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PREHISTORIC RELIGION FROM INDIAN MEGALITHS

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Introduction

Despite our lack of knowledge about the origins of religion, we know that religious expressions (beliefs, ideas, sentiments, etc.) are to be found in the very early period of human history, namely during the Middle Palaeolithic period, which is dated as c. 30,000 B. P. We do not know whether any form of religion existed even earlier, nor do we know the different forms of religion may have taken during the Middle Palaeolithic period. However, reconstructions based on burials reveal the existence of a large body of religious ideas for this period. In the case of the Upper Palaeolithic, we can use artifacts such as sculpture, engraving and painting as sources of information about religion. In most of these early manifestations, it is clear that death and its many associations play a central role. Religion may perhaps best be related to individual and group psychology within the socio-cultural matrix. The explanation of the various components of religion is problematic. It is not a simple matter of relating it to the environment, for religious manifestations are often found in forms which indicate the influence of the ideological complex on material culture. The pattern of the total religious complex of a given group is not always uniform over a limited period and area, but uniformity can be observed within a broad range of variation. This holds good not only for minor changes in content within social, cultural, economic, political and other systems, but also for the dynamics of the human mind.

Terminology

It may be best at the outset to explain the main terms used in the present paper. They have all been used by different writers to mean different things. Nevertheless, the terms themselves are useful, and it has been thought better to clarify them here rather than replace them.

First, we must define what is meant by « religion ». The religion of any community or group, whether of earlier times or of the present day, encompasses an enormous field of diverse phenomena. In this connection Frazer (1945, p. 81) has aptly written:

« All that a writer can do is, first, to say clearly what he means by religion, and afterwards to employ the word consistently in that sense throughout his work ».

On the whole, religion may be taken as a cultural phenomenon. As Lowie (1925, p. xvi) states the problem:

« Religion is verily a universal feature of human culture, not because all societies foster a belief in spirits, but because all recognize in some form or other awe-inspiring, extraordinary manifestations of reality ».

The above statement illuminates the underlying idea, although it is not a critical definition. In the circumstances, we prefer to adhere to this rather general statement. This is not the place for a comprehensive definition of religion, since the present study is not concerned with the concept as such, but with a limited area of research. The task of this paper is the reconstruction of the religious beliefs and ideas of the prehistoric megalithic peoples of India by logical synthesis.

The second term to be defined is that of « prehistory ». This point was raised by James (1957, p. 13):

« To have drawn the line at the invention of the art of writing would have excluded all consideration of texts, documents and inscriptions written or carved on prehistoric and protohistoric tombs, temples, stelae or tablets which, particularly for this investigation, constitute an all-important source of information, not only for contemporary belief and practice but also for their more remote background ».

This is not a very clear definition and I understand « prehistory » in a slightly different way. The popular definition of prehistory is the period before the emergence of writing. This means that it covers a considerable time-span; and in many cases it is difficult, if not impossible, to draw the boundary line. Events of a comparatively recent date, where no direct or indirect documentation exists, may thus be attributed to prehistory. It is a question of cultural complexes rather than of chronology, and the concept may cover conventional prehistory as well as similar cultures of a later period.

In the present study two terms will be used: « prehistoric » and « primitive ». The latter term is unpopular with many people, who understand it purely in its etymological meaning, in which case it is certainly a misnomer. The use of the term « primitive » in this paper coincides with the meaning used by Lowie (1925, p. IX), namely « people of a relatively simpler culture », or, to be more precise, tribal peoples whose culture still takes an earlier and simpler form.

Problems and Methodology

The geographical area under consideration is the sub-continent of India. Since the material available is so vast, the present study is based on representative samples designed to cover the subject temporally and spatially. Three types of data are synthesised: reports on prehistoric megaliths which have already been excavated; megaliths found in the vicinity which have structural and morphological similarities; and ethnographic monographs on tribes practising megalithic customs. The latter offer both structural and ideological accounts of megaliths. In the present case, the morphology of the megaliths of the earlier prehistoric and later primitive periods is so similar that we are justified in asserting

some similarity of cultural norms. On the basis of this hypothesis, religious ideas, beliefs and practices have been projected backwards from present to past, and attempts have been made to reconstruct the religious ideas underlying the material expressions associated with death and burial. The methodology used is a combination of archaeology and anthropology. The former deals with material manifestations, the latter substantiates these by ideological information.

