CHAPTER V

THE MEGALITHIC CULTURE
IN ANANTAPUR DISTRICT
A CRITICAL STUDY
After studying the various aspects of the megaliths and their types in Anantapur district, a reconstruction of some aspects of the life and society of megalithic builders in the Anantapur district in particular is attempted in this chapter. For a convenient study the sites in the district are divided into four groups, namely, the Rayadurg, the Kalyandurg, the Gudibanda and the Sunnampalli complexes which are identical in nature and architecture. But the emerging picture is bound to be incomplete and sketchy as the data for the assessment is only from the district.

LOCATION OF THE SITES

The megalithic people generally preferred hilly sites nearby some perennial water source, since stone for building megalithic tombs were absolutely necessary, and probably also the hilly tracts were rich in iron ore. Especially the cist type of burial builders concentrated near the river valleys in hilly terrains. The extent of the sites suggest that the localities were usually large in area.

DOMESTIC ARCHITECTURE

There is scarcely any evidence giving some
idea about the domestic architecture in spite of the fact that the people did use huge boulders and slabs to build tombs of various types of no less architectural merit and suggesting their empirical skill in meeting the architectural problems. At Adaguppa, rubble flooring was noticed and the plan was circular in shape which suggest that the houses possibly were simple and of perishable material such as wattle and daub and thatched or reed roofs. Similarly the occurrence of two post-holes on the bottom most floor of layer-IV, trench-A at Gulyapalyam indicates the existence of some sort of huts. Nails, being the domestic objects also occur both at Adaguppa and Mudigal (see page Nos. 105 and 168). At a few other places like Palavoy and Hulikal, stray remains of the homes exposed were made up of stone chips covered with murrain and plastered with lime and are rectangular, circular, square, ovoid etc., in shape.

SEPULCHRAL ARCHITECTURE

A comprehensive survey of the distribution of the megalithic burials in the Anantapur district (See Table-1 and diagram-1) which include both sepulchral and non-sepulchral throw some light on their typology, nomenclature, orientation and architectural patterns. Among the sixteen classified types, the sepulchral cist burial
type out number the other and occur densely in the western
and south-western part and sporadically in the central but
totally absent in the northern parts of the district. There
are also a few sub-types employed in their construction.
Among the varieties, the square and rectangular being large
in number, the swastika, the double chambered, those
surrounded by stone circles as well as slab circles, most of
them representing port-holes of both circular and square
types, have been built by exactly cut orthostatic slabs, in a
majority of cases, have been placed vertically either in a
pit dug specially for that purpose, or above the ground. In
the case of a few, the arrangement of orthostats with a view
to prevent the other from falling in, i.e., in swastika
pattern represent both clock wise and anti-clock-wise. A
few, more cists with transeptions into double chambered
character probably to provide a separate grave to an
individual are also noteworthy. The orthostats and the cap
stones used for all these cists have been formed both from
undressed rough blocks of stones and partly dressed flattish
ones.

Except in the extreme east and north-eastern
part, the non-sepulchral dolmens are common in the
district. These are found predominantly in the south, west
and south-west considerably. However, they are found rarely
in the central but absent totally in the northern part of the district. All these structures have an enclosure of three upright granite slabs topped by another, with an opening to mostly east and rarely to north and north-east.

Among the other non-sepulchral monuments, the menhirs, a few of which also being surrounded by stone circles, occur in a number of sites in the close vicinity of the other monuments in the district. Closely allied to the menhirs, the alignments and avenues appear to be quite rare, although they are not totally absent. A single alignment in the Kalyandurg complex and a couple of avenues each at Kalyandurg and Gownivaripalli (The latter in Sunnampalli complex) in the south-western and southern parts of the district are specimens in this area. The most significant and typical type, i.e., anthropomorphic figures adjoined by a cist with port-hole and surrounded by triple slab circles, occur at Morlabanda only. The empiric architectural skill especially involved here is praise-worthy. Cairns and stone circles of sepulchral types are spread in the major part of the district.

ECONOMY

Agriculture and hunting were the chief forms of the economy of the society attested by plough shares and
sickles. The location of megalithic burials in the vicinity of tanks and other water-sources, the occurrence of agricultural tools, the skeletal remains of domesticated animals found at Palavoy and other habitational sites etc., are very good evidences attesting the importance of agricultural practices. The iron plough-shares found at Adaguppa and Konapuram are made of thick metal plate which indicate ploughing a large tract of hard black soil. Reaping of crops might have been done by the iron sickles as is attested by their findings at Adaguppa and Sunnampalli. The presence of storage vessels in the excavations at Bandameedapalli, Gulyapalyam, Budagavi, etc., suggest the storage of grain produced from ploughing the land. The charred seeds at Bandameedapalli also equally attest the invariable agricultural activities.

