

THE NEOLITHIC ASH MOUNDS: ASH MOUND TRADITIONS AT HANDRI AND PENNER VALLEYS IN SOUTH ASIA

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Abstract

The Neolithic prehistory of the Handri and Penner valleys. to further research into ancient ash mound practises, pottery, cow caretakers, and stone tool technology. Investigating ash mounds and cow caretakers at Neolithic Archaeological sites in southern India. He described how to write an excavation and exploratory report. We investigated new archaeological sites and collected data from them. Ash mounds are a separate category of archaeological monuments found only in the southern Deccan. They are concentrated in the northern section of Karnataka, including the districts of Gulbarga, Raichur, Bellary, and Chitra Durga, as well as the neighbouring Andhra Pradesh districts of Kurnool and Anantapur. The rivers Krishna and Tungabhadra drain this region. The sites are made up of several layers of soft and hard ashy deposits. We now know roughly 150 different places.

Key Words:

Ash mound, Prehistory, History India, culture, Kurnool Prehistory, Neolithic age, Neolithic Ceramic and Stone tools, Archaeological science, Ash mounds traditions, Stone age

Introduction

The Neolithic, the New Stone Age, was the penultimate era of prehistoric human cultural progress or technological advancement. It was distinguished by stone tools formed by polishing or grinding, reliance on domesticated plants or animals, permanent village settlement, and the advent of crafts like pottery and weaving. The Neolithic Period followed the Palaeolithic Period, the age of chipped-stone tools, and before the Bronze Age, the age of metal tools.

During the Holocene Epoch, the Neolithic stage of development was reached (the last 11,700 years of the earth's history). The beginning of the Neolithic period is debatable, with various portions of the world corresponding to the Neolithic stage at different dates. However, it is widely regarded to have occurred around 10,000 BCE. Humans learned to cultivate crops and domestic cattle during this period and hence were no longer reliant on hunting, fishing, and gathering wild vegetation. By grinding and polishing relatively hard rocks rather than just chipping softer ones to the proper form, Neolithic tribes created more useful stone tools.

The production of cereal grains allowed Neolithic peoples to build permanent houses and concentrate in towns. The freedom from nomadism and a hunting-gathering economy allowed them to pursue specialised skills (Britannica, 2022).

Archaeological evidence suggests that the change from food-gathering to food-producing societies proceeded gradually across Asia and Europe, beginning in the Fertile Crescent. The first evidence of agricultural and animal domestication in southern Asia has been dated to around 9500 BCE, implying that these practices may have begun earlier. By 7000 BCE, an agricultural and settled village way of life had been firmly established in the Tigris and Euphrates River basins (today in Iraq and Iran) and now Syria, Israel, Lebanon, and Jordan. The first farmers grew barley and wheat, as well as sheep and goats, which were eventually augmented by cattle and pigs. Their ideas went northward into Europe via two routes: Turkey and Greece into central Europe and Egypt and North Africa into Spain. Farming settlements first developed in Greece around 7000 BCE, and farming moved northward over the next four millennia. This long and slow shift, known as the Mesolithic, was not completed in Britain and Scandinavia until about 3000 BCE.

By 5000 BCE, Neolithic technology had expanded eastward to India's Indus River region. Farming villages based on millet and rice appeared around 3500 BCE in China's Huang He (Yellow River) basin and Southeast Asia. Neolithic lifestyles developed separately in the New World. Corn (maize), beans, and squash were progressively domesticated in Mexico and Central America beginning around 6500 BCE, but sedentary village life did not begin until much later, around 2000 BCE.

The Neolithic was superseded in the Old World by the Bronze Age when human communities learned to combine copper and tin to produce bronze, which replaced stone as a material for tools and weapons.

ASH MOUNDS OF NEOLITHIC DECCAN REGION:

In South India, in the middle section of the immense mass of old rock known as the Deccan Plateau, unusual structures appear here and there among the farmers' fields and atop the rocky hills, attracting the interest of both residents and visitors for ages. The formations are all

spherical mounds with uneven, typically stony surfaces that have been partially colonised by patches of soil and grass, despite their vast differences in shape and size.

