

## ROCK ART IN KURNOOL DISTRICT OF ANDHRA PRADESH: RECENT EXPLORATIONS AT LANJA BANDA

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The tradition of painting has hoary past. The socio-cultural profile of the early man and his communicative ability is being reflected by his material remains in general and by his painting activity on rocks in particular. So, the rock art of a particular site presents an evidence for understanding the creativity of the early humans inhabiting that region, their cultural activities and thought process (Kumar and Pradhan 2016: p. 87).

The evidence of the evidences and activities of early men are copious in the Rayalaseema region of Andhra Pradesh, when compared with those of the other regions of Coastal Andhra. The geological formations in Rayalaseema gave an opportunity to the early man to engage in various kinds of activities here. And so this region consists the evidences of Stone Age culture and its' cultural continuity. So, the history of human beings i.e. prehistory in Andhra Pradesh begins from the Rayalaseema region and this Rayalaseema region includes four districts i.e. Kurnool, Ananthapur, Kadapa and Chittoor. Being so, Rayalaseema in general and Kurnool District in particular is one of the richest zones of rock-art in South India, where the livelihood, flora and fauna of the primitive man were recorded in the form of rock paintings. In fact, rock paintings in Kurnool area are the foundations for one of the India's and also world's longest sequences of prehistoric art (Tacon et al. 2010:335).

Rock art sites in general, rock shelters in particular in Rayalaseema region of Andhra Pradesh do have names ending with suffixes like '*Banda*', '*Gundu*', etc., and for instance *Lanja Banda* (the present study site), *Pedda Chittari Gundu* and *Chinna Chittari Gundu* (Kethavaram, Kurnool district), *Diviti Mallanna Banda*, *Dongalu Rasina Banda*, *Maremma Gundu* and *Yeddula Aavula Gundu* are to name a few in the Kadapa District and comprehensive studies on rock art sites in Andhra Pradesh was first carried out by Prof. N. Chandramouli (2002). Also, Erwin Neumayer and a few others also immensely worked on the rock paintings of the region.

The study of paintings at Lanja Banda first was penned by the archaeologists in the year 2002. During the archaeological explorations carried out at the time of the surveying of the village Lanja Banda in Kurnool district the boulder, on which the paintings are depicted, was cracked into two parts due to the nature's effect that too in a systematic way. However, the rock art chiseled on this rock is still in flawless condition excepting the visibility of the natural corrosion. So, this study attempts to portray the rock-art depicted in rock shelter and red ochre that consists even depictions including human figures, animals, geometric symbols, etc., along with the views of the rural folk of the study village on the rock art site.

### THE DEOMOGRAPHIC SETTING OF LANJA BANDA

Lanja Banda 15° 30' 14.20" N 77° 58' 05.36" E, is a small village situated about 15 km towards southeast from Veldurthi, the mandal headquarters in Kurnool district. The village in which the present study site is located at the bank of a brook named *Banda Vanka* or *Voori Vanka*, joins Handri River, a tributary of river Tungabhadra.



Synoptic view of the site, Lanja Banda

### LITHOLOGY



An overview of the granitic hillock at Lanja Banda

The current study red ochre painted rock shelter is oriented towards east to west with an opening facing the south. This red ochre painted rock is located on the extreme southern side of the hillock and is situated very close to the village just with in a distance of about 600 meters towards southeast. The lithology of the hillock is of granitic composition.

### GEOMORPHOLOGY

Geomorphologically this hillock exhibits the feature of *cuesta*. Here, there is also a cave shelter without any paintings, west of the painted rock shelter that might have provided shelter to the early man in times of need i.e. during the rest hours. This cave shelter which might belong to the Vijayanagara period (1336-1670 A.D.) has the capacity to accommodate 5 to 10 persons at a time. On the peak of the hillock the remains of a fort with mutilated *burujus* (bulwarks) and a boundary wall with an entrance can be witnessed Two grinding holes were noticed on the peak of the bed rock located within a distance of about 100 meters to the rock art site towards eastern and northern sides orderly.



The Grinding Hole at Lanja Banda



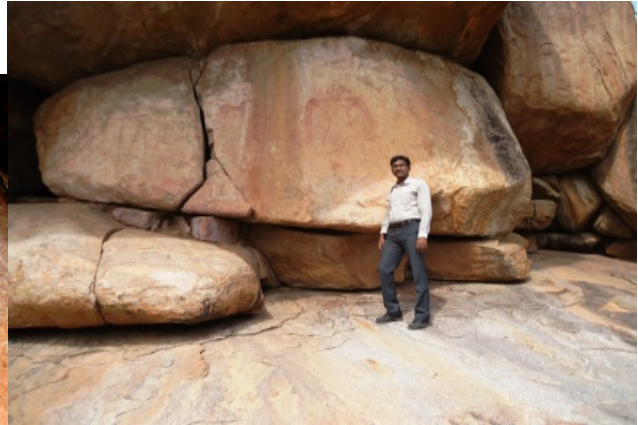
An important observation that has to be placed on record is that the current prehistoric site is being located near the houses of different castes and tribes whose occupation is still hunting like *Yerukalu*, *Boya*, *Bestha*, *Vaddera* castes and so on.