The stone balls found in site No.XIV (see page No.110) at Adaguppa resembling those found at Brahmagiri suggest to their being used possibly in hunting, which seems to be an auxiliary profession. This can further be supported by the arrow-head and dagger, both being the weapons of hunting, encountered at Adaguppa and Morlabanda graves respectively.
Food

The evidences noticed in support of food items in this area are, the husk, probably of paddy and other grain found in the pots accidentally dug out both at Thimmaganipalli and Madakasira and also the charred seeds found in the south-western corner of trench-A layer-III of Bandameedapalli (see page No.209) reveal that their food consisted of agricultural products. The abundant bone splinters of domesticated animals found in the excavations and explorations seems to have served both the purposes of agriculture as well as animal meat. A few of the identified bones to have belonged to bovine animals and a few more also horns of the sheep or goat attest the above fact. The good number of storage vessels as well as table-ware, indicate the activities of storing the food grains and serving the food respectively.

Stone Cutting

It also further suggests that the megalithic people might have carried tons and tons of gravel and cairn from Malakavaripalli and Morlabanda quarries for building their monuments. The construction of megalithic burials in imposing sizes certainly demands the effort of a large number of people and probably the whole community was
required to work for this purpose. The finely carved slabs of a few significant dolmenoid cists, dolmens, anthropomorphic figures etc., suggest that they were specialised in stone cutting. Smithery The occurrence of ashmounds at Andepalli, Hulikal, Mallapuram, Mallipalli, Mudigal, Palavoy, Ventareddipalli, Kolimipalyam etc., situated in areas which are geologically rich in iron ore, the existence of two iron smelting sites, one at Mudigal and the other at Kolimipalyam, the occurrence of iron slag, ash lumps and iron containing haematite fragments mixed with the megalithic black and red pottery in the vicinity of ashmounds and megalithic burials as well as in the excavations of a few sites, suggest that they were industrial-based iron working agricultural people. Probably a section of people might have specialised in the art of smelting and metal-working. The workmanship of a few iron tools and implements found in the sites distributed in the district are perfect and such perfection is possible only if the people are specialised and fully engaged in such activity.

Though there is not much evidence to speak of the gold and other smithery, the available crucibles found in the excavations at Bandameedapalli and Budagavi attest that there was other than iron smithery.
Carpentry

The use of certain carpentry tools such as chisels, adzes, wedges etc., by the megalithic people was noticed at a few places in Andhra Pradesh namely, Pochampad, Peddamarur and Peddabankur, the last mentioned being a habitational site yielded a few chisels. Chisel being a carpentry tool, was found at Hulikal (see Chapter IV, section-A, Hulikal) and Morlabanda (see plate XIX-2) in Anantapur district reveal that carpentry was also practised.

UTILITARIAN OBJECTS

Iron Objects

Iron was the principal metal used by the megalithic people for fabricating tools and weapons for different purposes. In all probability, they might have exploited the local ore which is available in large part of the district and abundantly in the Rayadurg and Kalyandurg complexes. The usual occurrence of iron objects found in the graves (See table-3 and diagram-3) in this district can be divided into four categories from their utilitarian
use. They are,
1. Agricultural tools,
2. Domestic tools,
3. Tools of carpentry and

The first category include plough shares and sickles, the second those of nails, the third being chisel and the fourth consisting of arrow-head and dagger, respectively.

Pottery

Megalithic people's most common utensils of domestic use are the pottery vessels. Though a few sherds of storage vessels, jars and urns appear to have been hand made, most of the ceramic ware is wheel-made and the clay is of fine texture, occasionally mixed with quartz particles, mica, sand or straw to make the pottery of required fabric. Quite a large number of sherds of various types such as black and red, black, red, black polished, chocolate slipped, dull red, coarse gray and russet-coated painted wares were found in the explorations (See table-2 and diagram-2). Except coarse gray ware, almost all the types are present in the megalithic strata of excavated sites (See tables-4 and diagram-4). The yielded shapes represent the three sections such as the table ware, the storage ware
and the burial ware which include bowls, dishes, pots, storage jars and vessels, basins, lotas, goblets, lids, knobs, spouts, urns, water flagons, stands, crucibles, a single bowl on stand etc., (See table-5 and diagram-5) reveal that pottery was a perfect art and numerous shapes, designs and fabrics achieved their perfection. Black and red ware, red ware and some times black ware outnumber the other wares in their proportion. The large number of shapes being household type, yielded from the excavated habitation deposits signify the characteristics of a settled life at convenient spots. The sites excavated further reveal that they were not briefing camps but having been occupied and passed through certain transitory phases. A very rare type is bowl-on-stand found at Budagavi and also a few crucibles which are outwardly flimsy, occurred both at Budagavi and Bandameedapalli. In all the excavated places, the form, typology and technology of pottery appears to be identical.