Close study reveals that the rock has a slag-like appearance, with twisted formations indicating that it was previously molten. When sliced or torn apart, the mounds reveal alternating layers of hard, glassy, and softer ashy material in whites and greys intertwined with blue, green, and pink.

Most of the mounds are unrecorded, and many are being demolished (see also Peddayya 1996). By the early 1800s, these Deccan mounds had begun to catch the attention of colonial officials and explorers in South India, who documented that people thought the mounds to be the burning bones of colossal giants or 'Rakshasas' that formerly inhabited the earth (Newbold 1843). Early observations on the mounds by Mackenzie (described in Taylor 1838), Taylor (1838), and Newbold (1836; 1843) put in motion a century-long effort by numerous investigators, both Indian and British, to explain the origins of the mysterious 'ash mounds,' as they finally came to be known.

Be recognised Interpretations ranged from the mundane to the fantastic, with suggestions ranging from natural limestone or volcanic formations to by-products of some industrial activity (glass-making, iron- or gold-smelting, brickmaking, Etc.) or mass funeral pyres where communal sati had been performed, or bodies had been burned after some great battle or massacre. The origins of the Deccan ash mounds were fully explained by comprehensive scientific examination in the mid-twentieth century. In the 1950s and 1960s, Raymond Allchin resurrected Robert Bruce Foote's early but widely dismissed notion that the mounds were Neolithic and made of burnt cow dung.

Chemical examinations by Zeuner (1960) and archaeological, ethnographic, and placename research by Allchin (1960; 1961; 1963) gave strong evidence that Foote's initial idea was right. Allchin's extensive synthetic analysis created a compelling case for understanding ash mounds as the consequence of the collection and burning of cow dung in periodic rituals done by Neolithic pastoralists to ensure bovine health and fertility (Allchin, 1963). Nonetheless, the enigma of the ash mounds persists. Aside from these critical but fundamental facts, we still need to learn much about the ash mounds, particularly the Neolithic culture that created them. Traditional culture-historical approaches to the Southern Neolithic have increasingly found competition from ecological and economic accounts of Southern Neolithic society in recent years, no doubt due to the influence of processual archaeology on, in particular, scholars at Deccan College (Fuller & Boivin, 2002; Peddayya, 1990). (e.g., Korisettar & Rajaguru 2002; Murty 1989; Peddayya 1993a; David Raju 1990). While such approaches have undoubtedly been useful in focusing research on the internal dynamics and environmental contexts of Neolithic societies, they have also had the potentially negative effect of diverting attention away from the ritual and social factors that feature prominently in Allchin's ethnographically inspired account, and that provided such a convincing explanation for the fires that resulted in the formation of the Southern Neolithic ash mounds.

While later writers frequently cite Allchin's ritual interpretation of the ash mounds, it is rarely elaborated upon and is commonly watered down through cautionary remarks that emphasise the possibility of mundane explanations such as auto combustion (Murty, 1989) or prehistoric sanitation measures (Peddayya, 1993a). Many academics avoid ceremonial interpretations entirely, preferring to examine the ash mounds regarding the insights they reveal regarding

adaptive pastoral techniques and habitats (Rajaguru, 1966). However, ritual performances of the ash mounds have recently received increased critical attention from Southern Neolithic researchers. Peddayya has noted the potential utility of 'phenomenological approaches for inquiring into the symbolic and cognitive worlds of the Neolithic settlers of the lower Deccan. This essay may be considered part of a new trend that recognises that ritual and symbolic elements of society are not an afterthought to be added after more pressing ecological, technological, and economic concerns have been addressed but rather are an integrated feature of all human engagement with the world, no matter how mundane. Ritual and symbolism are unlikely to have been compartmentalized components of Southern Neolithic life. However, they are far more likely to have played a significant role in a wide range of activities, including those leading to the formation of the ash mounds. This article aims to throw more light on the still enigmatic ash mounds and other aspects of Southern Neolithic society by openly addressing ritual and burial issues. And symbolism in Southern Neolithic archaeology.