Prehistoric Megaliths

Prehistoric megaliths have a very wide distribution in India, but the highest concentration is found in southern India, particularly in the provinces of Kerala, Tamil Nadu (formerly Madras), Mysore and Andhra. The major studies on this area are those by Branfill (1881), Ghurey (1926), Hunt (1933), Aiyappan (1945) and Srinivas and Banerjee (1953). In the literature on Indian megaliths there were considerable discrepancies in typological nomenclature: several terms being used to denote a single type, or several different types being denoted by a single term. In 1949 Krishnaswami made an attempt to standardise nomenclature. His listing of types was detailed, though not exhaustive; and although some problems still remain, these could only be clarified by further excavations, particularly of the problematic underground structures. Rao (1972, p. 235) considers that Krishnaswami's attempt is « inadequate at the present stage of our growing knowledge ». But his objections are not convincing; and his alternative typology of « simple surface features » does not help to ascertain morphology, which is a combination of structure and function. In general, Krishnaswami's typology has therefore been used in this paper.

The main types of megaliths found in Kerala are: menhir, cairn circle, urn burial, sarcophagus, *topikl* (Umbrella Stone), dolmen, cist, and rock cut cave (single or multiple chambered). They are constructed either from unhewn slabs of stone, such as granite, or dressed slabs of laterite. Excavations yielded objects of different types comprising: pots (of many sizes, such as bowls, dishes, and jars of different shapes and textures, some of which are decorated); terracotta animal figurines (probably votive offerings); stone objects (such as grind-stone, mortar, pestle, beads of etched carnelian and greenish stones); bronze bell and bowl; spearhead, sword, aze, trident, billhook, chisel, knife, tripod, hook nail, etc. of iron, shell bangle, ash, bone, etc.

Tamil Nadu may be considered as the most fruitful region of prehistoric megaliths in India. This province has almost the same types as Kerala plus the barrow. The grave goods, also similar, are more numerous here and more human bones and even complete bodies are found. Remains of habitation sites near megaliths are also interesting. Adichannallur (Rea, 1904), one of the most extensive urn fields in India, belongs to this region. It deserves special mention for its large number of associated objects as well as human skeletal remains (Zuckerman, 1930). All these, perhaps, indicate a better way of life with high efficiency.

Unlike the former two regions not much is known about the state of Mysore, though famous sites such as Brahmagiri (Wheeler, 1948) and Maski (Thapar, 1957) are situated within this province. The com-

mon types found here are: stone circle (single or double), pit circle, cairn circle, cist circle, dolmenoid cist and urn burial. The associated grave goods are not very different from the other areas of south India.

As in Mysore, little exploration or detailed work has been carried out in Andhra. The types comprise: stone circle (single or double), cairn circle, pit circle, menhir, alignment, dolmen, cist, dolmenoid cist, sarcophagus, etc. Objects found in association are pottery (also pots) of different types, mostly black and red, iron objects, copper implements, etc.

In other areas of India, the concentration of megaliths may not be as high as in south India. The general distribution is from Kashmir to southern Maharashtra, and from Sind to Assam, although not much is known about this wider geographical area apart from the simple existence of megaliths. Menhirs are very numerous and other types met with are: stone circle, barrow, cairn, cairn circle, tumulus, cist, etc. Except in Maharashtra, grave goods are very scarce; the common finds are pottery and bone fragments (mostly unidentified). Some of the burials in Nagpur area yielded iron objects: battle axe, palstave, hatchet, dagger, knife, arrowhead, spearhead, and even horse bits and stirrups (Leshnik, 1970).

The main features revealed in the above summary of prehistoric megaliths in India are: the typology and its distribution pattern, and associated finds which cover a wide range of materials and forms. The chronology of prehistoric megaliths is highly variable, as evidenced by radio-carbon datings in different megalithic sites. The earliest limit may be set at 1000 B. C., while it is still difficult to ascertain the later limit. From the available data it appears that there is an overlap of prehistoric megaliths with primitive ones.