The most common decoration found on the megalithic pottery is the thin-line grooves round the body which were incised probably with finger nails or a sharp instrument. Zig-zag and wavy-line and applique patterns also rarely appear.
Russet coated painted ware is represented in both the red slipped ware and black and red ware. The painting on this ware, seems to have been first executed on the surface of the pots, which were coated again with a thin russet coloured substance, which preserved the painted designs.

Thus the perfection evidenced in the shape, fabric, colour and design suggests expertise behind the production of pottery of this region and pottery making must have also been one of the most important occupations of the people of megalithic times.

Clothing

Though there is no direct evidence for using cloth from the megalithic people of Anantapur region, the availability of a terracotta disc-shaped spindling wheel at Bandameedapalli (See plate-XXV) is an indirect evidence and is of a great significance that the megalithic people of this region also used cloth and knew manufacturing of cloth.
Ornaments

Among the toilet articles of the megalithic people of this region is a well-made wooden tooth comb found in the excavation at Buntakal by Mr. Cornelius Cardew which can be seen in the Madras museum. A few varieties of beads found in the excavations in this region include steatite, carnelian, terracotta, bone etc., A few stray objects found in this area are a bead of probably lapis lazuli and conch shell fragment. By this small section of ornamental pieces, it is very difficult to come to any conclusion.

PEOPLE

In comparison to burial evidences, there persists a sort of lacuna regarding the habitational evidence of this culture. This has led to a long standing discussion on the point whether the megalithic people were nomads or were leading a settled life.

The presence of very few megalithic habitational sites in comparison to burial sites which are so numerous has led some archaeologists to think that these people were wandering pastoralists. The explorations and excavations conducted in this district provide some information for discussion.
The location of the megalithic sites in the district throw some light on the fact that the megalithic people not only chose to live in the close proximity of the irrigational tanks, rivers, streams, rivulets, ponds, natural water cisterns, arable lands and areas where stone was available, but also gave importance to other factors such as natural protection (lived near hills), haunting, grazing and availability of iron.

Rayadurg Complex

Among all the megalithic sites in Anantapur district, Adaguppa is very rich both in burial as well as habitational deposits. The sites are surrounded by hills and shrub jungles. The huge concentration and thick occurrence of hundreds and hundred of burials signify the considerable numerical strength of the people of this place, the burials, being their graves most of which are sepulchral in character. This situation is possible only for settled people. This is attested further by the habitational deposits noticed at the same place.

It is presumed that the basic amenity of water supply might have been met by the river, Hagari and a few such streams located closely. The hills and hillocks
might have also provided natural protection and construction of their burials.

Kalyandurg Complex

The occurrence of iron ore, iron slag, ash lumps, iron containing haematite fragments, and iron smelting sites discussed earlier (Page ) and the thick diffusion of megalithic monuments in this region helps us to presume that they were iron working agricultural people. The existence of megalithic strata both at Palavoy and Hulikal excavations suggest the invariable link between the ash mounds and those people.

Gudibanda and Sunnampalli Complexes

The blazing and stone cutting quarries along the top as well as slopes of the hills both at Morlabanda and Malakavaripalli, situated in the Gudibanda and Sunnampalli complexes respectively suggests that they were stone-cutters.

The ethno-archaeological survey conducted by us in the Gudibanda complex interestingly throws some light on a few important aspects of the culture of the people of Morlabanda. A few villages surrounded by the Morlabanda hill represent the 'Gollas', a caste among the Hindus whose
occupation is sheep keeping. These people form the bulk of the population. A village called 'Gollatti', 'Golla' meaning shepherd and 'Hatti' meaning hill, is adjacent to the north of Morlabanda. There are two sub sects found with in the 'Gollas' of this place namely, 'Adavigolla' and 'Urugolla'. The latter group seemed to have settled in the present village, and the former group seemed to have been living in the jungle since long time. Even to-day each group maintains its own tradition and customs, faiths and beliefs. Even to-day the villagers believe that their predecessors lived at Morlabanda megalithic site and worship those tombs on a few occasions. The nomenclature of the site also testifies this fact.

As the area surveyed is very small and the data collected is not sufficient, it is difficult to discuss the race or chronology. But, the apparent similarities of the port-holes and their constructional patterns, grave goods and other artifacts found both at Brahmagiri situated about 25 Kms north-west of Rayadurg and about 34 Kms north of Adaguppa presume us to think that the culture of this region and that of Brahmagiri are similar.
NOTES AND REFERENCES