It is a study inspired by Allchin's synthetic approach of the mid-twentieth century. However, it also considers subsequent developments in theoretical archaeology, particularly those that have occurred in the last two decades and have generated interest in landscapes, symbols, rituals, meaning, and phenomenological and interpretive methodologies in archaeology. However, observations observed during customary fieldwork in the middle of Deccan are the fundamental motivation for this debate. These unsystematic observations are preliminary, but they imply the necessity for a more comprehensive approach to the study of ash mounds and the Southern Neolithic in general. What follows is an initial attempt to explore Neolithic cosmologies in South India and to understand their prehistoric significance and implications for subsequent developments in the southern peninsula and beyond, using various data sources, particularly evidence relating to landscape use.

NEOLITHIC CATTLE-KEEPERS OF SOUTH INDIA:

Dr. Allchin set out to explain a well-known phenomenon and used a wide variety of material, not all of which was archaeological. The Deccan ash mounds were discovered by English surveyors in the early nineteenth century and have since attracted the interest of many researchers. The current collection is of inherent relevance to anybody interested in subcontinental prehistory, but it can also be recommended generally as a fascinating study in approach. The author's excavations at Pallial in 1951-2 revealed the Deccan Neolithic people's reliance on cow rearing. However, it was the late Professor F. E. Zeuner's assessment in 1953 that ash samples gathered

by (Neolithic Cattle keepers Figer-1)

himself and from the Piklihal excavations most likely originated from the burning of cow dung that offered an additional incentive to study while also giving it a distinct direction. Dr. Allchin dug the Utniir mound and visited several other mounds in 1957 to investigate the notion that they were burnt cattle pens. Simultaneously, he conducted library and anthropological field research to determine how placenames, oral tradition, and current pastoral activity could contribute to the situation.



He begins by outlining how archaeologists have attempted to interpret the mounds in the past. He then explains and depicts his results at Utnur (published in full in India) in and follows this by summarising material from similar locations. He then examines the evidence supporting the continuity of tradition in cattle-keeping interestingly (chap. 6). He begins by demonstrating the tight relationship between Budi (ash) place names and the spread of ash mounds. When it comes to vocal tradition, he distinguishes between the attempts of local pandits to connect the mounds with the epics and the more grounded memories of ancient pastoral practices recalled by villagers who spoke of itinerant cattle breeders pounding cattle and the use of fire to protect the enclosures from wild beasts. Turning to current practice (chap. 7), he discovers evidence that when cattle were fed in the hills and forests distant from communities, it was usual practice to create cow pens, and the dung that collected in these was disposed of as fuel to homemakers or potters or utilised as fertiliser.

He next investigates folk religion and discovers that livestock is significant. His last chapters analyse the data from archaeological sites historically and seek to understand the ash mounds. Allchin discovers that the mounds were an essential feature of the pastoral lifestyle of the Deccan's neolithic population between around 2000 and 750 B.C. He convincingly argues that the elements at Utnur and similar sites, particularly successive layers of burnt dung and alignments and realignments of enclosure posts, are best explained by the conflagration of cattle pens of the type traditionally used in the area down to modern times to keep livestock together and protect them from predators.

As Dr. Allchin freely concedes, his interpretation, supported by archaeological, placename, and anthropological data, validates the notion first proposed by Bruce Foote in the 1870s. The current reviewer needs to be convinced Foote was correct in his assumption that the fires were accidental rather than deliberate. It is hardly unexpected that the flames needed to keep wild animals at bay burn the extremely combustible dung and its surrounding enclosure in a dry environment. This is almost certainly what happened when the pens and their soldering flames were removed for the season. To establish that the conflagrations were cultic in any way and proof considerably more compelling than the weak link between cattle and fire in pastoral religion would be required.

