be burial sites and could have an alternate story to tell.

Alexander Rea provided monumental insight into the megalithic sites in Adichanallur and Perumbair.¹⁵ Though the sites had been noticed previously, extensive excavation was carried out only in the early half of the twentieth century. As the vessels recovered from the burials urns showed striking similarities to prehistoric Egyptian pottery, with characteristic red and black polished surface, Rea was more inclined to associate the burials at Adichanallur to a Pandyan origin.¹⁶

Robert Bruce Foote catalogued the sites and their major features in a highly commendable superiority coupled with very shrewd inferences.¹⁷ But the new trend in the historiography of the megalithic structures concerning the origin and authorship initiated a heated discussion with scholars like Deberuil arguing Vedic affinities to the

¹⁴Fergusson, 1872, p.139.

¹⁵Alexander Rea, *Catalogue of the Prehistoric Antiquities from Adichanallur and Perumbair*, Madras, Government Press, 1915, p.5.

¹⁶*ibid.*, pp.6-8.

¹⁷Robert Bruce Foote, *The Foote Collection of Indian Prehistoric and Protohistoric Antiquities: Notes on their Ages and Distribution*, Madras, Government Press, 1914.

rock caves, and scholars like A. Aiyappan eagerly disproving the claims of so called Vedic affinities of these megaliths.¹⁸ In the eagerness to assert the Aryan or non-Aryan nature of the megaliths scholars failed to understand the megaliths in their entirety and complex nature.

This trend can be clearly traced in the works of L. A. Krishna Iyer, yet another pioneer in the study of megalithic structures. Iyer's studies were largely placed against the backdrop of the European understanding of the megalithic cultures and the theories of diffusion. His study was largely descriptive with emphasis on the place of occurrence; size, shape and racial links. Being an anthropologist his interest was more to identify the earliest settlers of Kerala. Iyer ascribes it to pre-Dravidian people and traces its living tradition in some of the tribes who are living in the uplands like Urali, and Kadars¹⁹

While the pre-independence era in megalithic studies was largely pertained to excavations, cataloging and brief observations, the post-independence era gave rise to a new hoard of literature in megalithic studies. It was a combination of explorations, excavations and strives to understand the different facets of culture of the megalithic builders.

A brief yet comprehensive analysis of the megalithic problem in India was attempted by K.R Srinivasan and N.R Banerjee in the post-independence era.²⁰ The origin, chronology, authorship, typology and distribution pattern, associated pottery, bead industry, mode of production, geography, climate and orientation was discussed and the typological parallels with their western counterparts were given due mention. However their insights were not complete and were largely based on major type sites like Brahmagiri, Chingleput, Pudukkottai, Cochin and Sanur, which inevitably limits the scope of the study.

¹⁸A.Aiyappan 'Rock- cut Cave Tombs of Feroke, South Malabar,' in *The Quarterly Journal of the Mythic Society* vol. 23, no. 13, 1933, pp.299-314.

¹⁹L.A.Krishna Iyer, 'Prehistoric Archaeology of Kerala,' in *The Quarterly Journal of the Mythic Society* vol. 20(2), 1929, pp.58-61.

²⁰K.R Srinivasan and N.R Banerjee, 'Survey of South Indian Megaliths', *Ancient India*, vol.9, 1953, pp.103-115.

Colin Renfrew, with the solid backing of Carbon -14 dating, claims that the megalithic monuments of Europe preceded their Mediterranean counterparts at least by two centuries. Thus the antiquity of the megalithic monuments in Europe was pushed back to 4500 BCE. Since most of megalithic sites far exceed this date, it seems only logical for Renfrew to assume that the origin of the megalithic culture was indeed from Europe. However Renfrew also gives due importance to the functionality of these megalithic monuments and ponders over the question of whether all of them were in fact sepulchral in nature. The megaliths for him are symbols of materialistic powers which do not limit themselves to simply being the veneration of the departed.²¹

Even though Gordon Childe was doubtful whether it was possible to assign a single origin to the megalithic cultures, the close proximity of early megalithic architecture to Mediterranean coasts probed him to accept that the centre of origin as well as diffusion of the megalithic culture was the Mediterranean region.²²

Completely discarding the possibility of multiple centres of origin, Elliot Smith quite fervently supported the theoretical assumption of a single center of origin.²³ The affinities of the Indian grave furniture to that of proto-Dynastic Egypt overpowered Smith's understanding of the builders of the megalithic culture. The megalithic tradition attributed by him to the third or fourth dynasty of Egypt is understood to be the original home and centre of diffusion. The sophisticated sepulchral tombs of Egypt were adopted by the people of Mediterranean and Europe in due course.²⁴ Following Smith, G. S. Ghurye had also echoed strong affinity to Smith's hypothesis. The contemporary burial practices that exist between the different communities in India have been traced back to the more sophisticated and elaborate rituals of the Egyptians. However Ghurye is particularly silent on how the Egyptian customs figure in the megalithic cultural traditions. But if we accept Heimendorff's idea that the hill tribes of south and central India are the descendants of the megalithic people then Ghurye's theorization is indirectly applicable in this scenario. Add footnote.

²¹Colin Renfrew, 'The Social Archaeology of Megalithic Monuments' *Scientific American*, vol. 249, no. 5, 1983, pp. 152-163.

²²V. Gordon Childe, 'Megaliths', *Ancient India*, no. 4, pp. 3-5.

²³Elliot Smith, 'A Note of Megalithic Monuments', *Man*, Vol.46, 1946, pp.46.

²⁴Panchanan Mithra, *Megalithic Builders and their Origin*, Taylor & Francis, pp. 302-308.

Contradicting the diffusionists, A.L Lewis put forth the idea that the megalith builders need not be designated a racial identity or a centre of origin. The practice of erecting stone structures had a more assimilated and indigenous identity which led him to the conclusion that fixating on one single centre of diffusion was not wise when it came to the study of megaliths. Lewis applies to the common sense of the primitive man to cover the deceased in some sort of cist or chamber, as part of the burial ritual. He finds it difficult to link the majestic monuments such as Stonehenge and Avebury to the much smaller and crude ones elsewhere. The idea that one single race can spread across the world and contribute to the megalithic constructions elsewhere does not appeal to him. He questions whether the megalithic structures were in fact build by one race or their descendants or whether these stone structures were merely borrowed.²⁵

In the post-independence period, Indian Archaeology witnessed a new revival. Scientific archaeological studies and interpretations into India's ancient past are linked with the era after Mortimer Wheeler's appointment as the Director General of the Archaeological Survey. The Brahmagiri and Chandravalli excavations proved to be every bit promising as expected and provided a great impetus to the archaeological investigations in to the megalithic past of India. The immense potentiality of the site was identified by Dr. M. H. Krishna in the early 1940's. The excavations at Brahmagiri and subsequent analysis were undertaken with the sole purpose of dating the megalithic culture at Brahmagiri in par with the already dated adjacent town site of Arikamedu. The stratigraphic evidence for three continuous occupational phases at Brahmagiri made it possible to assign a probable chronological framework. The antiquity of the Brahmagiri site was placed sometime in the third and second century B.C. Stratigraphic differentiation between the Stone Age culture and the succeeding megalithic and Andhra cultures, further provided solidarity to the existing idea about the intrusive nature of the megaliths largely credited with the introduction of iron into the peninsula, during the period. Wheeler places the intrusion of megalithic people into the native Stone Age period somewhere around 200 B.C and A.D 50, explicitly after the chaos that followed the death of Asoka. For Wheeler the megalithic people ushered in the so called

²⁵A. L Lewis, 'A Note on Megalithic Monuments', *Man*, vol. 16, 1916, pp. 25-26

‘Dark Age of Deccan’ which lasted for almost three centuries.²⁶ However Wheeler consistently pointed out that the dating pertains only to the site of Brahmagiri and there might be earlier dating from other sites around the subcontinent, which would be capable of disrupting the whole chronology. Years later, Wheeler was proved right with the discovery of new megalithic sites which pushed the antiquity of the megalithic culture in south India as far back as 1000 BCE.²⁷ As a probe for further enquiry, Wheeler points out the consummate connections between the port holes cists of India and that of Europe and is reluctant to side with the hypothetical theory of independent origin and cultural assimilation.

Furer-Haimendorf is quite careful in asserting that the center of diffusion not necessarily origin, of the megaliths of the Southeast Asiatic type lay somewhere in Eastern Assam, North Burma or South West China. He understands the megalithic culture in the south and the Deccan is different from those of the central Indian megaliths. He assigns an older antiquity to the megaliths of central India which seems to have begun with the actual migration of a group of people which he refers to as Austronesians. The megaliths of the south and the Deccan seem to have more typological similarities with their counterparts in the Mediterranean region. Heimendorff is once again silent as to whether the megaliths of the south and Deccan and that of the central and eastern India were spawned off from a single cultural source or separate centers of diffusion.²⁸ Haimendorf’s hypothetical theorization of the diffusion centre of the megalithic folk and the chronology of the particular culture is based heavily on the Brahmagiri excavations, which again posits the problem of an overarching generalization solely on the basis of one type site. However he tries to break off from a racial theorization and tries to understand the authorship of the megalithic people on the basis of linguistic affinities. This theory gives ground to his

²⁶R. E. M Wheeler, ‘Brahmagiri and Chandravalli Excavations’, *Ancient India*, no. 4, 1948, pp.195-202. Hereafter referred to as, ‘Wheeler, 1948’

²⁷T. Satyamurthy, *The Iron Age in Kerala: Mangadu Excavations*, Thiruvanthapuram, Government of Kerala, 1992, pp.20-35.

²⁸Furer-Haimendorf, ‘The Problem of Megalithic Cultures in Middle India’, *Man in India*, vol 25, p.74.

hypothesis that the Asokan edicts in the Deccan actually speak to the Dravidian speaking megalithic people who had inhabited this place.²⁹

A whole other aspect of the megalithic culture which had to be tackled by the historians was the idea of the Black and Red Ware culture and the introduction of iron in South India. These two aspects have been intrinsically woven with the megalithic culture in such a way that for years it was unquestionable. The intrusive nature of the megalithic culture in the south was stressed upon and seen as a landmark social change in the early history of the south as well as the Deccan. The question of the introduction of iron in the northern context and in the southern context is yet another grave problem which to this day is still an ongoing study. In the case of the megaliths the presence of iron implements was seen as a significant characteristic. It also brings up a whole new debate on the Dravidian identity of the megaliths.³⁰

B. Subbarao reinforces the idea when he suggests that the cult of the megalithic was indeed intrusive but the grave goods and the iron technology involved were largely indigenous. He advocates the idea that a southward movement of Dravidians with the knowledge of iron technology was initiated when iron arrived in the north. The subsequent subjugation of the Dravidian speakers in the south and their dominance over the existing cultures made them a formidable presence. He alludes to the western origins of the burials and the possibility of the burials in the Gangetic doabs as predecessors to the megaliths in the south. Leshnik critiques Subbarao because of the obvious gaps in his theory. While Subbarao gives a profound insight regarding the association of iron with the megalithic cultures, he largely leaves the question of the arrival of iron in the northern context unanswered and as to the question of the origin of the burials, he is profanely silent.³¹

Around the 1960's the existence of 'nomadic pastoralism' though always hinted was however strongly associated with the megalithic complex. The similarities between the megaliths of the Indian subcontinent show similarities in typology, distribution and

²⁹*ibid.*, pp. 75-77.

³⁰Leshnik, *Pandukal Complex*, pp. 6-10.

³¹*ibid.* pp. 10-15.

in grave assemblage to the Iranian cemetery in Sialk B. The underlying assumption has been pointed out by N.R Banerjee and Subbarao who argues to be a migration of Indo-European speakers of Sialk B to India.³² Along with the idea of cist burials and their technology of iron welding the new migrators drove out the Dravidians that they encountered in the north. They argued that this led to a southward migration of the Dravidian speakers who had already adopted the knowledge of iron technology as well as those of cist burials.³³ Meanwhile they also adopted several cultural traits of the chalcolithic people who were already settled in the south and in turn were subjugated by the newcomers. Heine Geldern on the other hand claimed that the Dravidians were an actual migratory people who came to India at the time of the Persian conquest.³⁴ The debate of ‘Aryanization’ and the celebrated Aryan invasion theory once again gained renewed vigor in light of megalithic studies.

Lawrence Leshnik while debating the problem of the ‘pandukal burials’ combine evidences from literary sources to attest to the archaeological finds. The existence of the pastoral tribes who resided in the less desirable tracts during the Sangam period has been associated with the pandukal burials in the south by Leshnik. The people of ‘mullai’ region were organized into petty chiefdoms that were involved in feuds with one another and were also in a constant state of war with the Chera, Chola and Pandyan kingdoms. The literature attests to their subsistence pattern and Leshnik refers to it as a ‘buffer zone’ between the kingdoms of the north and the south. The pandukal burials are a part of the cultural assemblage of these distinct nomadic pastoral groups and makes sense as to the differences in grave assemblages which resembles that of a “martial equestrian cattle and sheep-raising people who occasionally did a small amount of grain cultivation.”³⁵ This hypothetical theory of the nomadic nature of the megalithic people is probably derived based on the comparative lack of habitation sites when compared to the burial structures. But the large number of burial sites uncovered over the years and the effort and time it consumes to build up such elaborate stone monuments and that too

³² N.R. Banerjee, *The Iron Age in India*, Delhi, Munshiram Manoharlal Oriental Publishers and Booksellers, 1965, p. 6

³³ Leshnik, *Pandukal Complex*, p.10.

³⁴ *ibid.*, p.130.

³⁵ Leshnik, *Pandukal Complex*, pp. 7-11.

in numerous numbers would require intensive labor. Such a tedious and elaborate process would not be entirely convenient to a nomadic group of people, as it would require them to stay for a long period of time at a particular place.

U. S Moorthy deserves special mention for undertaking the herculean task of compiling the data from the explored and excavated megalithic sites in the country. Making use of various primary and secondary sources he compiled a list of all the explored and excavated sites in South India which amounted to 1,993 sites.³⁶ Over the years, the number of sites could have only been increased.

When we analyze the history of megalith studies in the Deccan, we can safely conclude that they seem to have considerably more differences than similarities with the megalithic cultures elsewhere in the subcontinent. But this should not be mistaken to mean that the ‘megalithic culture’ if indeed there was one single one, was somewhat uniform in characteristic, as we have already established that this would prove to be quite a complicated attempt. The political geography of Deccan has changed considerably over the centuries. Studying such a widespread culture on the basis of the political boundaries of the present day has its own limitations. But for the sake of academic convenience the present study would predominantly deal with the present state of Telangana. The megalithic burial sites in the state of Telangana amount to a considerable number and are even more vexing in terms of regional variations.

After the publication of Meadows Taylor’s findings which mostly concentrated in the Deccan region, interests were initiated for further explorations and enquiries. Captain Newbold’s ‘panduvaram dewal’ in Chittor received considerable attention.³⁷ William King explored the stone crosses and dolmenoid cists in Mungapet which raised substantial controversies and confusions.³⁸ The cromlechs of Central India became the

³⁶U. S. Moorti, *Megalithic Culture of South India: Socio- Economic Perspectives*, Varanasi, Ganga Kaveri Publishing House, 1994. Hereafter referred to as, ‘Moorthy, 1994’.

³⁷Captain Newbold, ‘Ancient Sepulchres of Panduvaram Dewal in Southern India’, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, vol.13, pp.90-95

³⁸William King, ‘Notice of Prehistoric Burial Place with Cruciform Monoliths, near Mungapet in the Nizam’s Dominions’, *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, vol. 46, no. 3, 1877, pp.179-185. Hereafter referred to as, ‘King, 1877’.

subject matter of investigation for J. Mulhern³⁹ and Rivett-Carnac. Upper Godavari and Krishna Districts were explored by T. Vanstavern.