Primitive Megaliths

Megalithic customs are found in different forms among a large number of Indian tribes. A comprehensive list, on the basis of geographical distribution, is as follows: in south India it is practised among the Chenchu (Brecks, 1873), Irula (Thurston, 1909), Kadir (Thurston, 1909), Kota (Thurston, 1909), Kurumba (Thurston, 1909), Paniyan (Thurston, 1909), Pallan (Thurston, 1909), Toda (Walhouse, 1873, 1874) etc. In the rest of India most of the tribes in Assam (in the broad sense) such as the Khasi (Dalton, 1872; Gurdon, 1914), Garo (Playfair, 1909), some of the Naga groups, such as the Ao (Smith 1925), Angami (Hutton, 1921-a), Sema (Hutton, 1921-b), and Tangsa (Dutta, 1959) have or had megalithic customs. In Bihar and Orissa, similar customs are still found among the Bondo (Haimendorf, 1943; Elwin, 1950), Gadaba (Haimendorf, 1943), Munda (Roy, 1912), Oraon (Roy, 1928), Ho (Das and Chatterjee, 1927; Majumder, 1950; Ghosh, 1965), Bhumij (Das, 1931), Saora (Elwin, 1955), etc. Some of the central Indian tribes such as the Baiga (Elwin, 1939), Gond (Elwin, 1945), Bhil, Kavar, etc. may also be included in this context. Banerjee (1966) has made attempts to identify the megalithic builders with Dravidian speakers. But from the above distribution this hypothesis does not hold good.

In some of the above cases a complete change has taken place, mainly due to the influence of other religions, such as Christianity or Hinduism. In several instances where megalithism is still the prevalent custom among the older generation, the converted group, usually Christian, either knows nothing of megalithic customs or feigns ignorance. This kind of contradiction is a significant indicator for future research. Very little detailed research has yet been done on the tribes who have or have had megalithic customs, and little is yet known about the beliefs and ideas associated with megaliths. A few examples, drawn from existing accounts and from the author's own work, are outlined below.

Haimendorf (1943) supplied information on the megalithic rituals of the hill tribes of Orissa, mainly Gadabas and Bondos. He observed (p. 151): « an irregular collection, sometimes roughly circular in arrangement, of horizontal stone slabs and upright menhirs. The horizontal slabs and boulders, which are often piled one on top of the other, form a raised platform, with menhirs standing more or less haphazardly amidst these sitting-stones ». Analysis of the funeral rites of the Gadabas revealed that they have the concept of a soul as well as a spirit. They believe that immediately after death the spirit of the dead may influence his/her relatives. Various rituals and rites are performed to avoid this and finally stones are placed in memory of the deceased.

« A characteristic feature of all Bondo villages are the built-up stone circles... They are usually built up of rough rubble stones, the top covered with flat slabs;... menhirs are occasionally found in association with the circles and never in large numbers » (Haimendorf, p. 163). The stone circle is the seat of the earth deity (*Bursung*), not the spirit of human ancestors; this is true of menhirs. On the other hand there are miniature dolmens consisting of a table-stone supported by two or three smaller stones, and these are the memorials erected by wealthy men in honour of a deceased relative ». The concept of soul is also evidenced among the Bondos.

Among the Saora, menhirs are numerous, each family having its own group. Elwin (1955, p. 365) reported that: « they regard the menhirs as the houses for the dead », and the concept of soul is also found. The Saora living near the Kond area have a slightly different custom, whereby wooden pillars are posted for memorial purposes; similar forms are found among the Korkus (Chattopadhyay, 1943). I think that this change of material, from stone to wood, may possibly be due to the absence of suitable stone. The latter form of menhir may be regarded as megaxylic (Childe, 1948, p. 13). Among the Hill Marias and Bison-Horn Marias, menhirs, small table stones and carved wooden posts are found to occur simultaneously for the same memorial purpose. This mixture of types may be explained by the persistence of earlier type(s) and the diffusion of others at a later phase. No valid information about this is yet available.