Dr. Allchin wonders why following generations of archaeologists dismissed Foote's explanation and engaged in irrational fantasies, attributing the ash to gold- or iron-smelting or even burial activities. One can only respond that European archaeology went through a similar ridiculous period, when, for example, peasant farmers in Neolithic Europe or even Iron Age Britain were assumed to have huddled in 'pit-dwellings.' The desire felt at the time to design methods and classify the material amassed in museums can explain to some part the subject's disconnection from reality that affected it for two or three generations.

Even today, occupational myopia has an impact. Energies that could be spent on formulating and answering questions about what happened in the past are wasted on organizing and classifying conventional categories of objects so that some of the most intensively studied periods are those we know the least about. Dr. Allchin should be commended for writing an engrossing work that helps us comprehend modern India and prehistoric India. One wishes that more European archaeologists will awaken from the trance caused by their subject's processes.

Ash mounds relation

The Neolithic habitations discovered so far in the concerned area measure between 1-3 hectares in size. The sparse representation of occupancy and meagre remnants of cultural material at specific sites suggests that the Neolithic populations had vigorous movement between their settlements. Thus, much information and material flow may have been possible. The cultural material includes pottery of various fabrics, pecked and ground stone, and blade tool industries, notably those made on chert.

The yellowish-brown chert nodules discovered at numerous locations indicate that the raw material was obtained from river-born pebbles as nodules generated either from the Kurnool-Kadapa system of rocks or from another source. The Neolithic populations used dyke formation and dolerite outcrops for edge tool making since exposed intervening black soils and granite boulders are observed as outcrops everywhere, perhaps serving for ground stone artifacts. Pottery, iron slag, animal bones, and shattered bits of stone items were previously recorded from the same site, in addition to grey ware, dull red ware, red ware, black ware, Russet-coated-painted ware. In addition to the shell bangles, terracotta beads, and iron artifacts, a fragment of a ring stone and a neolithic celt were collected (IAR 1992-93:2-3).

However, it is stated that the cloddy and coriaceous grey dirt was discovered in a 250 sq. area near the mound, which may have been the exact position of the ash mound. The material collected from this site indicates a blend of neolithic and early historical civilizations, so it is apparent that the lowest layers belong to the Neolithic since there is evidence of soft ash. The

current author has seen a similar scenario. This plough zone may correlate with Neolithic living at the lower levels, which may be 0.5 to 1 meter thick, while the top layers, which cannot be seen at the time lying west of the mound, belong to early historic. Although there are fewer Neolithic habitations with ash mounds, such as Piklihal (Allchin 1960) and Budihal (Paddayya 1993a,1993b), these are good instances of rural villages where dumping of cow-dung coupled with the mingling of daily garbage followed by periodic fire was perhaps frequent.

Ash Mounds



(Neolithic Cattle bones figer-2)

Ash mounds, created by burning cow dung, are a defining aspect of Neo-lithic society. They are intimately related to the human settlement sites and offer clear indications of the economic importance of cattle pastoralism. It is said that excrement from cow pens was let to build up and was occasionally lit on fire, perhaps in a ceremonial manner similar to how it is now done at the yearly cattle celebration in southern India.

The ash in the mounds is divided into many separate strata, some of which are light and free and others of which are extensively vitrified, indicating that the temperature at which the cow dung was burned varied. Tools made of stone and bone, animal bones, and ceramics can all be



(Neolithic Cattle keepers at south India Figer-3)

found in the ashes. Under the cow dung at Utnur and Budihal, cattle footprints were discovered, providing proof of cattle pens. Additionally, Budihal has provided evidence of a slaughtering floor.

The lowest portion of the mound has been quickly built and cared for, mostly to accommodate the demands of confining animals, and maybe repaired as required. This required the building of embankments and outer enclosures and their ongoing maintenance. Regular dung removal and resurfacing would have been necessary for maintaining the inside surface. Within the lower section of Ashmound I at Budihal-S, a circular sandstone platform blocks nine meters in diameter. This platform is located in the centre of the enclosure amidst a small cluster of three children and a single cattle burial, as well as a concentration of beads, chert blades, knives, and cattle and sheep/goat bone (Peddayya 1998, p. 150). The structure, graves, and artifacts, in addition to the fact that here is where there was a lot of burning activity, all point to communal ritual activity.