The excavations undertaken by G. Yazdani and Mohammad Ahmed Waheed Khan, in the 1930's under the aegis of the Archaeological Department of the His Exalted Highness The Nizam's Dominions, is highly commendable. It was their efficient and hard work that brought new perspectives in the study of megaliths in the Deccan. A comprehensive study of the different aspects of the megalithic culture was attempted by K.P Rao whose personal explorations and excavations have contributed considerably to the megalithic studies in the Deccan particularly Andhra Pradesh and Telangana.⁴⁰

M. L. Nigam of the Birla Archaeological and Cultural Research Institute undertook excavations at two megalithic sites in Hashmatpet and has provided a brief excavation report with a detailed catalogue of finds. An interesting aspect of the study was the possible link between Jain and Buddhist migration to the south and the erection of megalithic monuments.⁴¹ Nigam puts forth the possibility of a Jain migration under Bhadrabahu, into the south west and peninsular India by 4th century BCE. He also does not deny the possibilities of these megalithic monuments being early prototypes of a Buddhist stupa tradition which is an undeniable feature in Buddhist architecture.⁴² Yazdani has also vouched for the Scythian origin for the megalithic building tradition in India but the in light of the excavations at Brahmagiri and Maski, this theory was refuted.⁴³

The pre and proto history of Andhra region and the succession of different archaeological cultures have been possible with the help of Andhra History Congress. M. L. K Murthy edited the first volume aimed at creating a comprehensive history of

³⁹ J. Mulhern, 'Cromlechs of Central India' *Proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Bengal for the Year 1868*, 1868, 116-118.

⁴⁰ K.P Rao, *Deccan Megaliths*, Delhi, Sundeep Prakashan, 1988. Hereafter referred to as, 'Rao, *Deccan Megaliths*'.

⁴¹ M. L. Nigam, *Report of the Excavation of Two Megalithic Burials at Hashmatpet, Hyderabad, AP*, Hyderabad, Birla Archaeological and Cultural Research Institute, 1971, 26. Hereafter, referred to as 'Nigam, *Hashmatpet Excavations*'.

⁴² G. Yazdani, *The Early History of the Deccan*, vol.1, 1960, no. 4, p.3.

⁴³ Nigam, *Hashmatpet Excavations*, p. 19.

the Andhra region and this attempt can be understood as the representative of a new dawn in the archaeological enquiries of megalithic studies. His compilation of the data concerning the megalithic culture of Andhra Pradesh deserves special mention. The work exploits the interdisciplinary approach to the maximum, and conjures up a comprehensive and critical analysis of the megalithic history of the region.⁴⁴

Thus, we can see that the megalithic studies in the Indian subcontinent have given rise to a hoard of literature, of which only the most relevant arguments have been mentioned here. There are still a number of studies that deserves equal mention as they all have directly or indirectly contributed to understanding the different facets of the megalithic cultures.

⁴⁴M.L. K. Murty (ed.), *Pre- and Proto-historic Andhra Pradesh up to 500 BC*, Hyderabad, Orient Longman, 2003.

Chapter 3

The Materiality of Death: Understanding the Material Remains of the Megalithic Burials in Telangana

Considering the wide variety and dispersal of the megalithic structures both worldwide as well as in the Indian context, it is no doubt that the very typology of the megaliths itself is a matter of great enigma. Even one particular site yields numerous varieties of megalithic monuments which have further internal variations and regional varieties. Megaliths in India are largely sepulchral in nature. Therefore, before initiating one's self into a detailed analysis of the grave furniture and material remains, so far discovered from the monuments, there is dire need to apprehend the structures themselves. This becomes especially important when we understand that these structures are our primary sources for comprehending the lives of the megalithic people, especially for the Deccan region. The lack of written materials is indeed a grave problem which posits before an average scholar who takes up the cause of megalithic studies. Since the landscapes and geographical boundaries as gleaned from the Sangam literature⁴⁵ does not pertain to the present area of study, the megalithic structures themselves have been taken up as the primary source of information. An understanding of the physical geography of the region and its subsequent link to the megalithic structures also needs to be analyzed.

Telangana: As a political and geographical entity.

Ferdinand Braudel while analyzing the history of Mediterranean pointed out the role of geography in the evolution of historical epochs. What he understood to be the *long duree* would also apply to the cultures around the world.⁴⁶ It would not be far-fetched to assume that the erection of stone monuments would largely depend on the local availability of stones and boulders. So far all the major sites recovered from around the world have access to rock boulders necessary to erect the lithic appendage

⁴⁵Dr.S.Ilakkuvanar, *Tolkāppiyam*, Madras, M. Neelamalar Educational Publishers, 1963, pp.20-25

⁴⁶E. Sreedharan, *Textbook of Historiography, 500BC to AD 2000*, New Delhi, Orient Longman 2004, pp.258-275.

associated with megaliths. The comparison the stone used for carving out the monuments, the type of soil or mud used to cover it up and why that particular type was used in the absence of local availability of raw materials required and from where and how they transported it from all become relevant and perplexing questions which need further enquiry. Thus the geographical positioning of the state of Telangana and its immediate surroundings are necessary to arrive at a holistic understanding of these stone structures. Once again keeping in mind that the political boundaries of the modern era would not be applicable to ancient societies, the investigation of present geography however limited the results would yield had to be undertaken.

The modern political and geographical borders of the state of Telangana were formed in 2014 when the nation gave birth to her 29th state. However the state has a history dating back to the prehistoric times. A hub of various cultural and social institutions, Telangana is a land of many differences. The glorious past of Satavahanas, Kakatiyas, Qutub Shahis and Asaf Jahi's smear the celebrated past of the state and still reign in the collective memory of the people. Initially part of the Madras presidency the state was amalgamated with Hyderabad state in 1948 and later on merged with the state of Andhra Pradesh. The prolonged struggle for a separate statehood for the region of Telangana, which had its early beginnings in the post-independence era, became fruitful on June 2, 2014. Bounded by the states of Maharashtra and Chhattisgarh in the North, Karnataka at its west and Andhra Pradesh in the south and east direction, the state of Telangana has an area of 1,12,077 Sq.km. with an average population of 3,50,03,674. The state has 31 districts with Hyderabad as its capital city.⁴⁷

Telangana was the inland region of the state of Andhra Pradesh. The physical geography of Telangana consists of low granite hills on rolling plains with broad open valleys and an average elevation of 150m to 600m. The average temperature of the region borders around 34-36 degree Celsius. The district of Mahbubnagar, Hyderabad, Medak, Warangal, Nalgonda, Karimnagar, Adilabad, and some pockets of Nizamabad yields a variety of brown red sandy loams locally known as chalka soil. Another variety of soil type found in some parts of Mahbubnagar, Hyderabad, Medak, Khammam and

⁴⁷ <http://www.telangana.state.gov.in>, (accessed 25 November, 2018).

Nizamabad is black soil which is best suited for cotton cultivation. The districts of Adilabad, Karimnagar, Khammam and Warangal which forms the north-western borders of the state is bountiful with dense deciduous forests and is replete with a wide variety of flora and fauna.⁴⁸ A majority of the megalithic stone structures of the region are carved out of granite and this can be attributed to the abundance of granite hills in the area.

Chronology

With the initial appearance in the Neolithic period and then with the subsequent Bronze age around 2000 BCE the megaliths appear in the Indian context around 1000 BCE. Mortimer Wheeler had dated the Brahmagiri megaliths to 200 BCE – 100CE based on the archaeological layers found at the type site.⁴⁹ However this cannot be applied to all the megaliths found from the Indian subcontinent. The Komaranahalli megalithic site has yielded a C-14 dating to 1440 BCE to 290 BCE and the Hallur megalithic complex has been dated to 1000-800 BCE.⁵⁰ A. Sundara has worked out a chronology for the Aihole anthropomorphs associated with the megalithic cultural complex to 800-600 BCE. The Vidarbha megalithic complex ranges from 760BCE to 100 BCE. Polakonda, a site in Warangal has given a C-14 date of 150BCE to 100 BCE. The Nilgiri megalithic complex has a much later date to 90 AD. U. S Moorthy after careful analysis of available C-14 dates has pushed the chronology of the megalithic structures in the Indian subcontinent to 1200 BCE -500 CE. After 500 CE, the megalithic communities seem to have faced a decline.⁵¹ But such a generalization is quite hazardous as not all the sites have been dated and this particular chronological framework is solely based on a handful of type sites.

⁴⁸M.L.K Murty, 'Physiography and Environment' in M. L. K Murthy (ed.), *Pre- and Protohistoric Andhra Pradesh up to 500 BC*, Andhra Pradesh, Orient Blackswan, 2003, pp.9-15.

⁴⁹Wheeler, 1948, p.202.

⁵⁰K. P Rao, and V. Ramabrahmam, 'Cult of the Dead: Evidence from the South Indian Megaliths', *Proceedings of the Second International Symposium*, 2016, pp.65.

⁵¹Moorthy, 1994, pp.19-25.

Megalithic typologies

The megalithic typology much like its chronology and origin is a matter of grave speculation and debate among different scholars. The numerous internal variations and inconsistency also contribute to the enigma of the megaliths. The problem of assigning a nomenclature, figures prominently in the works of many scholars. Different megalithic types are defined by different names according to their local disparities. This problem particularly features in the early works on the megaliths particularly in the pre-independence era. The first conscious effort to attempt at a typological classification was done by V. D Krishnaswami when he attempted to differentiate between the different megalithic types in South India. His work predominantly focused on the type sites of Chinglepet, Pudukkottai and Cochin. The inherent differences in the megalithic complexes from south and that of the north eastern region of the country led him to develop a separate typological classification.⁵² Many scholars have attempted to classify the megaliths into different types. Over the years new and new varieties have showed up and this has created further problems of assigning a nomenclature.

A classification of megalithic monuments found in India has been attempted here.

Graves	Cist Dolmen Pit burials Rock cut caves Sarcophagus Urns Umbrella stone Hood Stone
Protective Markings	Cairn Slab circle

⁵² V.D Krishnaswami, 'Megalithic Types in South India', *Ancient India*, no. 5, 1949, pp.35-45. Hereafter referred to as 'Krishnaswami, 1949'.

	Stone circle Stone enclosure Stone seat
Miscellaneous	Menhir Alignment Avenue Anthropomorphic figures Barrow

1) Graves

- **Cist**

Usually built below the surface, a cist can be roughly understood as a ‘box grave’ with orthostatic edges with or without a capstone as a top covering.⁵³ A cist can be with or without a ‘port hole’. The port hole can be round shaped or ‘U’ shaped with varying diameter ranging from a few centimeters to one meter.⁵⁴

- **Dolmen**

Roughly translated as ‘stone table’, a dolmen is an enclosure made of upright stones usually above the surface level, with or without a slab stone as a top covering. Beneath the dolmen is often a burial chamber. The dolmen may exist with or without a ‘port hole’.⁵⁵

- **Pit burials**

A normal burial dug underground to put in the mortal remains as well as funerary assemblage. Pit burials are not exclusively assigned to megalithic people as this mode of disposal of the dead existed from the Neolithic times.

⁵³Lee Hoen Jai, ‘Megalithic Monuments of Asia’, New Delhi, Sharada Publishing House, 2012, pp.20.

⁵⁴K. P Rao, ‘Megalithic port hole- A Techno-cultural study’, *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, Vol.57, 1996, pp.964-969. Hereafter referred to as, ‘Rao, Megalithic Port holes’.

⁵⁵Krishnaswami, 1949, pp.35-45.

- **Rock cut caves**

The rock cut caves are intricately carved out of rock boulders either in a rectangular and elongated shape.

- **Sarcophagus**

Sarcophagus is a terracotta elongated structure with or without supporting legs, this is used to store the mortal remains and funerary assemblage of the deceased.

- **Urns**

Urn burials are simple earthen ware container with varying sizes. Some of the urns have yielded full body skeletons in sitting position, while others have just yielded funerary assemblages and few select bone pieces.

- **Umbrella stone**

Locally known as 'kudaikallu' these stone monuments resemble an umbrella shaped structure above surface level and is restricted to the state of Kerala. The umbrella stone has yielded funerary assemblage from beneath the surface.

- **Hood stone/Cap stone**

As the name suggests, the hood stone closely resembles a cap which is placed above the surface level and encloses a burial beneath the surface. This variety is also restricted to state of Kerala.

2) **Protective markings**

- **Cairn**

A heap of pebbles or which often marks the burial site. Most often the cairn circles are washed off the surface level or destructed since it is exposed and vulnerable and this makes it difficult to identify the burials under it.

- **Slab circle**

Slab stones are protective and identification markers placed in concentric circles around the burial. Slab stones often have trimmed edges.⁵⁶

- **Stone circle**

Concentric circles made of huge stone boulders are referred to as stone circles. The stone circle's often enclose a burial underneath. The stone circle may or may not exist with a cairn packing in the interior.

- **Stone enclosure**

Quite similar to stone circles, the stone enclosures are arranged in square or rectangular formation and may or may not have further divisions in the interior.⁵⁷

- **Stone seat**

Stone seats can be found in single or multiple clusters and is a rare occurrence. Often found among the tribes of Assam, the stone seat may or may not have a burial beneath.⁵⁸

3) **Miscellaneous**

- **Menhir**

Menhir is a stone pillar erected mostly in the memory of a deceased. Menhir can be found in clusters and has yielded significant astronomical data. Sometimes a single menhir is found to be erected adjacent to a burial site.

- **Alignment**

Stones arranged in a particular pattern either in horizontal or diagonal pattern. The alignments are made from erected menhirs and also from stone boulders.⁵⁹

- **Avenue**

⁵⁶Lee Hoen Jai, p. 23.

⁵⁷*ibid.*, p.26.

⁵⁸Krishnaswamy, 1949, pp. 40-45.

⁵⁹F. R Allchin, 'The Stone Alignments of Southern Hyderabad', *Man*, vol. 56, 1956, pp.133-136.

An alignment becomes an avenue when two or more of them line up in parallels.

- **Anthropomorphic figures**

Roughly cut into the shape of a human form, anthropomorphic figures represent the male and female effigies.⁶⁰

Thus, it is quite evident that megalithic typology varies from one burial site to another due to a number of reasons. A district wise analysis of the distribution and typology of megalithic structures falling within the boundaries of the state of Telangana has been attempted here. The reorganization of districts within the state for the sake of administrative conveniences has led to grave misperceptions, regarding the present location and distribution of the megalithic sites. Most of the excavation reports concerning the megalithic sites were published in the pre-independence era and mostly before the formation of a separate state of Telangana, inherent confusions are bound to occur. The added issue of the sites being on private lands which restrain entry and certain others being located in dense forests, particularly in the north-western borders of Adilabad, Khammam, and Warangal posit the problem of inaccessibility. Due to the similarities in the cultural complex Uppalappadu, Chagatur and Gondimalla, regions which now constitute the state of Andhra Pradesh has also been taken up for the study. Located in the submergible regions which came under the Srisailem Reservoir Project a majority of the excavations in the megalithic sites were undertaken as salvage excavations.