Megaliths are found among a number of tribes in Bihar, and the author has worked among the Hos, where both prehistoric and recent megaliths exist in the same region. From the information collected from

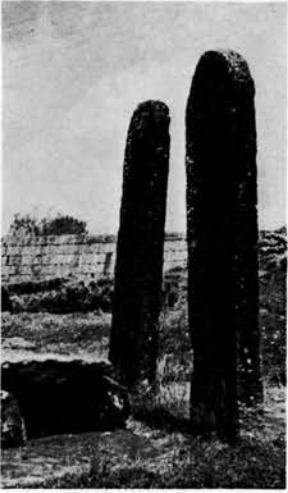


Fig. 200
Menhir and capstone in
Mehgalaya. Practised by
the Khasi.

Deduction

the Hos it appears that some material and structural changes have taken place. This conclusion was based on excavated megaliths as well as observations carried out during the construction of megaliths. In both prehistoric and primitive megaliths, the concept of soul is almost identical, as is demonstrated by the urns which are provided with a hole for the entrance and exit of the soul, found in two different contexts.

The Khasis of Assam and Meghalaya have menhirs and bone repositories built of gigantic stone slabs. Megalithic practice among the Khasi may be briefly summarised from the works of Dalton (1872), Hunter (1879), Gurdon (1914) and the author's own research. After burning the dead, a few bones are kept in a small pot which is placed in a small stone cist, in the family burial ground. When the whole area is covered, all the bones are placed in a large cist and their former positions marked by menhirs. The size of both menhirs and cists depends on the economic condition of the family as well as the position and status of the deceased. The Nagas, of different groups (Hutton, 1921-a, 1921-b; Smith, 1925; Haimendorf 1946) have more or less similar customs.

This brief survey of primitive megaliths from different parts of India reveals three main underlying motives: memorials, burial (sometimes a combination of both) and fertility rites.

Burial customs depend mainly on beliefs about the soul or life after death. Differences of burial customs among different primitive people are only minor. The relatives have a mixed complex of fear and love or respect for the soul of the dead: on the one hand, they want to get rid of the corpse, while on the other they make provision for the well-being of the departed soul. Group feeling among primitive peoples is compact and well-knit, resulting in a large number of participants in the funeral ceremony. This wide participation may be designed to avoid the revenge and ill-will of the dead.

Grave goods are deposited during the burial or cremation, either because these are personal objects to which the deceased may be attached, or because they are objects of necessity provided for his well-being and happiness in the other world. The memorial stone serves as the seat of the departed soul and also forms a link between the two worlds. The soul is pleased to see that the members of his family remember him by a memorial stone. In some cases, as among the Bondos and Gadabas, the megaliths serve to promote fertility: here they are concerned with the earth deity rather than with the spirit of the dead.

At least these concrete inferences can be related to prehistoric megaliths. This approach has long been suggested by many scholars. Karsten (1935, p. 276) writes: « it must be borne in mind that a given practice does not in itself give sure knowledge as to the ideas which originally underlay it. The archaeological grave finds, therefore, cannot be of real value for the history of religion until they are supplemented by the facts supplied by ethnology with regard to the religious beliefs of primitive people living to-day ».

Finally, on prehistoric religion in India it may be stated with necessary reservations that the contemporary people believed in life

Fig. 201
*Dolmenoid box grave in
Meghalaya. Practised by
the Khasi.*



Fig. 202
*Huge box grave found in
Meghalaya. Practised by the
Khasi.*



Fig. 203
*Earthen pitcher from the
box grave in Meghalaya.
Practised by the Khasi.*



after death, that the soul of the dead was somewhat more powerful than the living and was propitiated in various ways. This is evidenced from the grave goods discovered; other objects of perishable nature might also have been placed with the burial or the memorial stone. The building of the megalithic structure (which may be considered as a form of religious work) was carried out by the group, as is clear from the huge size of prehistoric megaliths. Probably the status concept was also involved, as were sex, age and causes of death. All these differences may be indicated by variations of structure and grave goods, found on the same site.