## **PORTRAYAL OF THE PAINTINGS AT LANJA BANDA**

The depictions of human paintings here are seven in number.



**Back pose of a female**



**Rock art on the surface boulder**

Two animal depictions are noticed, one is the outline of a horse and the other one is deer in flat wash. If carefully observed, one can also witness the riding scene depiction here. Recorded from East to West, a figure appears to be backside pose of female. It is stylistically similar to the female figure of the *Mallela Teertham* (Kadapa (Cuddapah) district) rock painting. But the *Mallela Teertham* painting is in flat wash whereas the painting here is in outline with back pose. The depiction of pectoral girdle measures 70 cm and 140 cm height notifies the humans of this area as much stronger.



**Flat wash deer**

Right faced flat wash deer was depicted, with a partly disturbed head due to erosion on the west side of the above female human figure. It is a small composition measuring 30cm. height (minus head, because head part was damaged due to natural corrosion).



**Short handed human figure**

A human figure with short hands measuring 60cm. was depicted below to the deer is re-drawn with green colour by the present human folk as they felt that red ochre is going to be eroded.



**A male holding a knife accompanied by a medium size human-being**

A larger male figure as genital is clearly appearing, with a weapon like a knife in his right hand and his left hand on his hip was depicted in red ochre measures 150 cm height and his pectoral girdle measures 60 cm. This too has been re-drawn with green colour as the red ochre painting is going eroded. The legs covered with geometric designs looks like a shoe mask. A medium size human figure measuring 36 cm. was depicted very left to the above figure which is also re-drawn with green colour.



**Horse, arrow mark, riding scene etc., on the western side of the boulder**

A standing horse in outline measures 38cm. height (minus head) and right faced was depicted above to the human figure in sitting pose and very right to the larger male figure. A riding scene measuring 20cm. height (10+10) was depicted on the top of the hind part of outlined horse and a arrow mark with 30cm. height was also depicted on the western side of the riding scene. Amongst all, the unique one is a human figure in a sitting pose with left hand on his knee looks like *dhyana* (prayer) pose was depicted below the riding scene and left/east to a human standing figure. Finally, another human figure in a stylistic standing pose with his both hands on his hips and as if observing something, measuring 40cm. height was depicted on the extreme western side bottom of the boulder.

The techniques used for depicting the figures in this rock art include flat wash figures and outlined figures apart from the strokes of the figures that are of both thick and thin. Generally the prehistoric artists used locally available material and so used here also.

### **Local narration about the Lanja banda site**

According to the village folk, long ago, both a concubine (*Lanja* in Telugu) and her paramour (*Mundagadu* in Telugu) resided on this hillock. Every night the paramour used to go for hunt and would return at an early hour by observing light of a lamp which had been holding by his concubine until he returns. But one night, the paramour didn't find her with the lamp. Then he suspected that she might have spent that night with another person. And so, he killed her and drew the paintings on a boulder. These paintings are known as *Lanja-Mundagani Banda/Lanja-Mundagani Bommalu* (concubine-paramour boulder/concubine-paramour figures) by the village folk. With the passage of time, this village acquired the name *Lanja Banda* which is the corruption of the name *Lanja-Mundagani Banda*. Later, for their convenience the rural folk of the village abbreviated Lanja Banda to L. Banda and then named it recently as Lakshminagaram.



It is perspicuous to place it here on record about the keen and good knowledge of the painter in selecting this rock shelter for the depiction of his artistic activity. The depicted paintings of pectoral girdle of both man and woman (might be a fair couple) and the legs of men covered in geometric designs like shoe masks here are strange to the rock-art of Rayalaseema region of Andhra Pradesh. The most important factor to be reckoned here on record is the depiction of human figures. All figures here are only outlined and two of them (male and female) are depicted largely with small size human figures in the middle signifying the existence of a family system. Also, the *yoga* or *dhyana* pose here is the unique feature of the rock art in the entire Rayalaseema region. This evidence proves that the *dhyana* culture was popular even during prehistoric days, which continued in later periods.

Finally, based on the colour of the paintings i.e. red ochre, the depictions such as deer, riding scene, human figures, geometric figures and the horse and human in *dhyana* pose in this site, the paintings are assignable to Mesolithic phase and to early historical period signifying the cultural continuity in this region.

### NEED FOR CONSERVATION/PRESERVATION

Current scenario at this site is that some of the villagers are resorting to quarrying of the hillock particularly from north and north eastern side for concrete ballistics. However, this activity may come closer or carried out at the rock shelter too in future. So, there is a dire necessity to take measures to stop these rock blasting activities here. Also, the rural people of this region should be educated about the prominence of the historicity of this archaeological monument. Further, if this quarrying activity continues, the archaeological site may disappear from the scene within a short period.



**Quarrying scene on the hillock of Lanja Banda**

The perspicuous point to place here on record is that these monuments of prehistoric times in the Rayalaseema region are to be protected by both the Central and the State governments as the paintings here are going to be eroded due to the effect of natural corrosion i.e. due to rain water.

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