Keeping in mind all these problems, the present study has attempted to compile a list of known megalithic sites in Telangana and has followed the locations given in original sources to eradicate these confusion with updates wherever necessary. A brief look at the information provided in Table 1, is proof that it is not possible to undertake excavations at all the megalithic burials that had been discovered, due to their sheer number. The study was able to note down ninety-four megalithic sites that had been reported in the state of Telangana, out of which we have detailed excavation reports of only twenty four. To add to the complexity, the number of megalithic burials in one site

⁶⁰Lee Hoen Jain, p.29.

might range from one to over one thousand five hundred. Owing to this only selected structures can be undertaken for excavation. This already eliminates the possibility of a complete study. However, the time, cost and effort involving in excavating just one particular site might take years. An attempt has been made to understand some of the most significant burial sites and the associated grave assemblage that have been excavated in the state of Telangana.

1. Pochampad

The excavation conducted by the ASI yielded evidence of a habitation-cum-burial site at Pochampad. The site bore megalithic black and red ware pottery and associated wares with iron objects such as iron daggers, javelins, lances, copper hilted dagger etc. The evidence of domestication of cattle has proved strong the preposition that Pochampad was a megalithic occupation site. Miscellaneous objects like terracotta figurines, bone and ivory combs were also discovered. The site also yielded rectangular platforms beneath cairn circles without any evidence of skeletal remains.

2. Bowenpalli

Most of the megalithic sites in Hyderabad have been destroyed with the onslaught of urbanism. Even the ones in remote villages had been destroyed and the lands fallen into private lands. The excavations conducted at Bowenpalli proved to be significant as it yielded a unique find; an iron trident with the effigy of a buffalo skeleton.⁶¹

3. Hashmatpet

The excavations undertaken by M.L. Nigam at Hashmatpet, discovered forty cairn circles in close proximity. The site yielded typical megalithic pottery and iron objects. The burials were all secondary in nature and yielded fragmentary skeletal remains. The occurrence of rectangular slabs beneath cairn circles, without skeletal remains but replete with pottery and associated funerary assemblage, just like that of Pochampad in Adilabad district, was an interesting find. The excavator has drawn on several inferences to the similarities in pottery and rectangular slabs to that of Brahmagiri and

⁶¹ Refer Table 2.

Maski and had come to the conclusion that the slabs might have been used to expose the body to natural elements before the final ritual.⁶²

4. Lingampally

The burial site at Lingampally which now forms a part of the Hyderabad Central University Campus was excavated in 2001 and the site yielded a sixteen foot menhir, adjacent to a pit burial oriented in the north-south direction. The burial borne thirty-four megalithic potteries of varying dimensions and also included iron objects kept alongside an extended skeleton. The iron objects included war weapons like javelins, a trident, sword, and arrow heads.⁶³ An interesting feature of this burial was its solitary nature with complete lack of any other megalithic monuments in close proximity.⁶⁴

5. Maula Ali

Maula Ali has attracted the interests of various antiquarians and scholars as the site has yielded an extensive megalithic burial site with cairn circles and dolmenoid cists. The cairn circles vary from 42 feet to 11 feet in diameter. More over the number of stones that make up the cairn circle, almost always include twenty four stones.⁶⁵

6. Kadambapur

Situated 8km north of Peddabankur, the excavations at Kadambapur yielded an extensive habitation-cum-burial site. The first season of excavation undertook the investigation of five megalithic burials. Out of the five, four of them were pit burials similar in construction and one was a port holed cist. Megalith 1 yielded fragmentary skeletal remains along with black and red ware pottery and iron artifacts. It was marked by a double circle with the inner diameter of 7.60m. and outer diameter of 9.75m.⁶⁶ The skull was found damaged with a copper hilted dagger near it along with an iron javelin

⁶² Nigam, *Hashmatpet Excavations*, pp, 7-8.

⁶³ V.V Krishna Sastry, 'Megalithic Cultures: Iron Age', in *Pre and Protohistoric Andhra Pradesh*, ed. M.L.K Murty, Chennai, Orient Longman, pp. 113.

⁶⁴ Refer Table 2.

⁶⁵ Refer Table 2

⁶⁶ V.V. Krishna Sastry, *The Proto and Early Historical Cultures of A.P.*, Andhra Pradesh, Government of Andhra Pradesh, 1983, pp. 83-84. Hereafter referred to as 'V.V. Krishna Sastry, *The Proto and Early Historical Cultures of A.P.*'.

measuring 1.25m and a smaller javelin were placed near the skeletal remains. Funerary pottery was interred at varying levels of which some were seen crushed. The second burial unearthed, was very much similar to the first one, but provided evidence of multiple burials. Bounded by double circles of boulders, the outer circle measured 7.50m in diameter and the inner circle measured 6.50m. There were two skulls, and several other long bones strewn roughly and completely covered in pottery. Only the skulls were left exposed with two pair of javelins measuring up to 85cm, a dagger and two conch shells kept to the side of the skulls. The pottery found from this burial was of three types; dull red, complete black and complete red. Akin to the first burial the pottery also seemed to be crushed along with the skulls.⁶⁷ The third burial was also a rectangular pit burial but with a single circle of diameter 7.60m and yielded evidence of complete inhumation. This particular burial was quite significant as it yielded a complete skeleton with two wire gold earrings, which is quite a rare find. The skeleton had a dagger lunged into the clavicle with the heel bones missing. The right fibula and tibia was cut off and placed on stones. Everything except the skulls was covered in pots. A dagger of length 28.5cm, was placed near the clavicle. The hands were pushed into two bottom-cut conches. The fourth megalithic burial that was excavated was a dolmenoid cist with a port hole at the northern orthostat. The skulls and fragmentary bone pieces were found in a fragile state and most of them were badly crushed. A number of iron objects along with black and red ware pottery were unearthed. The port-holed cist yielded two skulls and fragmentary bone pieces, along with pottery and battle axe and knife which were kept near the skulls.⁶⁸ The fifth pit burial with double circle upon excavation yielded fragmentary skeletal remains which were not arranged properly. Four stones were placed at four corners possibly to place the bones similar to that of the other two burials excavated.

⁶⁷ *ibid.*, pp 84-85.

⁶⁸ Indian Archaeology- A Review, Archaeological Survey of India, Government of India, New Delhi, 1974-1975, pp.3-4, 'Hereafter referred to as IAR.'

7. Peddabankur

Peddabankur is quite an extensive and unique site for it yielded evidences of an extensive habitation site which is quite rare in the context of megalithic cultures. The site yielded a baked brick structure with north and south entrances, and three enclosed wells within.⁶⁹ The evidence of what is assumed to be a black smith's workshop, the basement of a shrine along with numerous circular bases, several iron objects, saddle querns, antimony rods and copper bangles were also identified.⁷⁰ Several pieces of ornaments and beads of jasper, agate, carnelian and amethyst were also identified during the course of excavation.⁷¹

8. Mungapet

The stone crosses of Mungapet have been on the map of antiquarians because of the large number of stone crosses and dolmenoid cists strewn over a large area. The stone crosses also led to a bit of controversies, owing to its structural similarities with the crosses associated with Christianity. William King calls these stone crosses as 'cruciform monoliths' while a more apt term would be 'anthropomorphic figures'. He calls for the possibility of the builders of the megaliths in Mungapet as the ancestors of the Kolarian, a tribal group inhabiting the Chota Nagpur region.⁷² However he does not also rule out the possibility of these monoliths to be a cemetery of the elite 'race' of people who ruled the land before the 'Aryan wave of invasion.'⁷³ Such anthropomorphic figures have been reported from Midimalla and Mottur in Chittor and North Arcot district respectively.

9. Dongatogu

Dongatogu is a fine example of a megalithic cemetery which yielded almost a thousand and five hundred dolmenoid cists. Some of the excavations provided proof of

⁶⁹IAR 1968-1969, p.1.

⁷⁰V.V. Krishna Sastry, 'Megalithic Cultures: The Iron Age' in M. L. K. Moorthy (ed.), *Pre and Protohistoric Andhra Pradesh upto 500BC*, pp. 109. Hereafter referred to as, 'V.V. Krishna Sastry, 'Megalithic Cultures.'.

⁷¹IAR 1970-1971, pp.1-2.

⁷²William King, 'Notice of Pre-historic Burial Place with Cruciform Monoliths near Mungapet in Nizam's Dominions' pp. 184.

⁷³ibid.,p.185.

multiple burials for both adults and children. The lack of skeletal remains is baffling. The idea that all the excavated burials could be symbolic is not possible and hence could be attributed only to the natural corrosion of the mortal remains. At Polichetticherugudda, excavations at a few cist burials yielded a single golden ring, iron artifacts and stone sarcophagus without skeletal remains.⁷⁴

10. Chagatur

The burial site at Chagatur, yielded dolmenoid cists with passage and further excavation revealed that the dolmenoid cist was further divided into four chambers, and the southern orthostat had two port holes. This particular cist burial was conducted with care and wary craftsmanship. The orthostats were supported from outside with rectangular shale slabs and further protected by a rectangular chamber.⁷⁵ The second season of excavation conducted at Chagatur revealed a cist burial with a full skeleton with hands missing and flexed legs. As opposed to the normal tradition of placing a dagger near to the skull, the dagger was placed near the pelvis and was found along with pottery.⁷⁶

11. Chinnamarur

Chinnamarur is an important site for uncovering the history of the megalithic people. The site shows, the transition from chalcolithic culture to megalithic culture. The chalcolithic structures were used by the succeeding archaeological culture as well. A three chambered cist with passage and port hole yielded a full skeleton with an iron knife plunged into the neck.⁷⁷

12. Peddamarur

The salvage excavations conducted at Peddamarur laid bare a habitation-cum-burial site. One of the burials excavated were three chambered with port hole in the southern orthostat. One of the chambers yielded a terracotta sarcophagus, and evidence of

⁷⁴V.V. Krishna Sastry, 'Megalithic Cultures', pp. 112.

⁷⁵IAR 1977-1978, p.12.

⁷⁶*ibid.*

⁷⁷ IAR 1979-1980, p.12.

calcified bone pieces, a clear indication of a post cremation burial. Another burial was two chambered, with a passage chamber and a port hole in the southern orthostat. A terracotta sarcophagus was discovered in one of the chambers. The terracotta figurine of a buffalo was also found alongside the sarcophagus. The sarcophagus yielded human bones; an interesting point was the presence of multiple human skulls and bones outside the sarcophagus.⁷⁸

13. Uppalappadu

The megalithic site at Uppalappadu yielded sixteen megalithic sites, of cist and pit burial variety. The cists have been found with or without port holes and the ones that do have portholes are usually on the southern or western orthostats. Some cists upon excavation have revealed just rectangular shale slabs devoid of any skeletal or funerary assemblage. One other pit burial, uncovered twelve skulls and fragmentary bone pieces along with pottery. A cist with no skeletal remains or funerary pottery was also unearthed. The excavator seems to think of this mode of burial as a dummy burial but as to the nature and purpose of it he maintains silence.⁷⁹

14. Upperu

At Upperu, the excavations at the pit burials yielded evidence of family burial. A complete inhumation burial with two extended skeletons facing each other and pottery with graffiti close to the Brahmi letter 'Ma' were two interesting finds from this site.⁸⁰

15. Yelleswaram

With human occupation tracing back to the Paleolithic age, the site has yielded extensive examples of stone tools and microliths. The salvage excavation carried out by Dr. P. Sreenivasachar, exposed three megalithic burials. The first one took up for investigation was an oblong cist devoid of capstone. The cist yielded evidence of multiple burials with two skulls and fragmentary skeletal remains along with placed

⁷⁸ V.V. Krishna Sastry, 'Megalithic Cultures', p.120.

⁷⁹ IAR 1978-1979, pp. 65-67.

⁸⁰ Refer Table 2

alongside pottery.⁸¹ The second season of excavation was undertaken by Abdul Waheed Khan which brought to light a dolmenoid cist and urn burials.⁸² Further excavations revealed a cairn circle with a particularly unique feature. Two extended skeletons were found to be placed one on top of the other along with the funerary assemblage of a perforated stand, a dish and a lid.⁸³ Apart from assuming a tantric ritualistic resemblance, the excavator seemed to be at a loss to explain the nature and purpose of this type of a burial position. The skeletons also yielded war like weapons like javelins and dagger placed in close proximity. The remains of a horse further consolidate the significance of war like activities, in the life of the deceased. The urn burials yielded evidence of complete skeletons either of a child or an adult which was difficult to determine along with funerary assemblage. An interesting feature to be noted here is that the megalithic cultural complex was found directly beneath a Stupa identified to be belonging to the Buddhist epoch.⁸⁴ The pottery yielded from Yelleswaram has significant resemblance to the contemporary deposits at Tinnevely and Brahmagiri.⁸⁵

16. Polakonda

The megalithic burial site in Polakonda has yielded around sixty cairn circles and over one hundred cists. The cairn circles are found to be located on south-east and cists to the southern portion of Pedddagutta hill.⁸⁶ Thus, Polakonda is a clear cut evidence of a megalithic cemetery.

Since only the most important sites have been studied in detail, the rest of the information regarding the artifacts had been given in Table 2 at the end of the chapter.

⁸¹ IAR 1958-1959, p. 11.

⁸² IAR 1961-1962, pp. 2-3.

⁸³ IAR 1962-1963, p. 2

⁸⁴ Mohammad Abdul Waheed Khan, *A Monograph of Yeleswaram Excavations*, Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh Government Archaeology Serial no. 14, 1963, pp. 6-8. Hereafter referred to as, 'Mohammad Waheed Khan, *Monograph*.'

⁸⁵ *ibid.*, pp 25-26,

⁸⁶ V.V. Krishna Sastry, 'Megalithic Cultures', p.122.

Pottery:

The pottery unearthed from the different parts of Telangana bear significant resemblances to the finds from elsewhere. Black and Red ware pottery has been unearthed from Lothal in the cultural context of the Indus Valley civilization. The spatial and temporal continuity of the black and red ware is quite evident from the fact that it has been associated with various archaeological cultures ranging from Neolithic grey ware to the russet coated painted ware.⁸⁷ Thus it cannot be argued that the megalithic black and red ware was a contribution of the megalithic builders. The megalithic black and red ware pottery sometimes along with red ware and black ware constituted the pottery traditions of the megalithic people in Telangana. A significant part of the grave assemblage only five sites are completely devoid of pottery. Ranging from pottery shards to as much as seventy five pots has been unearthed from the megalithic burials in the state. Megalithic black and red ware pottery shards were discovered from Ismailkhanpet, Venkatraopet and Polichetticherugudda. Black and Red ware bowls and pots of varying sizes were unearthed from Pochampad, Lingampally, Kadambapur, Peddamarur, Upperu, Hazurnagar, Hashmatpet, Maula Ali, Chinnamarur, Erladinne, Karpakala, Pochampad and Yelleswaram. Red ware pots and bowls of varying sizes were excavated from Pochampadu, Dongatogu, Peddamarur, Chagatur and Chinnamarur, Yelleswaram, Black wares were observed at Yelleswaram. Funnel shaped lids and chalices were unearthed from Hashmatpet, Kadambapur and Maula. From small bowls and perforated jars to funnel shaped chalices and water storage cans the pottery assemblage found interred in the megalithic burials and at habitation-cum-burials sites, exist in wide varieties.⁸⁸

Iron objects

The association of iron and the megalithic cultures in the Indian subcontinent has been a matter of great debate and even more controversies. The present study is reluctant to address this issue as it does not seem to be relevant to the core theme of the study. Iron objects are found in abundance in the megalithic burials. From iron lamps

⁸⁷ Moorthy, 1994, pp.23-25.