All megalithic monuments do not serve both burial and memorial purposes. Tumuli, barrows and rock cut caves are burials, while menhirs are memorials. On the other hand, other megaliths, such as dolmens and stone circles, serve a dual purpose. Cists clearly indicate the concept of soul and life after death. All these inferences appear to be reasonably valid from comparison with the primitive megaliths. Further investigations along this line, both of prehistoric and primitive periods, will help to elucidate the religious concepts of prehistoric India. Even today not much information is available on the location and diffusion of religious ideas, or on religious groups. An intensive survey over a wide area may open new vistas covering all these important aspects.

RIASSUNTO

In India si è constatato che la tradizione megalitica ha persistito presso differenti gruppi tribali in varie forme. I più antichi megaliti sono di epoca preistorica. La loro struttura, l'orientamento e il corredo funerario associato formano un complesso, in base al quale non è sempre agevole ricostruire le idee religiose che stanno dietro il culto megalitico. Uno studio sistematico dei megaliti delle tribù getta un fascio di luce su questo problema e la ricostruzione delle idee religiose, di cui sopra, diverrebbe più plausibile. L'autore considera la religione come un particolare sistema di fede, di azione o di comportamento indicanti una credenza in qualche potenza superiore invisibile, riverenza nei suoi confronti e desiderio di fare ad essa piacere. In questo sistema così delineato, il metodo della sovrapposizione delle forme attualmente conosciute agli aspetti del passato sconosciuti o poco conosciuti, è forse giustificato e ragionevole.

RÉSUMÉ

On constate que la tradition mégalithique a survécu sous des formes variables chez différentes tribus de l'Inde. Les plus anciens mégalithes remontent à l'époque préhistorique. Leur structure, leur orientation et le mobilier funéraire qui les accompagne forment un complexe qu'il n'est pas toujours aisé d'interpréter. L'étude systématique des mégalithes de certaines tribus éclaire ce problème et permet une reconstruction plus vraisemblable des idées religieuses et du culte préhistorique. L'auteur considère la religion comme un système de foi, d'actes et de comportements qui traduisent une croyance en quelque puissance supérieure invisible, de la vénération pour celle-ci et le désir de lui plaire. Dans le système ainsi défini, la méthode qui consiste à superposer des formes connues actuellement à d'autres peu ou mal connues et appartenant au passé, est peut-être justifiée et raisonnable.

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PRIMITIVE RELIGION AND MEGALITHISM IN SOUTH INDIA

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Introduction. Belief in the soul

The origin of tribal belief in the soul is quite interesting. Tylor, who propounded the theory of Animism, is of the opinion that in his dreams, primitive man met his ancestors; but when he awoke, he heard his voice as echoes and saw his shadow in ponds and rivers. He was unable to dissociate and differentiate himself from these shadows. Tylor further says that primitive man visualised two souls within himself, one of which is active during the day time and the other during the night. The soul which resides in the body of a man while he is alive is the one which stimulates him to carry on his work as a human being (body soul) and the other soul is the one which leaves the body permanently at death and wanders about in the form of a ghost or spirit.

In order to find out whether the second soul (free soul) left the body temporarily or permanently some tribal peoples, for example the people of the Megalithic period (Iron Age) practised double funeral, namely primary burial (green) and secondary or fragmentary burial (dry).

The second burial takes place after a period of a fortnight or so when it is presumed that there is no hope of the return of the soul. The dry burial marks the end of the dead man's connection with this world and his entry into the other world. The Todas, Hos and Kotas practise both green and dry burial.

The Origin of Monuments

Primitive man believed that if a person dies, both body soul and free soul should be destroyed without trace. Thus to prevent the free soul (now a spirit or ghost) from harming the living, the people devised many cunning ways of tying the free soul down with the body soul.

The primitive tribes thought that despite all these precautions, the souls might still escape, and they therefore attempted to propitiate them to avert crop failures, diseases, disasters, catastrophes and calamities. The simplest mode of disposal of the dead (body soul) is the erection of physical obstacles. Among the Malayaryans of Kerala, the custom of placing two stones, one at the head and another at the feet

has been observed. Instead of two stones, the Uralis of Kerala erect four, two on either side of the body.