The highest portions of the mounds were built from loads of dung that were progressively placed and then intermittently burnt, eventually expanding the mounds' both horizontal and vertical dimensions over time. It also suggests a high cultural significance when a construction material strongly linked to a community's lifeways and survival is used to produce structures of such enormous dimensions. All of the excavated ash mounds showed at least two distinct burning tempos: regular low-temperature burnings of thin lenses or layers of dung and less frequent high-temperature burnings of thick layers, which produced significant deposits of vitrified strata (Johansen, 2004). The mounds' structural stability was strengthened and preserved by both the high-temperature burnings and the capping occurrences, boosting their long-term viability as monumental sites. Uncertainty exists about the precise relationship

between variations in sedimentological pace and the rhythm of ritual actions that contributed to the formation of ash mounds. Nevertheless, it does show that a range of activities, some of which were organised, repetitious, cyclical, and communal, were engaged in ash mound building, usage, and maintenance.

Many ash mound villages only have one mound, but there may be as many as four. It is unknown if these mounds were built and used simultaneously. Still, if they were, this might suggest that the ceremonial activity related to their upkeep was targeted at particular community groups, such as kin-group relationships. Many Neolithic sites, such as Hallur, Maski, Tekkalakota, Veerapuram, and Watgal, lack ash mounds. This may mean that specific populations only practice religious activity connected to cattle production or that the ash mounds at these sites have since been destroyed. It should be mentioned that a rammed earth feature surrounded by a sizable and thick concentration of ash lensing was discovered during



the excavation of Neolithic Watgal. (Johansen, 2004)

(Ash mound with ash roots south India Figer-4)

Chronology of Ash mounds

This is another significant cultural stage in the evolution of human populations, in which man abandoned his roving economic pursuits and established himself in a region by providing for himself through the use of local resources and a special type of tool technology, namely the pecked and ground stone and blade tool industry, which was invariably helpful in the production of plant foods, domesticating animals, building houses, and making pottery. Due to his expertise, which was utilized in the creation of pottery, the human population adapted to the local environment and made progress in discovering and extracting copper. The ceramics were first manufactured by hand.

Slow-wheel was eventually employed for superior fabrics and those above primary commercial activities.



(Ash Mound liars Figer-5)

Neolithic populations made an effort to use natural resources by adding wild animals to their diets through hunting, collecting, and fishing. So, this cultural process may be an excellent illustration of the link between man and the earth. Because of how drastically different this era of human development is from the one before it, it has been referred to as the Neolithic revolution. It may be observed across India in various climatic circumstances. However, in southern India, which includes the majority of the states of Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, and



northern Tamil Nadu, it has developed a distinctive character with regional variations within (Neolithic Ash Mound 10ft inside Ash Figer-6)

the material culture as a result of several causes. Ash mounds connected to many Neolithic habitations are another significant component of the culture's settlement and subsistence patterns, exhibiting this variety.



(10 ft original Neolithic Ash finger-7)

Geographical Analysis

Ash mounds are a separate category of archaeological monuments found only in the southern Deccan (fig.1). They are concentrated in the northern section of Karnataka, including the districts of Gulbarga, Raichur, Bellary, and Chitra Durga, as well as the neighbouring Andhra Pradesh districts of Kurnool and Anantapur. The rivers Krishna and Tungabhadra drain this region. The sites are made up of several layers of soft and hard (vitrified) ashy deposits. We now know roughly 150 different places.