⁸⁸ Refer Table 2

with legs to javelins and trident iron objects vary in size and nature. Agricultural implements and weaponry seem to constitute a majority of the iron objects that has been found interred in the megalithic structures. Out of the excavated sites in Telangana, weapons of offence and defense types largely consist of javelins, tridents, spear heads, arrow heads, copper hilted iron daggers, battle axes and swords which were found interred in the burials at Pochampad, Bowenpalli, Lingampalli, Kadambapur, Chinnamarur, Uppalappadu, Yelleswaram and Polakonda. Agricultural implements such as sickles, handaxes and ploughshares were unearthed from Pochampad, Hashmatpet, Peddabankur, Polichetticherugudda, Chinnamarur, Peddamarur, Yelleswaram and Polakonda.⁸⁹ A detailed report of the iron objects unearthed from the excavated burial sites has been given in Table 2 at the end of the chapter.

Out of the ninety-four sites that have been identified, only twenty-four of them have been undertaken for excavation. Sixteen sites have published archaeological reports and had yielded significant archaeological remains that can be used to interpret the society. Out of these, eighteen sites have yielded megalithic black and red ware pottery and five sites are completely devoid of pottery. Fragmentary skeletal remains have been excavated from seven sites while full extended skeletons have been excavated from three sites. Nine sites yielded no skeletal remains at all but have provided other significant finds. Stone sarcophagi are rare finds and have been excavated from five sites.

A brief analysis of the distributional pattern and nature of the artefacts interred in the megalithic burial sites of Telangana even though limited can shed some light on the megalithic communities in the region. It has to be kept in mind that an attempt to understand the fundamental ideas that framed the social and cultural fabric of an archaeological culture is in itself a complicated task. The present study will read the artifacts placing it in the context of funerary rituals. This is by no means a complete study of an archaeological culture that is known to have a global spread but merely an attempt to understand the underlying reason which prompted these megalithic communities to erect such elaborate dwelling structures and funerary practices. This

⁸⁹Refer Table 2.

very belief behind the erection of such stone structures and a conceptualization of the material remains at par with the archaeological context is pertinent to understand their relation to the mortuary practices which would be attempted in the next chapter.

Table 1**Distribution of megalithic sites in Telangana**

Site (District wise)	Latitude/ Longitude	Nature of burial	Reference
I. Adilabad District			
1. Pochampad ⁹⁰	18°50 N 78°20 E	Habitation-cum-burial. A rectangular platform, cairn circles and cists.	IAR 1963-1964, p.1
2. Vilegaon	INA	Cairns	K. P Rao, Deccan Megaliths, p.19
II. Hyderabad District			
3. Balajigutta	INA	Forty Cairn circles Stone circles	IAR 1958-1959, p. 68 K.P Rao, Deccan Megaliths, p. 24
4. Bolaram	INA	Cairn Circles, Cist Burials	...do...
5. Bowenpalli	INA	Cairn Circles, Oblong	...do...

⁹⁰ Submerged area under Sriram Sagar Dam Project. There is a contradiction as to whether the site is in Nizamabad or Nalgonda

		cists	
6. Dhadanhali	INA	Menhirs	...do...
7. Gurramguda	INA	Cairns	...do...
8. Hashmatpet ⁹¹	17° 30 N 78° 32 E	Forty Cairn Circles	IAR 1970-1971, pp.1-2
9. Koisaram	Medchal Taluk	Twenty one stone circles (22 to 35 ft. in diameter)	IAR 1958-1959, p.68
10. Lingampalli	INA	Stone circle and menhir	K. P Rao, Deccan Megaliths, p.24
11. Maula Ali	17°25 N 78°28 E	Cairn Circles, Dolmens, Oblong cists.	...do...
III. Karimnagar District			
12. Budigapalli	INA	Svastika shaped cist burials Rectangular cists	IAR 1976-1977, pp.3-4 Dr. V.V. Krishna Sastry, The Proto and Early Historical Cultures of Andhra Pradesh, p.78.
13. Dhudikota	INA	Stone circles	IAR 1973-1974, p.5
14. Kadambapur	INA	Pit burials	IAR 1974-1975, pp.3-4.

⁹¹ Inaccessibility due to private ownership of land. Most of the surface finds have been destroyed.

15. Mallangur	INA	Cairns	Dr. V.V. Krishna Sastry, The Proto and Early Historical Cultures of Andhra Pradesh, p.110.
16. Peddabank- ur ⁹²	18°35 N 19°20 E	Habitation-cum-burial	IAR 1968-1969, pp.1-2
17. Singapur	Hazurab ad Taluk	Cist burials	Dr. V.V. Krishna Sastry, The Proto and Early Historical Cultures of Andhra Pradesh, p.110
18. Telghir	18°33'N 77°16'E	Cairns	K. P Rao, Deccan Megaliths, p. 25
IV. Khammam District			
19. Barreleguda	18°02'N 80°00'E	Dolmens, Dolmenoid Cists, Trimmed Stone circle, stone sarcophagi	K. P Rao, Deccan Megaliths, p.25
20. Domada	18°05'N 80°35'E	Dolmens, Dolmenoid cists, Trimmed stone circle, stone sarcophagi, Anthropomorphic figures	...do...
21. Dongatogu	18°10'N	Dolmens, Dolmenoid	...do...

⁹² Submerged area under Sripada Sagar Dam Project.

	80°40'E	cists, 'U' shaped port hole, Trimmed stone circle, stone sarcophagus, Male and Female Anthropomorphic figures	
22. Khammam	INA	Dolmens, cruciform, anthropomorphic figures, dolmenoid cists	IAR 1989-1990, p.2
23. Madhira	INA	Cairns	K. P Rao, Deccan Megaliths, p.25
24. Palvoncha	INA	Cairns	...do...
25. Pandurangapuram	INA	Dolmenoid cists with trimmed stone circle, 'U' shaped port hole, Passage, Stone sarcophagus.	...do...
26. Padugonigudem	INA	40 anthropomorphs	K. P Rao, Cult of the Dead: Evidence from the South Indian Megaliths, in Megalithic Monuments and Cult Practices, 2016, pp.65-70
27. Polichetticheruguda	INA	Dolmenoid cists, Stone sarcophagus	...do...

28. Talampaha-d	INA	Cairns	...do...
29. Tottigutta	INA	Dolmenoid cists, Dolmens, Stone sarcophagus, Anthropomorphic figures.	...do...
30. Wyra	INA	Cairns	...do...
V. Mahbubnagar District			
31. Amangal	INA	Cairns	Personal exploration conducted by K.P Rao
32. Budidappa- du	INA	Megalithic burials	IAR 1979-1980, pp. 6-7
33. Chagatur ⁹³	15°56'N 78°14'E	Dolmenoid cists	IAR 1965-1966, p.4
34. Chellapadu	INA	Megalithic burials	IAR 1977-1978, p.12
35. Chellipad	16°00'N 78°15'E	Cairn-circles and megalithic Black-and- red Ware	IAR 1976-1977, p.8
36. Chinnamarur ⁹⁴	INA	Habitation site and oblong cists	K. P Rao Deccan Megaliths, p.28
37. Erladinne	INA	One hundred cairn circles and six burials	IAR 1982-1983, p.7

⁹³ Salvage excavation

⁹⁴ Salvage excavation

		sites	
38. Gondimalla	15°55'N 78°10'E	Stone circles	IAR 1967-1968, p.5
39. Kalvakurti	16° 39'N 78° 30'E	Megalithic stone-circles, menhir and dolmen	IAR 1982-1983, p.7
40. Kandur	16° 32'N 78° 00'E	Megalithic stone-circles and cairn-circles	IAR 1982-1983, p.8
41. Karapakala	INA	Pit circle with cairn packing	IAR 1979-1980, p.9
42. Kudavelli	INA	Megalithic burials	IAR 1977-1978, p.12
43. Madhavaram	INA	Cairn circles	IAR 1986-1987, p.11
44. Madmal	INA	Menhirs	IAR 1992-1993, p.3
45. Mahbubnagar -r	16°44' N 77°59' E	Megalithic cairn circles	IAR 1982-1983, p.7
46. Malleswaram	INA	Stone circles	K. P Rao, Deccan Megaliths, p.28
47. Muraharidodi	INA	Menhirs	IAR 1992-1993, p.3
48. Nandimalla	16°21' N 77°44' E	Cairn circles	IAR 1982-1983, p.7
49. Peddamarrur	16°00' N	Habitation sites,	IAR 1977-1978, p.13

	78°05' E	Cists, and Pit burials	
50. Polkampalli	16°38' N 78°02' E	Cairn-circles with post-holed rectangular cists.	IAR 1982-1983, p.7
51. Ravipakhala	INA	Cairns	K. P Rao, Deccan Megaliths, p.29
52. Tadikonda	16°40' N 77°59' E	Cairn circles	IAR 1982-1983, p.8
53. Timmaipalli	16°39' N 78°38' E	Cairn circles	IAR 1982-1983, p.8
54. Tirmalaipalli	16°37' N 78°04' E	Cairn circles	IAR 1982-1983, p.7
55. Uppalapadu	15°55' N 78°12' E	16 megalithic burials which consists of cairn circles 2 dummy burials Pit burials and Cist Burials	IAR 1977-1978, p.12 IAR 1977-78, p. 12 IAR 1978-1979 pp. 65-66
56. Upperu	INA	Pit burials	Dr. V.V. Krishna Sastry, The Proto and Early Historical Cultures of Andhra Pradesh, p.117
57. Urkonda	16° 43'	Megalithic cairn-with	IAR 1982-1983, pp.7

	N 78° 24' E	rectangular cists.	
VI. Medak District			
58. Ismailkhanpet	INA	Sherds of megalithic black-and red-ware	IAR 1958-1959, p. 11
59. Siddipet	INA	Stone circles	IAR 1961-1962, p.2
60. Sivarvenkatpur	INA	Burials	K.P Rao, Deccan Megaliths, p.29
61. Topran	INA	Stone circles, Menhirs	IAR 1953-1954, p.38
62. Venkataraoopet	INA	Sherds of megalithic black and red ware.	IAR 1961- 1962, p.2
63. Vargal	INA	Cairns	Personal exploration The person who has discovered the site is unknown/unpublished.
VII. Nalgonda District			
64. Gollapalle	INA	Burials	K. P Rao, Deccan Megaliths, p.20
65. Hazurnagar	INA	Multi-chambered cist	IAR 1983-1984, p.5

		burials	
66. Karlapahad	17°05'N 79°25'E	Cairn circles	K. P Rao, Deccan Megaliths, p. 29
67. Kishapura —m	INA	Burials	IAR 1963-1964, p.4
68. Narasapur	INA	Eight cairn circles	IAR 1987-1988, p.6
69. Phanigiri	INA	Cairn circles	IAR 2000-2001, p.5
70. Raigiri	17°30'N 78°55'E	Cairns and oblong cists	K. P Rao, Deccan Megaliths, K.P Rao, p.29
71. Takadapall —e	INA	Burials	...do...
72. Valigunda	INA	Cairn circles, Menhirs	...do...
73. Yelleswara -m ⁹⁵	16°29'N 79°10'E	Habitation-cum-burial sites. A dolmenoid cist, urn burials. The third season of excavations yielded: a) dolmenoid cists; b) cists with port-holes; c) cairn-circles, One	IAR 1958-1959, p.11 IAR 1961-1962, pp. 2-3 IAR 1962-1963, pp. 2.

⁹⁵ Submerged area under the Srisailem Reservoir Project.

		particular cairn circle yielded two skeletons, placed one above the other and contained a perforated stand, a dish and a lid ; d) urn-burials.	
VIII. Nizamabad District⁹⁶			
74. Kolhapur	Armur Taluk	Burials	K. P Rao, Deccan Megaliths, p.30
75. Mahur	Kamaredd-i Taluk	Burials	...do...
76. Pochampad -u	INA	Burials and cairn packing	M. L. K Murthy, (ed.), Pre and Protohistoric Andhra Pradesh, p.109
77. Yellareddip -et	Yellareddi Taluk	Burials	...do...
IX. Ranga Reddy District			
78. Manneguda	INA	Megalithic circles of varying dimensions.	IAR 1987-1988, p. 7

⁹⁶ All the sites in this district were submerged in the Srisailem Reservoir Project.

X. Warangal District			
79. Albaka	18°10'N 80°40'E	Dolmenoid cists	K. P Rao, Deccan Megaliths, p.31
80. Alipur	INA	Burials	...do...
81. Damaravai	INA	Dolmens	IAR 1993-1994, pp.5-6
82. Dornakal	17°15'N 77°45'E	Cairns	K. P Rao, Deccan Megaliths, p. 31
83. Gangasanip -alli	INA	Cairn circles	...do...
84. – Kaperlagur u	INA	Dolmenoid cists with port hole, stone crosses	...do...
85. Katapur	18°05'N 80°20'E	Burials and stone crosses	...do...
86. Kodakandl- a	INA	Dolmens	IAR 1993-1994, p.5- 6
87. Kondaparth -i	INA	Graves	...do...
88. Mallur	INA	Stone crosses	...do...
89. Mettigutta	INA	Cairn circles	IAR 1976-1977, p.8

90. Mungapetta F /Mungapet	18°15'N 80°20'E	Trimmed stone circles, Dolmenoid cists, Stone crosses	K. P Rao, Deccan Megaliths, p.31
91. Neleore	INA	Graves	...do...
92. Palakonda	INA	Habitation	...do...
93. Polakonda	INA	Habitation-cum-burial	IAR 1975-1976, pp. 5-6.
94. Singapur	INA	Stone circles, cists in Svastika pattern	K. P Rao, Deccan Megaliths, p. 31

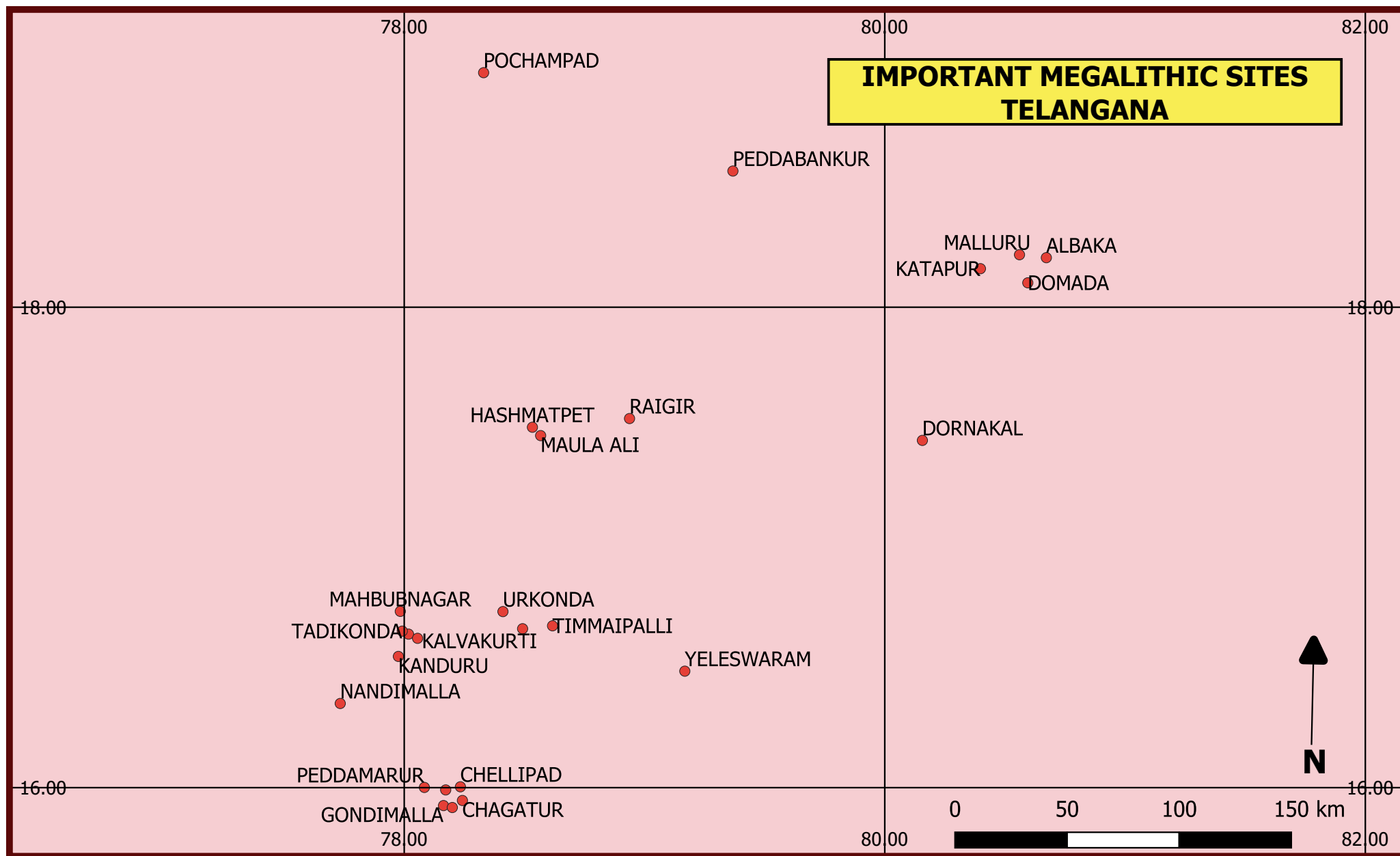


Table 2

Nature and Distribution of artefacts in the excavated megalithic sites.