This rudimentary arrangement of stones on the grave was the origin of the stone circles, cairns and dolmens of the Megalithic period (2nd or 3rd century B. C.). The underlying idea of preventing the spirits from escaping from the grave is the same, both among the Megalithic people of the past and a few tribes of the present day.

*Megalithic monuments
and their contents*

During the Palaeolithic period, bodies were left in the places where they died, since people were wanderers in search of food. But during the Iron Age, we find that the body was placed in an earthenware pot which was placed in a pit, filled and covered with soil. There are two types of burial pots: namely the oval or pyriform burial urns of Adichanallur in Tirunelveli District and the pottery coffins or Sarcophagi of Perumbair in Chingleput District (Tamilnadu State).

The burial site at Adichanallur lies on the bank of the river Tambarparani, about twelve miles from the town of Tirunelveli. It is a large burial ground, covering about 114 acres of land, and thousands of these urns were arranged in two rows, buried at a depth of 3 to 12 feet. The Sarcophagus burials of Perumbair in Chingleput District are worth mentioning here, since as usual this site is situated in the rocky areas around the hills, which were probably uncultivated and barren. These Sarcophagi are oblong in shape and have two or three rows of hollow cylindrical legs.

In and around the burial urns and Sarcophagi are a number of wheelthrown, black and red ware pottery vessels of varying sizes: bowls, cups, lids, conical vessels, jars, lamps, ring stands etc.

The pottery urns and the Sarcophagi are thick, handmade and undecorated.

Apart from the pottery, a large number of iron objects have been found, mostly consisting of weapons and agricultural appliances. The ornaments collected from the burials include several oval diadems of thin gold plate with triangular and linear dotted designs. These « patams », which were fixed around the forehead of the deceased, can be compared with those tied on the forehead of the married couple of the present day to show that they have attained a new rank and status in society. Some bronze objects in the form of lids, animal figurines, including the famous female dancing figure, bangles, bracelets and rings have also been unearthed. Other ornaments discovered were made from bones, shells and skulls. These numerous items of gold, pottery, leads, iron implements etc., collected from the megalithic sites, amply demonstrate the custom of offering gifts to the dead. The underlying principle is based on the « law of contact » (Contagious Magic) which states « once in contact always in contact »: the objects with which these persons are in contact will ultimately go with them to the grave. Thus we find that even among present-day tribes, especially the Kadars of Coimbatore, on the actual day when the corpse is placed in the grave, the burial gifts such as a digging stick, an earthenware pot, a

coconut spoon and a small tin for drinking coffee are placed by the side of the body.

Apart from these megalithic burials in Adichanallur and Perumbair, we find other types of burial spread all over South India from Krishna to the Southern tip of the Sub-Continent. Chief among them are the dolmens of North Arcot and Pudukkottai, the underground stone chambers of Mysore, the rock cut tombs, the hat stones, and the umbrella stones of Kerala, the cairns of Nilgiris and the Ram Sarcophagus of Cuddapah.

Hypotheses - the origin of Megalithism

A number of hypotheses have been put forward to explain the origin of the megalithic culture in India. According to Reuben's theory, the megaliths found among the Asurs and the Mundas of Chota Nagpur are of western origin and reached India through Palestine and Russia.

Within India, they spread to North and South simultaneously. But Haimendorf thinks that the megaliths found among the Gadabas and Bondos may belong to the South-East Asian type and believes that these groups migrated into Peninsular India during Neolithic times. Elliot Smith is of the opinion that the dolmens of South India could have been adopted from the Egyptians who invented the rock cut tombs; and that this art of tomb building was transferred from people to people along the Red Sea to South Arabia and Persia, India, Ceylon, Burma, Indo-Malaysia, Japan etc.

According to Haimendorf, the areas where the megalithic tombs are prevalent in South India are occupied at present by people who speak Dravidian languages (Tamil, Telugu, Canarese and Malayalam). The research carried out by Zuckerman on the finds of the Adichanallur site concludes that the Dravidian race built these monuments. These people were able to introduce the use of iron, red and black pottery ware, and disposal of the dead in urns.