The material culture of a community at the micro level and overall data from settlements occupying a geographical region or zone at the macro level are generally the focus of environmental study. This may also involve the study of a specific cultural trait to demonstrate its significance in terms of research into the causal component, which requires a scientific method. Scholars working on this topic might derive meaningful interpretations from cultural behaviour patterns by using existing data and evaluating hypotheses that may or may not yield a precise response. Many classic issues in social sciences may be unanswerable, but there is a need for approach reformulation through the corresponding units of analysis that compose the behavioural framework. As is well known, cultural variation, whether micro or macro, in the form of site location with material culture is primarily determined by people's interaction with the environment, the arrangement of artefacts, architecture, cultural deposits, and so on, an outcome of living systems, and thus in an archaeological record it is the result of the product of human behaviour (controlling for non-cultural formation processes). So long as issues can be phrased in terms of people-object interactions, almost any element of human existence is subject to scientific inquiry and explanation.

The distribution pattern of Neolithic-Chalcolithic settlements in the Lower Tungabhadra region are at Pragatur, Seripalli(Neo./Meg.), Kyatur, Paidigutta (Neo.-Chal./Meg.), Karapakala, Pallepada, Gondimalla (Neo.-Meg.), Bhairavanipalli (Neo.-Meg.), Chagatur(Neo.-Chal./Meg.),Uligipalli and Upperu in the Alampur taluk and at Ija, Utnur (Neolithic habitation and ashmound), Talpari-Kurukunuru, Machanpalli (Neolithic habitations with ashmound remains) and Talmari in the Gadwal taluk of Mahabubnagar district; in the taluks of Adoni, Yemmi- ganar, Kodumur, Kurnool and Nandikotkur in the Kurnool district at Chetnapalli,

Nagaladinne, Adoni-East, Suguru (ashmound site), Hattibellagallu, Gadikal (ashmound site), Bastipadu, Kosigi, Lanjapoluru, Moravakonda, Pandipadu, Penchikalapadu, Tangadancha, Satanikota, Veerapuram, Devanuru, Chintalapalli, Mandlem, Tartur, Gani, Nandavaram, Orvakal and Stallakudluru (habitation and ashmound); in the Bellary district at Anegondi, Hampi, Balamudi, Belagal, hakrathirtham, (Habitation debris with paintings), Chandru, Siriguppa, Tekkalakota (Neolithic-Chalcolithic habitation), Sanganakallu (Neolithic habitation lying on the hill terrace and ashmound) and in the Raichur taluk at Arnaha, Kupgal (ashmound), Arval, Badalli, Kallur, Belgunda caves, Billarayan-gudda, Chakrampur, Gonal, Gorkal (ashmound), Hebbal, Hirebenaka, Hirejanthakal, Harakeri, Hunthoji, Indurikoppal, Kudatini, Maski (Neo.-Chal./Mega-E.H), Piklihal (Neolithic-Chalcolithic Habitation and paintings), Watgal and Yebbalu. (Venkatasubbiah, 2009).

The Southern Neolithic culture can be divided into two distinct phases, the first of which spans the period Circa. 2800-2500-1800 B.C. and is attributed with ash mounds, and the second of which differs in the human settlements by colonizing foot-hill regions and on the riverbanks, streams, and waterways and is, to a large extent, devoid of ash mounds.

The absence of a significant number of plant remains (charred grains), which suggests that the settlements were limited to foothills and areas close to hillocks covered in grasses and the areas at their foot strewn with grasslands that have served as good grazing grounds for their livestock, indicates that pastoralism was their primary economic activity during the first phase. This has been confirmed by the presence of faunal remains found during excavations at Piklihal, Watgal, Maski, and Utnur (70 percent of which were from cattle, 15 percent from sheep/goats, and the remainder, 15 percent), as well as the burning of cow dung during the building of ash mounds. (Venkatasubbiah, 2009).

we found more archaeological sites, and many scholars are excavated ash mounds then we taken ten feet depth ash but it's very good quality with very good bright. in the remaining site I found cattle bones it is have very weight. when we were gone to field primely I found cattle teeth it is also so what good weight, how it knows that? actually when recently denied cattle teeth is not weight, I think so, when we found teeth in the field definitely it will be weight. I don't know the reason why it is? few days back we completion of field work, now we have to send to lab for analysis works. after completion will post phase two results.

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