Site	Pottery	Metal objects	Skeletal remains	Miscellaneous	Remarks
1) Adilabad District					
1. Pochampad	Black and red ware pot with lid on red ware stand, red ware vase, black and red ware bowl on black ware stand, black and	Chisels, battle axe, trident, spear head and arrow heads, iron goad, iron sickles, javelin, copper hilted iron daggers, battle axe. ²	Symbolic burials with no skeletal remains as well as burials with fragmentary skeletal remains. ⁴	Bone comb, terracotta bull, terracotta rings ⁵ Ivory comb ⁶	Habitation-cum-burial. The site yielded rectangular platforms. ⁷ Evidence of domesticated cattle. ⁸ Evidence of a horse burial. ⁹

² Information gathered from State Archaeological Museum

	red ware dish, black and red ware bowl, black ware jar with lid on red ware stand, red ware pot with extended neck, broken red ware stand, red ware small pot, red ware small pot on broken ring stand, small red ware pot. ¹	Strapped axe. ³			

⁴ Rao, *Deccan Megaliths*, p.43

⁵ Information gathered from State Archaeology Museum.

⁶ Rao, *Deccan Megaliths*, p.43.

⁷ IAR 1963-1964, p.1.

⁸ M. L. K Murthy, *Pre and Proto-historic Andhra Pradesh*, p.129

⁹ *ibid.*, p.43.

¹ Information gathered from State Archaeological Museum

³ IAR 1964-1965, p.1.

2) Hyderabad District					
2. Bowenpalli		Iron trident with the effigy of a buffalo skeleton. ¹⁰			
3. Hashmatpet	Black and red ware pot with ring stand, black and red ware bowls, funnel shaped lids and vessels. ¹¹	Iron sickles, iron hand axes. ¹²	Fragmentary skeletal and animal remains. ¹³		Burial site. The site yielded rectangular slabs. ¹⁴
4. Lingampally	Megalithic black and red ware of varying sizes. ¹⁵	Trident, sword, arrowheads. ¹⁶	Full extended skeleton. ¹⁷		

¹⁰ ibid., p.46.

¹¹ Information gathered from Birla Science Museum.

¹² ibid.

¹³ IAR 1970-1971, p.1.

¹⁴ ibid.,p.2.

¹⁵ M.L. K Murthy, *Pre and Proto-historic Andhra Pradesh*, p.113.

¹⁶ ibid.

¹⁷ ibid.

5. Maula Ali	Ring-stands, bowls, dishes, incense-burners or chalices, platters, smaller bowls, vases, water jugs. ¹⁸	Axes, shaft-holed axe; cup. ¹⁹ Copper bells, knives, daggers, hatchets. ²⁰ Spears, iron lamps with legs. ²¹	Fragmentary skeletal remains. ²²		Burial site. ²³
3) Karimnagar District					
6. Kadambapur	Black and red ware pot, black and red ware vase on red ware stand, black	Iron javelins, a copper hilted dagger, crescentic tanged battle axe and knife,	Multiple burials, a damaged skull, a few fragments of longer bones such as,	Conch shells, Terracotta disc. ³¹ Gold Earrings. ³²	Habitation-cum-burial site.

¹⁸ V.V. Krishna Sastry, *The Proto and Early Historical Cultures of A. P.*, p. 74.

¹⁹ M. L. K Murthy, *Pre and Protohistoric Andhra Pradesh*, p. 130.

²⁰ Rao, *Deccan Megaliths*, p.47

²¹ V. V. Krishna Sastry, *The Proto and Early historical cultures of A.P.*, p. 74.

²² Rao, *Deccan Megaliths*, p.47.

²³ M. L. K. Murthy, *Pre and Protohistoric Andhra Pradesh*, p. 130.

	and red ware bowl, black and red ware pot on rod ware stand, black and red ware bowl cum lid on black ware stand, black and red ware vessel, black and red ware pot, black and red ware deep bowl, Black and red ware bowl, black and red ware vase on red stand, black and red ware deep bowl. ²⁴	spear heads, arrow heads, ²⁶	femur, tibia, fibula, etc. ²⁷ The second site yielded a skull and a few longer bones in articulated condition. ²⁸ The third megalithic site yielded a complete skeleton with heel bones missing and funerary pottery, covering everything except the skull. ²⁹ A dagger was found		
	Funnel shaped				

³¹ ibid

³² M.L. K. Murthy, *Pre and Protohistoric Andhra Pradesh* , p.134

²⁴ Information gathered from Telangana State Archaeology Museum

²⁶ IAR 1974-1975, pp. 3-4

²⁷ ibid

²⁸ ibid

²⁹ ibid

	chalices, black and red ware storage jars, red slipped ware with incised decoration, conical bowls. ²⁵		thrust into the clavicle of the skeleton. ³⁰		
7. Peddabankur	Black-and-red Ware ³³	Several iron objects, including a dagger, sickles and arrowheads, saddle querns and copper beads and bangles, antimony rods. ³⁴		Terracotta figurines, beads of jasper, agate, carnelian and amethyst. ³⁵	Habitation-cum-burial. Iron slag, blacksmith's work shop. ³⁶ Baked brick structure. ³⁷ The basement of a shrine. ³⁸ Circular bases of rubble stone masonry. ³⁹

²⁵ IAR 1974-1975, pp.3-4.

³⁰ ibid

³³ IAR 1968-1969, pp 1-3

³⁴ ibid

³⁵ IAR 1970-1971, pp. 1-2

³⁶ M. L. K. Murthy, *Pre and Protohistoric Andhra Pradesh*, p.129

³⁷ IAR 1968-1969, pp. 1-3.

³⁸ IAR 1970-1971, pp. 1-2.

³⁹ ibid

4) Khammam District

8. Dongatogu	Bright red pottery. More information not available. ⁴⁰	Stirrups, hoes, spears and knife blades. ⁴¹	No skeletal remains. ⁴²		1500 megalithic monuments. Evidence of stone sarcophagi for adult and child burials. ⁴³
9. Polichetticherug udda	Black and Red ware potsherds ⁴⁴	Stirrups, hoes and a spear. ⁴⁵ A single gold ring. ⁴⁶	No skeletal remains. ⁴⁷		Stone sarcophagi. ⁴⁸

5) Mahbubnagar District

⁴⁰ V. V. Krishna Sastry, *The Proto and Early Historical Cultures of A.P.* p. 75

⁴¹ *ibid*

⁴² Rao, *Deccan Megaliths*, pp.44

⁴³ *ibid*

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, p.45

⁴⁵ M. L. K Murthy, *The Proto and Early Historical Cultures of A.P.* p. 76

⁴⁶ *ibid.*, p.45

⁴⁷ Rao, *Deccan Megaliths*, pp. 46

⁴⁸ *ibid*

10. Chagatur	Black polished ware sprinkler and red ware bowls. ⁴⁹		Skeletal remains were found in an ashy deposit. ⁵⁰		Shale slabs, rectangular chamber of rubble stone masonry. Cists with port-hole and passage chambers. ⁵¹ The occurrence of skeletal remains outside the cist is an interesting feature. Decorated orthostats with bruised trident shapes. Memorial stone depicting a foot print. ⁵²
11. Chellipad	Megalithic Black and Red ware. ⁵³				
12. Chinnamarur	Red ware pots,	Iron axe head, iron	Skeleton with iron		This chalcolithic habitation

⁴⁹ IAR 1977-1978, p.12

⁵⁰ ibid

⁵¹ V. V. Krishna Sastry, *The Proto and Early Historical Cultures of A. P.*, p.59

⁵² IAR 1977-1978, p.12.

⁵³ IAR 1967-1968, p.5.

	black and red ware bowls, red ware jars. ⁵⁴	arrow heads, iron artifact. ⁵⁵	knife thrust into the neck. ⁵⁶		site and cemetery showed significant transition into the megalithic period. ⁵⁷
13. Erladinne	Black and red ware bowls, black ware broken bowl, red ware bowl, red ware lota with lid, black and red ware bowls, black and red ware bowl on stand, red ware pot with lid, black and red ware bowl with funnel shaped lid, black and red ware bowl, black and red ware bowl with				One hundred cairn circles were located in the site. ⁵⁹

⁵⁴ Information gathered from Telangana state archaeology Musuem

⁵⁵ ibid

⁵⁶ IAR 1979-1980, p.7.

⁵⁷ ibid

	knobbed lid, black and red ware lota. ⁵⁸				
14. Karapakala	Black and red ware pottery. ⁶⁰	Copper bell with bone tongue. ⁶¹	Fragmentary skeleton remains. ⁶²	_____	_____
15. Peddamarur ⁶³	Red ware lotas with lids, red ware small pots with lids, red ware bowl and black ware bowl, red ware lid, black ware bowl, carinated red ware vessel with conical lid, black and red ware small bowl,	Drill bit, iron small rings, hoes, sickles, broken iron lamp stand. ⁶⁵ Copper bangles with beads, arrow heads, spear heads and iron dish. Knives, triangular blades. ⁶⁶	Fragmentary skeleton remains, multiple urns with charred bones, calcined skull pieces accompanied with funerary assemblage. ⁶⁷	Terracotta ear spools, ⁶⁸ Pear shaped and tabloid terracotta beads, beads of jasper, carnelian, rock-crystal, shell bangles, Terracotta bull figurines, a	Habitation-cum- burial site. Shale slab floorings. Multi-chambered cist burials, Single chambered cist burials, terracotta sarcophagus. ⁷⁰ Port hole cist burials with passage. ⁷¹

⁵⁹ IAR 1986-1987, p.11

⁵⁸ Information gathered from Telangana State Archaeology Museum

⁶⁰ IAR 1979-1980, p. 9

⁶¹ ibid.

⁶² ibid.

⁶³ Submerged area under the Srisailem Dam Reservoir Project.

	black ware vase with lid ⁶⁴			spindle whorl, spatula. ⁶⁹	
16. Uppalapadu	Black and red ware bowl, broken red ware legged urn, small red ware pot on stand, funnel shaped bowl on black ware ring stand, black and red ware bowl conical shaped lid on red ware stand, black and red ware bowl	Axe with wooden shaft, iron rods, iron javelins, iron spear heads, long iron scrapers, cutting iron implements, horse stirrups, metal double hook and stylu, blunt edged iron tools, metal sword and dagger, spear heads. ⁷³	Fragmentary skeletal remains with ash deposit. ⁷⁴	Shell garland, Semi-precious beads and terracotta beads. ⁷⁵	Burial site. Sixteen megalithic sites, with evidence of segregation. ⁷⁶ Degenerated wooden coffins. ⁷⁷ Platform adorned with stone circles and with shale slabs beneath was identified. ⁷⁸ One pit burial during excavation yielded twelve adult skulls with

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ IAR 1977-1978, pp.12-13

⁶⁷ ibid.

⁶⁸ Information gathered from Telangana State Archaeology Museum

⁷⁰ ibid

⁷¹ V. V. Krishna Sastry, *The Proto and Early Historical Cultures of A.P.*, p.62.

⁶⁴ Information gathered from Telangana State Archaeology Museum

⁶⁹ IAR 1977-1978, pp 12-13

⁷³ ibid.

⁷⁴ IAR 1977-1978, p. 12.

⁷⁵ Information gathered from the Telangana State Archaeological Museum

⁷⁶ ibid.

	on red ware stand, black red ware small pot, perforated red ware pot sherds, black and red ware bowl on red ware stand ⁷²				fragmentary bone pieces. ⁷⁹
17. Upperu	Black and red ware dish, black and red ware bowl, red ware pots, black and red ware pot, black and red ware deep bowl, black and red ware pot with lid, red ware	Blades, chisels and knives.	The site yielded fragmentary as well as extended human skeletons. ⁸¹		Evidence of a family pit burial. Two adult skeletons facing each other. The vessels had graffiti resembling the Brahmi letter, 'Ma' ⁸²

⁷⁷ ibid.

⁷⁸ ibid.

⁷² Information gathered from Telangana State Archaeology Museum

⁷⁹ ibid.

	broken lid on black ware stand. ⁸⁰				
6) Medak District					
18. Ismailkhanpet	Microliths, sherds of megalithic black and red ware pottery. ⁸³			Etched carnelian beads. ⁸⁴	

⁸¹ M. L. K. Murthy, *Pre and Protohistoric Andhra Pradesh*, p. 117

⁸² *ibid.*

⁸⁰ Information gathered from State Archaeology Museum

⁸³ IAR 1958-1959, p.11.

⁸⁴ *ibid.*

19. Venkataraopet	Sherds of megalithic black and red ware pottery. ⁸⁵				
7) Nalgonda District					
20. Hazurnagar	Black and Red ware pottery. ⁸⁶		Fragmentary skeletal remains. ⁸⁷	A carnelian bead with fourteen facets. ⁸⁸	Multichambered cist burial with svastika pattern. Pre-firing marks on pot sherds. ⁸⁹ A cist yielded evidence of port hole in the northern orthostat with passage chamber. ⁹⁰ Evidence of child burials.

⁸⁵ IAR 1961-1962, p.2.

⁸⁶ IAR 1983-1984, p.5.

⁸⁷ ibid.

⁸⁸ ibid.

⁸⁹ ibid.

⁹⁰ V. V. Krishna Sastry, *Pre and Protohistoric Andhra Pradesh*, pp.120-121.

21. Raigir	Bowls, Dishes, Spherical jars. ⁹¹	Iron trident along with various other iron objects. ⁹²	Fragmentary skeletal remains. ⁹³	Lapis lazuli beads. ⁹⁴	Multiple burials. ⁹⁵
22. Yelleswaram	Black and Red Ware dish on long red ware, Red ware carinated pot, Polished black and red ware lota, Black and red ware small pot, Black ware dish cum lid on perforated designed stand, black ware stand	Arrow heads, copper ear spool, iron sickles, iron lances, spear head, stone rubber, broken iron hoe ⁹⁷ Ploughshares and javelins. ⁹⁸	Skull and bone pieces. ⁹⁹	Microlithic flakes and cores of jasper. ¹⁰⁰	Habitation-cum-burial site, Evidence of domesticated cattle and other animal remains. ¹⁰¹ In the second season of excavations, a unique find was the placement of one skeleton over the top of another. ¹⁰²

⁹¹ ibid, p.130.

⁹² V.V. Krishna Sastry, *Pre and Protohistoric Andhra Pradesh*, p.120.

⁹³ Rao, Deccan megaliths, p. 52.

⁹⁴ ibid.

⁹⁵ ibid.

⁹⁷ Information gathered from Telangana State Archaeology Museum.

⁹⁸ V. V. Krishna Sastry, *Pre and Proto-historic Cultures of Andhra Pradesh*, p. 130.

⁹⁹ IAR 1958-1959, p.11.

¹⁰⁰ ibid

¹⁰¹ V. V. Krishna Sastry, *Pre and Proto-historic Cultures of Andhra Pradesh*, p.130.

¹⁰² IAR 1962-1963, p. 2.

	cum lid, black and red ware broken bowl, red ware pot with lid, black ware kuja with finial lid, black ware jar with looped lid on stand ⁹⁶				
8) Warangal District					
23. Polakonda	Black-and-red Ware, red-slipped and dull red wares; shapes represented being dishes, deep bowls and vases. ¹⁰³	Iron objects include a broken sickle, a ring, a ladle without handle and a spear-head. ¹⁰⁴		A potter's kiln with some broken neolithic handmade pottery and a broken stone axe was noticed in a trench adjacent	Habitation-cum-burial site, horse remains. ¹⁰⁶ Seventy five burials indicating a graveyard. ¹⁰⁷

⁹⁶ Information gathered from Telangana State Archaeology Museum.

¹⁰³ IAR 1975-1976, pp. 5-6

¹⁰⁴ *ibid.*

				to channel. ¹⁰⁵	the	
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¹⁰⁶ V. V. Krishna Sastry, 'Megalithic Cultures', p.129.

¹⁰⁷ IAR 1975-1976, pp. 5-6.

¹⁰⁵ *ibid.*

On the basis of the information provided in Table 2, an attempt has been made to classify the data according to their artefactual distribution.

Table 3

Sites with skeletal remains	Kadambapur, Chagatur, Chinnamarur, Karpakala Pochampad, Hashmatpet, Lingampally, Maula Ali Peddamarur, Uppalappadu, Upperu, Hazurnagar Raigiri, Yelleswaram
Sites without skeletal remains	Pochampad, Bowenpalli, Peddabankur, Dongatogu Polichetticherugudda, Padugonigudem, Chellippad Erladinne, Polakonda
Iron weaponry	Pochampad, Bowenpalli, Hashmatpet, Upperu, Lingampally, Maula Ali, Kadambapur, Peddabankur, Chinnamarur, Uppalappadu
Agricultural implements	Pochampad, Hashmatpet, Peddabankur, Peddamarur, Polakonda
Animal remains	Pochampad, Hashmatpet, Polakonda, Yelleswaram
Habitation-cum-burial	Pochampad, Kadambapur, Peddabankur,

sites	Peddamarur, Polakonda
Anthropomorphs	Domada, Dongatogu, Galabha, Katapuram, Kishtapuram, Mallur, Mungapet, Padugonigudem, Tottigutta
Pottery	Pochampad, Hashmatpet, Lingampally, Kadambapur, Peddabankur, Polichetticherugudda, Chagatur, Chellipad, Chinnamarur, Erladinne, Karapakala, Peddamarur, Uppalappadu, Upperu, Ismailkhanpet, Venkatarao pet Hazurnagar Polakonda

Table 4

Megalithic sites based on typological classification

Cairns	Pochampad, Vilegaon, Balajigutta, Bolaram, Bowenpalli, Gurramguda, Hashmatpet, Maula Ali, Mallangur, Telghir, Madhira, Palvoncha, Talampahad, Wyrā, Amangal, Chellipad, Erladinne, Kandur, Karapakala, Madhavaram, Mahbubnagar, Nandimalla, Polkampalli, Ravipakhala, Tadikonda, Timmaipalli, Tirmalaipalli, Uppalappadu, Urkonda, Vargal, Karalapahad, Narasapur, Phanigiri, Raigir, Valigunda, Pochampadu, Dornakal, Gunsanipalli, Mettigutta
Stone circles	Balajigutta, Koisaram, Lingampalli, Dhudikota, Barreleguda,

	Gondimalla, Kalvakurti, Kandur, Malleswaram, Siddipet, Topran, Mungapetta, Singapur
Pit burials	Kadambapur, Peddamarur, Uppalappadu, Upperu
Oblong cists	Bowenpalli, Maula Ali, Chinnamarur, Raigiri
Dolmenoid cists	Barreleguda, Domada, Dongatogu, Khammam, Pandurangapuram, Polichetticherugudda, Tottigutta, Chagatur, Albaka, Kaperlaguru, Mungapetta/Mungapet
Multichambered cist burials	Hazurnagar, Peddamarur
Svastika patterned cist burials/dolmenoid cist	Singapur, Chagatur, Uppalappadu
Stone sarcophagus	Dongatogu, Polichetticherugudda, Barrelegudem, Domada, Pandurangapuram, Tottigutta

Child burials	Raigir, Dongatogu, Mungapet, Peddamarur, Hazurnagar
Megaliths with port holes and passage chambers	Chagatur, Peddamarur, Dongatogu Pandurangapuram, Yelleswaram, Kaperlaguru Chinnamarur, Kadambapur

Table 5.1

Beads	Conch shells	Gold
Peddabankur	Peddamarur	Kadambapur
Peddamarur	Kadambapur	Polichetticherugudda
Uppalappadu	Uppalappadu	
Ismailkhanpet		
Hazurnagar		
Raigiri		
Yelleswaram		

Bull figurines	Trident	Horse-bits and stirrups
Bowenpalli	Bowenpalli	Pochampad
Peddamarur	Lingampalli	Uppalapadu
Pochampad	Chagatur	Peddabankur
	Raigir	

Chapter 3

Perceptions of Death

A mystery far beyond the grapples of human perceptions, there might not be another topic so feared yet so crucial to the understanding of existence. Even though the topic is quite vexing, man's innate curiousness has led him to seek answers in search for his reality. The evolution of mankind and the development of social structures further prompted the human mind to progress beyond simple and blind acceptances and to question the very nature of being. Death still remains one of the gravest mysteries that have been pondered upon for eons and despite years of study there is high probability that mankind might never actually have an accurate answer for any questions regarding death. For primitive communities, death and funerary rituals were not simply a natural reaction to a calamity that has struck their near one. Death was experienced by the community as a whole and has the power to disrupt the balance of power and normalcy within the community. Perceptions regarding death and funerary rituals have only multiplied with intensity over time.

Death as a biological process is at the same time an individual and a social experience and funerary rituals can be understood in its simplest terms as the social response towards a particular biological state of the physical body. While death as a biological process is a universal experience, the social response to death has been constructed with time and varies in different cultures. There is no normative idea of death and in this sense death is not a universal experience even within one particular society as people deal with the death of a dear one and of one's self in their individualistic ways. The universality and the inevitability of death were quite evident in the development and popular usage of the allegory of *Danse Macabre* in the late Middle Ages in Europe.¹

A similar philosophy is expressed in the *Garuda Purana* when Vishnu tells "In the end a divine vision arises" and "All the world appears as one" reminiscent of the

¹Robert Eisler, 'Danse Macabre', *Traditio*, vol. 6, 1948, pp. 187-225.

universality of death. Here the universality of death is understood in the sense that death is a belief that it is a natural phenomenon that happens to all living beings. Over time death was personalized and personified in different ways. Oral traditions from different parts of the world shows striking similarities in the personification of deities associated with death and in the stories surrounding them. Migration of men in search of food and other new pastures in life, inevitably led to a diffusion of various cultural traits as well. The striking similarities between the mythologies of different cultures are enough proof for this. The finite nature of human existence fuelled the idea of death to evolve over the centuries and assume an identity of its own, which eventually formed a separate entity in the common psyche of man. The origin and subsequent deification of Hades, Yama, Osiris and many more that are portrayed in a destructive and violent persona can be understood in this context.

Social responses to death cannot be studied in isolation and is weaved into a network of interrelated topics. The origin, authorship, daily life, chronological framework, funerary rituals, legends and the typological variations associated with the megaliths have been subjected to intensive study ever since their discovery. However, the inherent philosophy motivating the erection of such grandeur structures are not as eloquent when compared to other studies concerning the subject. This tendency to refrain from commenting on the socio-cultural aspects of prehistoric and early historic societies is quite natural as it is a complicated task. It becomes more complex when such a society denies the possibility of corroborating literary evidences along with the archaeological discoveries. Hence it is less complicated to study the funerary practices and rituals associated with these structures, than analysing the very belief behind such vexing undertakings. This complication makes itself explicitly clear when Gordon Childe aptly pointed out that, “*the archaeologist cannot recapture Neanderthal man's ideas about a future life nor the theory of Cro-Magnon magic*”². Childe claims that early men were not capable of formulating complex ideas and then acting on it and it was their emotions that prompted them to act in a certain way. These acts in the course

²V. Gordon Childe, ‘Directional Changes in Funerary Practices During 50,000 Years’, *Man*, vol. 45, 1945, pp.13-19.

of time became behavioural patterns and should be seen as ideas themselves. Such acts or ideas were developed and adopted by society as and when deemed appropriate.³

The eschatological nature of the megalithic structures is quite evident from the funerary assemblage unearthed from them. The very nature of understanding the beliefs and ideas regarding death in the megalithic communities echo primitive religious beliefs and might be coupled with vivid imaginations, wild speculations and the fear of the unknown.

Death: The interplay of sin, divine justice and ancestor worship

Fear of death exerts law and order in society and the interpreters of death become the interpreters of social norms as well. The ‘life after death’ concept which dominated primitive religions might largely be a tool to instil a certain degree of ethics and morality among the inhabitants. It reinforced the belief that no action goes unnoticed and every action has its consequences, even after the death of the human body. The Garuda Purana talks about the Sravanas and Sravanis who wander the earth and keeps a record of all that man and woman does either openly or secretly. This is then conveyed to Chitragupta who keeps track of the good and bad deeds of all beings.⁴

Death has featured prominently in theology, literature, art and performance arts and has inspired creative minds to express themselves in varied ways throughout centuries. The seven capital sins of mankind that laid the groundwork for medieval catholic ecclesiastical beliefs was later etched into human psyche by the graphic detailing of heaven and hell in Dante Alighieri’s classic work, the Divine Comedy. The gruesome punishments meted out to the sinful were successful in generating fear among the people and to restore moral and social order in society. As humans are susceptible to sins even if it is to a minimal degree, the idea of an all perfect heaven accessible only to those perfect individuals, did not sit well with the Christian mind and there aroused the need to cleanse the soul of the sins that were committed during its time on earth. Thus

³ibid.

⁴Manmatha Nath Dutt, *Garuda Purana*, Shambazar, Society for the Resuscitation of Indian Literature, 1908, p. 21.

the intermediate realm of purgatory which existed between heaven and hell was created where one would be purified of the sins and would progress towards heaven.

A dialogue between Garuda and Vishnu, the Garuda Purana offers a meaningful insight into the ways of Yama, the God of death in Vedic mythology. The text extensively describes the sins and the punishment meted out to the same and records eighty-four lakhs of hell and mention the names of twenty-one of the most dreadful ones. An elaborate account of the deeds considered as sins is also provided.⁵ The people who commit such sins are tortured in hell and after years of torture they are purified after which they enter the cycle of rebirth. But even then they are not devoid of their past sins as in their present life they will be marked by a deformity which will be defined by the gravity of sin committed. Unlike the concept of purgatory, the Garuda Purana states that the person thus reborn after purification shall bear the deformities coercive to the sins he has committed in the past. The belief in karma states that a person's past deeds haunts him in the present life and the soul is released from this cycle of birth and rebirth only after self-realization. This realization of self happens when the self understands that the *atman* and *brahman* are one and that there is no dualism in existence.⁶

In some customs only the righteous proceed to the realm of the dead and enjoy the fruits of their labour while on earth. Life after death and the elevation of the deceased into the status of an ancestor is possible only if the deceased was virtuous in his earthly form. In a way continued existence is determined based on his deeds in his earthly life. Those who have done immoral deeds will be excluded from ancestor hood and would be considered as dead both physically and symbolically and this is in its truest sense the death of the physical body and of the soul.⁷

A person who has lived a life of moral piety is elevated to the realm of the ancestors. The ancestors are also considered custodians and enforcers of justice and morality among the living. Ancestors have a continued role to play in the life of the

⁵ibid, p. 22.

⁶ibid, p. 34.

⁷Benjamin C. Ray, 'African Religions: An Overview', in Lindsay James (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Religion*, USA, Thomas Gale, 2005, p.86.

living as well and continues to regulate the social life of the communities even after the death of their physical body. Ancestors function as intermediaries between God and the people. Thus, petitionary prayer is often said through them.⁸

The human understanding of afterlife is directly linked to the manifestation of the 'divine being' which varies in different cultures. The personification of Gods in polytheistic religious beliefs were the innate desire for attaining oneness with the divine manifestation which would be possible only after one's death, provided that the deceased live a life of piety. The perception of afterlife varies in different communities and it is seen as a direct correlation between the living conditions. Since the afterlife is seen as a direct extension of life on earth, this alternated state of existence is conceptualized on the same parallels as that of the living conditions.⁹ The Egyptian 'Book of Dead' describes the path which the soul has to take after death in order to reach the city of the living dead, where he can be judged in a clear cut testimony to the strong belief in afterlife.¹⁰

The mode of burial is an intrinsic and important part of death. The traces of human burial system can be traced back to the Neanderthals. It is astonishing to note that the Neanderthals used to place food and tools in their simple graves for the deceased.¹¹ The practise of placing food and water and other items that probably belonged to the deceased during his life time, could be understood as a way of preparing him for the life beyond death. Man's inability to comprehend what comes beyond the physical realm of his existence, forced him to conjure up the idea of the infinite nature of soul.

⁸Jane I. Smith, 'Afterlife: An Overview', in Lindsay James (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Religion*, USA, Thomas Gale, 2005, pp.128-131.

⁹TH. P. van Baaren, 'After Life : Geographies of Death', in Lindsay James (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Religion*, USA, Thomas Gale, 2005, pp.136-138.

¹⁰ Ibid., p.137.

¹¹Kenneth Boyd, 'Attitudes to death: Some historical notes', *Journal of Medical Ethics*, Vol.3, No.3, 1977, p.125.

Funerary customs

The reconstruction of the social fabric of pre-literate societies can be made possible only with the help of the material remains that have survived over time. This becomes particularly crucial for societies that have left behind only burial structures. Burial rites and funerary practices become exceptional sources when an archaeologist considers different aspects of the grave site. Burial practices have been observed in numerous variations even within one cohesive cultural unit. Burial rites primarily consist of two aspects which concern the ritualistic process and the social status of the deceased. Such variations in the treatment of the dead body and mode of disposal can be attributed to the social and anti-social behaviors of the deceased person during his lifetime. Burial practices symbolize the social status of the deceased and is a reflection on his life on earth. People who committed anti-social behaviors such as murders, patricide, matricide, suicide, adultery and similar crimes during their lifetime are considered to be not worthy of the accepted burial rituals. The deceased is thus condemn to hell for eternity and excluded from what might be the realm of ancestors as the rituals that are required to facilitate the deceased's soul in the afterlife are consciously denied by the living. The fear of eternal damnation also acts as a warning for the living of the community to follow certain moral conducts and keeps the society from entering into a state of chaos.¹²

The mode of burial, funerary assemblage, position of the dead body and the type of burial are crucial to the understanding of funerary rites. An analysis of the skeletal remains from a burial can also be helpful in ascertaining gender and age differentiations. The number and nature of grave goods in the burial is an indicator of the social position as well as the economic position of the deceased in the society.¹³

The institutionalization of religion further fuelled the conceptualization of death as well. The fear of death fed up the ideas of immortality, separability of body and soul, beliefs in a life after death, reincarnations and the simple belief in heaven and hell. The

¹²S. P. Gupta, *Disposal of the Dead and Physical Types in Ancient India*. Delhi, Oriental Publishers, 1972, p.3.

¹³V. A. Alekshin, 'Burial Customs as an Archaeological Source', *Current Anthropology*, vol. 24, no. 2, 1983, pp. 140-142.

mortality of man forced him to come up with alternative or parallel existences of life. These parallel existences of 'life after death' prevail in one form or the other in all main stream religious practices. With varying religious philosophies and belief systems, perceptions of death also expanded with much colour and fanfare.

Earlier studies concerning death were intrinsically linked to the origin theories of religion. The very term religion in the modern context is a matter of debate. Arriving at a definition for religion even for a modern society can spark controversies. Giddens broad definition of religion can be used in this context and it simply means, "...a set of symbols, invoking feelings of reverence or awe ... linked to rituals or ceremonials practiced by a community of believers..."¹⁴

Death and funerary practices were not only conducted as the final ritual for the deceased but it was used as a springboard for religion to soar, with sin as its wings. Death among primitive people was perceived as the departure of the soul from the deceased body, which was venerated by the living. This inference led Edward. B Taylor to conclude that existence of death solely gave rise to the conceptualization of religion.¹⁵ Herbert Spencer shared a similar theory but the idea of soul was replaced by the transformation of the deceased into ancestral spirits. He concluded that the worship of ancestor spirits served as the basis for the development of primitive religions.¹⁶ Bachofen gave yet another interpretation and concluded that death and funerary rituals were associated with fertility and sexuality.¹⁷ Emile Durkheim however did not resort to the evolutionary theorists and tried to understand death customs as a natural and obvious response to a complicated situation. Robert Hertz further extended the idea proposed by Durkheim by examining the burial rites which were secondary in nature of a specific culture group and came to the inference that, death is not seen as the end of life and it is merely an initiation into what is known as the afterlife. As a result death also brings the society together to gather around for the funerary practices through

¹⁴J. M Coles and E.S. Higgs, *Archaeology of Early Man*, England, Penguin Books, 1968, p.140.

¹⁵Edward B. Taylor, *Primitive Culture*, New York, Putnam, 1871, p.125.

¹⁶Helen Hardacre, 'Ancestors:Ancestor Worship', in Lindsay James (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Religion*, USA, Thomas Gale, 2005, pp. 322-325.

¹⁷J. J. Bachofen, 'An Essay on Ancient Mortuary Symbolism,' in *Myth Religion and Mother Right*, (trans.), E. Mannheim, London, Routledge and Kegan, 1967, p.4.

which the deceased is elevated to the status of the ancestor. For him life and death are not two different realities, but are connected to each other in an endless loop. This aspect is evident in the process of naming a new born with the recently deceased's name, which are still prevalent among some communities.¹⁸

Social attitudes to death

Malinowski gave more emphasis on the social reaction towards the dead. For him, social integration and an outlet for grief were the main forces behind death ceremonies. He says, "...The ceremonial of death which ties the survivors to the body and rivets them to the place of death, the belief in the existence of the spirit in its beneficent influences or malevolent intention in the duties of a series of commemorative or sacrificial ceremonies-in all this. Religion counteracts the centrifugal forces of fear, dismay, and demoralization and provides the most powerful means of reintegration of the group's shaken solidarity and the reestablishment of its morale..."¹⁹

Hertz and his socially determined attitudes to death remain centrifugal in the study of death and death customs. Hertz argued:

"...The emotion aroused by death varies extremely in intensity according to the social status of the deceased and may even in certain cases be lacking. At the death of a chief or a man of high standing a true panic sweeps over the group. On the contrary, the death of a stranger, a slave or a child will go almost unnoticed; it will arouse no emotion, no occasion, and no ritual..."²⁰

Hertz also discussed the reason why primitive peoples do not see death as a natural phenomenon: "...Society imparts its own character of permanence to the individuals who compose it: because it feels itself immortal and wants to be so. It cannot normally believe that its members above all those in whom it incarnates itself and with whom it identifies itself, should be fated to die. Their destruction can only be the consequence of

¹⁸Phyllis Palgi and Henry Abramovitch, Death a Cross Cultural Perspective, Annual Review of Anthropology, vol. 13, 1984, pp. 388-390.

¹⁹B. Malinowski, *Magic Science and Religion*, London, Faber & West, 1948, p. 52.

²⁰R. Hertz, *Death and the Right Hand*, Transl. Evans-Pritchard, New York, Free Press, 1960, p. 76.

*a sinister plot. Thus when a man dies society loses in him much more than a unit; it is stricken in the very principle of its life in the faith it has in itself...*²¹

This aspect of the death of a person in society might have driven them to construct elaborate funerary rituals and alternate realities were the death is given some kind of permanence and the society continues to function normally.

As per the data compiled in 1994, there are about 300 megalithic sites in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. Out of this the total number of sites that are excavated is only 58.²² It is quite evident that an attempt to form any conclusive theory or a coherent picture for that matter is already an impossible task but the possibilities for interpretations are always open.

Perceptions of death among the megalithic communities in Telangana

On the basis of the information derived from Table 1- Table 5, provided in the preceding chapter, the present study has attempted to gleam the megalithic perceptions of death and its relation to the megalithic burial structures and the associated grave goods.

Mode of disposal of the dead

There is no uniform mode of disposal of the dead or funerary practices throughout the megalithic communities in Telangana. The construction of a megalith is a structured task which requires labour power. The erection of a megalithic structure begins with the quarrying process. The required stones are then transported to the chosen burial site. The orthostats are then placed in the desired position and the walls for the cists are set up. After the body is interred into the cist the capstone is placed on top and the cairn packing is arranged accordingly.²³ The megalithic communities in the Indian subcontinent predominantly practiced post-exarnation burials. In post-exarnation burials the body of the deceased was subjected to the natural process of decaying after which the exposed remains would be treated and laid down in an articulated position in

²¹ibid., pp. 77-78.

²²U. S. Moorthy, 1994, p. 169.

²³M. Seshadri, *The Stone Using Cultures of Prehistoric and Protohistoric Mysore*, London, 1960, p.1-12.

the grave along with funerary pottery and other belongings of value. Burials with complete inhumation and cremation even though rare were also excavated from the region. This could also indicate an influx of new ideas into the belief systems among the megalithic communities or could be a ritual practice that is attributed to just one section of the society or to even certain people in position of power.

In inhumation, the deceased is interred in a deeply dug out pit and the head was found to be placed towards the north. Primary burials in the region of Telangana are quite rare and so far only Lingampalli, Upperu, and Yelleswaram has yielded primary burials with full extended skeletons. All the burials so far excavated has yielded some kind of funerary pottery with the numbers, varieties and mode of distribution varying in almost all the sites. Identical burials have so far not been identified and a certain degree of change is quite evident in all the burials either in typology, orientation, treatment of the dead body or the distribution of funerary assemblage.

The cremation as the dominant mode of disposal of the dead is almost non-existent when compared to post-exhumation burials and inhumation. Charred bone pieces found from Peddamarur and the interment of skeletal remains on an ashy deposit in Chagatur and Uppalappadu might be indicators to cremation.²⁴ As the spread of skeletal remains on an ashy deposit does not serve any practical purpose it might had been a part of the funerary ritual. Inhumation and cremation are extremely rare and might have depended on a number of factors. The nature of the death that occurred, the social and economic status of the deceased, age and sex might all have been determinants for these types of burials. Of this the probability of the social position of the deceased to be the determining factor holds strong due to their extreme rare occurrence. However the possibilities of future excavations and discoveries that might point towards other determinants need to be acknowledged.

Funerary assemblage

Out of the ninety-four sites that are known till date, twenty-four of them had been taken up for excavation. Fourteen sites have yielded significant pottery assemblage of

²⁴ Refer Table 2.

different varieties including bowls, dishes, spherical jars and perforated dish stands. The number of pots in the different sites varies from a few to as large as seventy-five within one burial. This might be based on the social and economic position of the deceased. However it must not be assumed that burials with larger number of artefacts are a direct reflection on the economic and social status of the person. For instance, it is easy to perceive that a grave with around seventy-five pots and bowls is richer than a grave which has yielded only a handful of pots along with gold earrings, precious beads and iron weapons. Thus, an analysis of grave goods has to be made two-fold. Firstly, grave goods can be analysed based on their number and secondly and most importantly on the basis of their material composition. Rare and precious items which are not a normal find among the graves can be understood as a direct reflection on the social and economic power of the individual.²⁵

Symbolic burials

The relevance of rectangular platforms at Pochampad and Hashmatpet²⁶ can be understood only in a symbolic sense and is believed to be associated with the general funerary practices of the megalithic people, since it does not seem to serve any purpose in day to day life. The excavator has understood them as platforms placed for the exposure of the dead body.²⁷ However, one cannot rule out the possibility of it being an altar with some significant ritualistic connotation or it could even be a symbolic burial. This could perhaps explain the total lack of skeletal remains but ample distribution of funerary pottery and iron implements. Rectangular shale slabs were excavated from Uppalappadu²⁸ and Chagatur. At Uppalappadu a cist devoid of skeletal remains and funerary assemblage were also discovered, which could indicate the prevalence of symbolic burials. Maula Ali and Dornakal also yielded symbolic burials in the same archaeological context. The most baffling discovery might be at Dongatogu where the excavated burials did not yield skeletal remains at all. At Polichetticherugudda, a terracotta sarcophagus was excavated which was completely devoid of skeletal remains.

²⁵Burial Customs as an Archaeological Source, V. A. Alekshin, *Current Anthropology*, vol. 24, no. 2, 1983, p. 142.

²⁶ Refer Table 2.

²⁷IAR 1964-1965, p.1.

²⁸ IAR 1978-1979, p.4.

The environmental factors might have played some role in it but the probability of these burials being symbolic in nature is much higher.

Funerary rituals and cairn circles

At Maula Ali, the numbers of stones that make up the cairn circle, almost always include twenty four stones. The significance of the number still alludes to confusion.²⁹ This is not a chance occurrence as in circles too small to accommodate 24 boulders the remaining were seen as heaped inside the circle. This does not indicate any practical purpose and deserves special mention.³⁰ Hence, it can be inferred that the similarities in number might have served a ritualistic cause.

Many of the cairn circles and mostly all the cists are made from granite which requires intricate knowledge and demands hours of manual labor. The division of the site into northern and western groups, with the northern half strewn by cairn circles and the western half dominated by dolmenoid cists,³¹ might probably indicate segregation within the cemetery. The same can be observed at Polakonda where cairn circles are found to be located on the south-east and cists are confined to the southern portion of Pedddagutta hill.

The differential treatment of the dead body

As has been observed a uniform mode of disposal of the dead was not followed and no site yielded identical material remains. Variations in the way the dead body is treated, the nature and number of funerary assemblage, positioning of the articulated remains and orientations itself are quite evident from the excavated sites. Even more vexing is that the very nature of the megalithic structures erected for the deceased would also vary drastically. Since the megalithic structures are largely found in clusters, it becomes quite evident that they are part of the megalithic culture, but are subjected to different customs when it comes to funerary rituals. At Kadambapur, the first of the three sites excavated yielded a damaged skull and a few remains of longer bones.

²⁹ E.H Hunt, *Hyderabad Cairns and their problems*, The Times Press, Bombay, 1916, p.8.

³⁰ V. V. Krishna Sastry, *The Proto and Early Historical Cultures of A. P.*, p.73.

³¹ Rao, *Deccan Megaliths*, Delhi, Sundeep Prakashan, 1988, p.47.

Whether the skulls were deliberately crushed or was affected by exposure to natural causes is unknown. The probability that the skull might have been crushed prior or during interment holds strong because the second and third excavated burials here yielded a complete skull and a few longer bones in articulated condition. The third megalithic site yielded a complete skeleton with heel bones missing and funerary pottery, covering everything except the skull. Whether the heel bones were deliberately cut off or whether it was just an accident, is still left to be determined. A dagger was also found thrust into the clavicle of the skeleton. At Chinnamarur the skeleton that was excavated had an iron knife thrust into the neck. Sixteen megalithic sites were identified at Uppalappadu with evidence of segregation between cists and pit burials.³²

Ancestor worship

At Pandurangapuram a ‘U’ shaped port hole was discovered and at Kaperlaguru dolmenoid cists with port holes were excavated. In a total, 8 megalithic sites including Chagatur, Peddamarur, Dongatogu, Pandurangapuram, Yelleswaram, Kaperlaguru, Chinnamarur and Kadambapur have yielded port holes with passages.

Megalithic port holes are generally associated with dolmens, dolmenoid cist burials and cist burials. The ‘U’ shaped and the round shaped are the two different types of port holes that had been identified from the Indian subcontinent. The typological variations among the different megalithic structures is proof that not all the deceased attained ancestor hood. Regarding the port holes and passageways there is more ambiguity than clarity. The port holes are restricted to certain areas only and this might have been a regional or a communal differentiation. Usually the port holes have been aligned to the three cardinal directions east, west and south with north being a rare occurrence. The port holes oriented to the eastern direction had been associated with the possibility of sun worship, but such an explanation cannot be given to the west-south orientation.³³ The possibility that it could be the oriented to the direction of Yama, the Hindu deity of death might assume the same risk that John Marshall did with his inference to the ‘Proto-Shiva’. However, the possibility that port holes oriented to the

³²Refer Table 2

³³K. P. Rao, ‘Megalithic Port holes’, pp. 964-969.

sun might lead them to a possible revered position which could be ancestor hood or an attempt to attain oneness with the divine itself can be considered as a possibility. In such a scenario the orientation of the port hole that leads them away from the sun would also lead them to a possible afterlife which might be a gateway for a continued existence or total abyss. Another contradiction that the port holes posit is our very own understanding of it. If the port hole is considered as entry and exit points for the soul of the deceased, then the site at Kadambapur posits a very perplexing problem. Megalithic III that was excavated at Kadambapur has yielded a complete skeleton with heel bones missing³⁴ and a dagger found thrust into the clavicle of the skeleton.³⁵ Mutilation of a dead body is considered as a means of protection against a deceased person who has the capability to harass the living.³⁶ The vexing question here is why the burial of such a person was provided a port hole and passage chamber. The present study is not in a position to answer this question with only probable evidence. Even still the fact remains that the megalithic port holes had a ritualistic significance which has to be studied in detail in order to arrive at a conclusion.

At Chagatur a memorial stone depicting a foot print was unearthed³⁷ and is the only site with such a rare find and this act as another indicator to differentiation in social position and the differentiation in mortuary rituals. The memorial stone depicting the foot might also indicate to the possibility of a symbolic burial considering that the skeletal remains were found outside the cist.

At Peddamarur fragmentary skeleton remains, multiple urns with charred bones and calcined skull pieces accompanied with funerary assemblage.³⁸ Twelve adult skulls with fragmentary bone pieces were also unearthed.³⁹ The skeletal remains were found to be heaped in a careless manner. The possibility of this being a part of a sacrificial ritual

³⁴IAR 1974-1975, pp. 3-4.

³⁵ibid.

³⁶James Frazer, *The Fear of the Dead in Primitive Religion*, vol. 1, London, MacMillan, 1933, p.75.

³⁷ IAR 1977-1978, p.12.

³⁸IAR 1977-1978, pp.12-13

³⁹IAR 1978-1979, p. 2

can be considered. Platforms adorned with stone circles and with shale slabs beneath were identified indicating symbolic burials yet again.⁴⁰

In the second season of excavations at Yelleswaram, a unique find was the placement of one skeleton over the top of another.⁴¹ The rare positioning of the skeleton might be part of a ritualistic process or might even indicate a sacrifice. Similar to the one at Yelleswaram the megalithic site at Upperu yielded two adult skeletons facing each other. The same sense of ambiguity persists with the Upperu skeletal remains as well.

Anthropomorphic figures

The erection of anthropomorphic figures in its simplest sense can be understood as the initiative by common man to conceive the supernatural in a way they can grasp which is the human form.⁴² The anthropomorphic statues found in Hyderabad are made of thick blocks of stones and were discovered in close proximity to dolmenoid cists often forming a part of the stone circle enclosing them.⁴³ So far all the anthropomorphs discovered are crude and plain and vaguely resembles a human figure. At Tottigutta the anthropomorphs have displayed female features and remains one of the sole sites which have yielded female anthropomorphs in the region.⁴⁴ The sacred nature of the anthropomorphs can be understood more clearly when analyzed in par with the ethnographic data as well. The belief that the stone structures encompass the soul of the deceased is a widespread credence among the tribal communities.⁴⁵

Menhirs

Menhirs are not such a common occurrence and had been identified only from Dhadanhalli, Lingampally, Kalvakurti, Muraharidoddi, Topran and Valigunda. Erecting memorials to honor the deceased for his exemplary service to the society can be seen

⁴⁰IAR 1977-1978,p.12.

⁴¹IAR 1962-1963,p.2.

⁴²R.J Zwi Werblowsky, 'Anthropomorphism', in Lindsay Jones (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Religion*, pp. 388-390.

⁴³K. P. Rao, 'A Unique Iron Age Grave Complex from South India' *East and West*, vol. 41, No. 1, 1991, pp. 363-369

⁴⁴ibid., p.364.

⁴⁵Refer Table 2.

throughout history. In early societies chieftains and war heroes would get a memorial as a token of appreciation for their services. Even now certain communities like the Gonds and Savaras erect stone structures in veneration of the deceased.⁴⁶

Terracotta beads and precious stones

Conch shells had been found from Kadambapur. The site also yielded gold earrings which are rare finds. Beads of jasper, agate, carnelian and amethyst were unearthed from Peddabankur. The finds from Peddamarur are more diversified with pear and tabloid shaped terracotta beads, beads of jasper, carnelian, rock-crystal and shell bangles. Shell garland, semi-precious beads and terracotta beads were excavated from Uppalappadu. Etched carnelian beads and a single carnelian bead with fourteen facets were discovered from Ismailkhanpet and Hazurnagar respectively. An interesting and unique find from Raigir was the presence of lapis lazuli beads from the megalithic sites. The existence of conch ornaments, precious and semi-precious stones indicate the possibility of local as well as inter-trade relations. The fact that only a few burials had such rare and precious items as funerary assemblage is a strong indicator to the presence of hierarchy in the society which has manifested itself in the mortuary rituals as well.⁴⁷

Symbols and ritualistic practices

Terracotta bull figurines seemed to have enjoyed a significant ritualistic position among the megalithic communities. Bull representations either in the form of terracotta figurines or as effigies has been identified from multiple sites. Terracotta bull figurines were excavated from Pochampad⁴⁸ and Peddamarur.⁴⁹ The interment of bull figurines as a possible indicator to animistic beliefs is a strong possibility. In primitive communities animals are sacrificed as they are often considered as spirit guides who alert the ancestors that the deceased is on the way to the afterlife.⁵⁰

⁴⁶Moorthy, 1994, p. 333

⁴⁷Refer Table 2

⁴⁸Information gathered from State Archaeology Museum.

⁴⁹IAR 1977-1978, pp 12-13.

⁵⁰John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, New York, Anchor Books, 1969, p. 155.

Normally assumed to be a weapon of offence, the trident is not a common weapon among the megalithic communities of the region. There is a mild probability that the trident was a symbol of power and must have had some ritualistic connection as an effigy of a buffalo skeleton on a trident was discovered from the megalithic site at Bowenpalli.⁵¹ Decorated orthostats with bruised trident shapes were discovered at Chagatur. An iron trident was also discovered from Raigir and Lingampally, along with various other iron objects.⁵² Copper bell with bone tongue is a rare and a baffling find. This interesting piece of artifact was found alongside what seems to resemble chalices and incense burners. The possibility that this might have been an object of ritualistic significance holds strong.

On the basis of the material remains unearthed from the megalithic sites, it is quite evident that the structures were predominantly erected for funerary purposes. Except for a few burials all the other sites have yielded secondary burials. The period between the actual death of the person to his interment in the grave might have been a period of mourning for the society. The sheer number of the megalithic monuments that have been identified from different parts of the region of Telangana itself is proof that this was not a practice reserved only for a group of people yielding social power. The social response of the society was based on the social position of the deceased. The megalithic perceptions of death are quite varied in its complexity. The interment of grave goods along with the mortal remains of the deceased can be understood in the context of the belief in afterlife. The possibility that the goods associated with the deceased were considered to be a taboo so much that they did not want to be a part of the living also holds strong.⁵³ The lack of habitation sites when compared to the megalithic funerary structures and the amount of time and labour invested into the process itself proves the primacy of death and death rituals in the lives of the megalithic builders.

⁵¹ Rao, *Deccan Megaliths*, p.46.

⁵² M. L. K Murthy, *Pre and Proto-historic Cultures of A.P.*, p.120.

⁵³ W. Crooke, 'Primitive Rites of Disposal of the Dead with Special Reference to India', *The Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, vol. 29, no. 3, 1899, pp. 271-294.

Any attempt to arrive at a conclusion regarding the beliefs of the megalithic communities especially for a topic as abstract as death is quite foolhardy. One can only reach possible interpretations which give rise to innumerable complications and possibilities. We can see that there is no conclusive evidence regarding the life of the megalithic communities in general. It seems as though their perceptions regarding death had played a decisive role in the way they lived their life. The death of a person especially if the deceased had held a position of importance in the psyche of the society might have triggered a uniform social response from the living. As the majority of the burials discovered so far are post-exarnation burials, the period between death and actual interment of the material remains of the person might have been a period of uncertainty where the society came together to mourn the loss of the deceased. In this context the megalithic sites become communal spaces where the society gathers not only for mourning but also to reaffirm societal ties. Thus funerary practices were an integral part of communal integration.

The megalithic perceptions about death have triggered them to form elaborate funerary practices which shaped their actions as well. To consider these megalithic structures simply as grave complexes will shut the vast potentiality of these stone structures. The anthropomorphs identified as representations of supernatural entities are largely associated with the dolmenoid cists. The association of dolmens and dolmenoid cists with fertility and sexuality also leaves the possibility that these megalithic stone structures were not simply grave complexes. The megalithic grave complex, in the case of sites with dolmenoid cists and anthropomorphs might also be centers with ritualistic significance. Here the grave site becomes a sacred space. In a scenario where the megalithic builders believed in ancestor worship and in continued existence of the being even after death, the possibility of the grave sites being a sacred space which was used for worship and communal gathering is a strong possibility. The Mudumal megalithic site in Mahbubnagar district has recently garnered scholarly attention. The possible astronomical significance of the site is being studied in detail.⁵⁴ Most of the megalithic burials are oriented in the cardinal directions and this might have acted as a guide to the

⁵⁴K. P. Rao, 'Ancient Sky Map from Mudumal', *Man In India*, vol. 91, pp.359-362.

deceased. Here astronomy and the perceptions of death are linked together. Understanding the megaliths simply as the cult of the dead denies these vast possibilities which are yet to be explored.

Conclusion

Any endeavor to study an archaeological culture solely based on material remains, should not be understood as an attempt to find concrete answers. Any enquiry into the very existence of being and how men responded to such attempts, especially in early societies should not be understood as absolute. The added complexity of the comparative lack of habitation sites and corroborating literary evidences to understand the very perceptions behind these material remains is a challenge to any researcher. However, the present study has undertaken the task to analyze this challenge itself in retrospection. Hence, it is palpable that the study leaves scope for more questions and contradictions than conclusions. The variations in technology employed for construction, architectural features, mode of disposal of the dead, articulation, the bone pieces chosen for burial etc., the chronology and distributional pattern and the origin and spread of the megalithic communities still posit a very perplexing problem for the researcher.

The megalithic sites in Telangana and adjoining regions encompass burials ranging from one to a thousand five hundred. The time and effort involved in excavating each and every burial is a challenging task. This denies the possibility of a uniform study. To analyze any aspect of the megalithic builders and to arrive at even some conclusions requires a uniform study which understands the megaliths at a global, national and regional context with emphasis on each burial site. Unfortunately such a study might take years to even compile the data. Until then the researcher can only engage in a dialogue with the material remains and probably attempt to piece together the story that they want to say.

The present study has only undertaken the region of Telangana, considering it as the first step towards understanding the rich antiquity and cultural heritage of prehistoric Telangana and the Deccan in general. U.S Moorthy believed that the early phase of the megalithic cultures began in the Krishna-Tungabhadra river valleys, which makes a comprehensive study of megalithic monuments in the region pertinent to understanding of the origin and spread of the culture. A number of factors have come into play regarding the erection of the megalithic monuments. Even though the inherent ideas of

death were most probably considered to be sacred and essential, most of the burials are located on rocky plains or hillocks and this could have highly influenced the erection of these stone structures as the availability of raw materials was an important factor. This availability of raw materials might be one of the reasons why some typologies are restricted to their particular regions alone.

To arrive at a conclusion regarding the megalithic beliefs behind the erection of such practices is hazardous. Any study into the megalithic structures opens up the Pandora's Box of complexities and contradictions. However, the present study is putting forward the possibility that the megalithic structures had immense importance in regulating the social life of the people, with the underlying assumption that their perceptions concerning death might have played a decisive role in it. The complexity of funerary rituals reciprocates the complexity of belief systems in the society as well. The megalithic builders of the region might have followed animism and anthropomorphism coupled with the belief in ancestor worship and afterlife. The presence of grave goods in the burials is a strong indicator to the belief in an afterlife. But the possibility of the body of the deceased and the goods associated with him to be a taboo is also equally possible. However, the effort and time involved in the construction of the megaliths contradict the possibility of the structures, port holes and passageways and the association of anthropomorphs contradict the possibility of the megaliths being in a state of taboo. Even then there are inherent contradictions which posit a very perplexing problem for the researcher. Dolmen and dolmenoid cists are constructed like elaborate dwelling places. In such a case it means that the select few will stay amongst the living and indicates a belief in a continued existence even after death. These select few might be the ancestors who act as messengers to the divine beings. The association of anthropomorphs along with dolmens and dolmenoid cists might have acted as a medium for the megalithic builders to communicate to their ancestors and for them in turn to communicate to the divine being. However apart from anthropomorphs we have not unearthed any evidences of divine manifestations from the burials or the habitation sites with Peddabankur being the sole exception. At Peddabankur there are the remains of a structure that seems to indicate the basement of a shrine along with supporting circular

bases, which the excavator seems to believe are platforms raised for deities.⁵⁵ But apart from terracotta figurines, the site lacks any insights regarding the deities of the megalithic people, if there were any at all.

The typological variations in the megalithic structures and funerary assemblage even within one burial site indicate elaborate funerary rituals which believed in the continued existence even after death to a select few. On what basis this chosen few were selected is not clear. The social, economic or ritualistic position of the deceased within the community might have been one major indicator. There could be multiple indicators like the age, sex, time and even the nature of death. Different types of death might have interred different modes of disposal of the body and influenced the subsequent erection of the megalithic structures as well. This hints at a society which followed some kind of hierarchy which was predominantly influenced by their perceptions regarding death. These ideas acted as a regulating body with fear and veneration as binary opposites just like life and death.

Elaborate mortuary practices are done so that it facilitates the dead in the journey into the afterlife. If a person is devoid of appropriate funerary practices then this would reduce his chances of progressing towards the afterlife. The integral connection between the body and the soul is the reason why the body of the deceased is treated with utmost respect. Thus we can see that the death rituals and the erection of the stone structures were for the living as much as it is for the deceased. A majority of the burials in the region of Telangana were secondary burials and the time period between the death of a person and the interment of his skeletal remains inside the grave and the time taken to construct the megalith might be a period of mourning. The probability of the prevalence of a belief in continued existence of life either among the living or as a part of the collective consciousness as an ancestor, might turn the period between the time of actual death and the interment of the skeletal remains to be a period of celebration.

The megalithic stone structures offer innumerable possibilities of interpretations. So, to confine our understanding of these stone structures simple as grave monuments

⁵⁵IAR 1970-1971, pp. 1-2.

might prove hazardous. The heterogeneity within the megalithic communities indicates the possibility that these megaliths could have acted as territorial markers. Some of the sites especially the ones with dolmenoid cists and anthropomorphs might be a sacred space for the megalithic people. The numerous variations in grave goods, architectural features and even the orientation of the megalithic structures might be a symbol of social power among the different sections of the megalithic society. The astronomical significance and their possible connection to their belief systems must be studied in detail. The association of dolmens and dolmenoid cist to the fertility cult also needed to be explored. On a more metaphysical note, the interconnection of the perceptions of time, soul, consciousness, body and the idea of the burial site as a sacred space has to be studied in detail. The answer to all these questions might be hidden under the megalithic perceptions of death, which should be analysed on a pan Indian context keeping in mind the ethnographic and complementary literary sources which the present study has not employed. What is quite enigmatic about the megalithic structures is their silence itself, for studies which spans over four centuries still do not provide only possibilities. “Yet again, they stand and they stand in silent and uncommunicative majesty.”

PLATES

PLATE 1



**Megalithic pottery excavated from Uppalappadu.
(Picture Courtesy: Telangana State Archaeological Museum)**

PLATE 2



**Megalithic pottery excavated from Raigir.
(Picture Courtesy: Telangana State Archaeological Museum)**

PLATE 3



**Megalithic pottery from Yelleswaram
(Picture Courtesy: Telangana State Archaeological Museum)**

PLATE 4



**Megalithic pottery from Pochampadu
(Picture Courtesy: Telangana State Archaeological Museum)**

PLATE 5



Megalithic pottery from Upperu
(Picture Courtesy: Telangana State Archaeological Museum)

PLATE 6



Megalithic pottery from Peddamarur
(Picture Courtesy: Telangana State Archaeological Museum)

PLATE 7



Megalithic pottery from Hashmatpet.
(Picture Courtesy: Birla Archaeological and Cultural Research Institute)

PLATE 8

Iron objects from Uppalappadu



PLATE 9



Iron objects from Uppalappadu

PLATE 10



Iron objects from Yelleswaram

PLATE 11



Iron objects from Pochampadu

PLATE 12



Site: Lingampally, Menhir with stone circle (Excavated)

PLATE 13



Site : Vargal, stone circle (not excavated) – Personal exploration

PLATE 14



Site : Vargal, stone circle (not excavated) – Personal exploration

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