Modern Megalithism

Megalithic art is still a living tradition among the tribes of Kerala, Assam, Chota Nagpur, Bastar and Madras. Most of the stone tombs are now replaced by wooden counterparts. These monuments are purely commemorative in nature. The most common substitute in Kerala is a cairn or stone topped by a capstone or a wooden pillar. The Khasis and the Nagas of Assam erect menhirs varying from 2 to 10 feet in height. The Kols erect monuments over the buried ashes of the dead. The Marias of Bastar and Gadabas use both menhir and dolmen, while the Kurumbas erect only dolmens, and the Malayaryans have miniature dolmens in honour of those who met with an unnatural death. The Bondos have dolmens close to a path which serve as seats for the living.

Acknowledgement

I am grateful to Dr. S. T. Satyamurti, Director of Museums, Government Museum, Madras, for all the help given in preparing this paper for the conference.

RIASSUNTO

Per molte popolazioni primitive l'uomo ha due anime: una strettamente legata al corpo (*body soul*), l'altra di natura più spirituale (*free soul*). Allo scopo di evitare che l'« anima libera » non ritorni a compiere danni o vendette nei confronti dei vivi, è necessario impedirgli di liberarsi. Le costruzioni megalitiche al di sopra della tomba hanno, a parere dell'autore, la precisa funzione di rendere impossibile il passaggio delle anime. L'Autore passa quindi in rassegna i differenti tipi di seppellimento durante l'età del Ferro, che comprendono l'erezione di strutture megalitiche, ed anche il corredo funerario contenuto in queste tombe. L'origine della tradizione megalitica in India è poco conosciuta ed è stata oggetto di ipotesi disparate (Reuben, Haimendorf, Smith, Zuckerman). L'arte megalitica continua ad esistere presso certe tribù del Kerala, dell'Assam, del Chota Nagpur, del Bastar e del Madras, ma nella maggior parte delle tombe il legno si è sostituito alla pietra.

RÉSUMÉ

Pour beaucoup de populations primitives, l'homme a deux âmes: l'une étroitement liée au corps (*body soul*), et l'autre de nature plus spirituelle (*free soul*). Afin d'éviter que « l'âme libre » ne revienne faire du tort aux vivants, il faut l'empêcher de s'échapper. Les mégalithes disposés au-dessus de la tombe ont précisément pour fonction de rendre impossible le passage des âmes. L'Auteur passe ensuite en revue les différents types d'ensevelissement durant l'Age du Fer, qui comprenaient l'érection de structures mégalithiques, ainsi que le mobilier funéraire contenu dans ces tombes. L'origine de la tradition mégalithique en Inde est mal connue et fait l'objet d'hypothèses diverses (Reuben, Haimendorf, Smith, Zuckerman). L'art mégalithique vit encore parmi certaines tribus du Kerala, de l'Assam, de Chota Nagpur, de Bastar et de Madras, mais dans la plupart des tombes, le bois s'est substitué à la pierre.

THE EARLIEST PRIVATE SHRINE IN WESTERN INDIA AND ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH THE MOTHER GODDESSES IN EUROPE AND WESTERN ASIA

Sankalia H. D., Poona, India.

Excavations carried out at Inamgaon, Poona District (Maharashtra), during the season 1970 - 71 have widened our idea of the settlement pattern, some 3,500 years ago and, for the first time, have provided evidence that the small female figurines of clay and terracotta found occasionally in deposits of the early protohistoric sites in India were actually worshipped; these figurines must indeed represent goddesses and not children's toys, as some archaeologists would believe.

Interestingly enough, the same kind of figurines with attendant figures of bulls were also worshipped in far-off Nuzi, on the borders of Iraq and Iran and in other countries. Some kind of relationship, either through actual migration of people or of ideas from Western Asia into India, was suggested by me three years ago (1969, p. 77):

« From the two objects found at Nuzi, Yorgan Tepe (near Kirkuk, Iran), and the figure of the mother goddess at Hissar, Bakun and elsewhere, and from similar objects found at Nevasa, Chandoli and Daimabad, all in Northern Maharashtra, we might say that the kind of cult followed in Western Asia was also practised in Maharashtra ».

During the month of March, 1971, on removing the circular structures of the last phase, called Late Jorwe, at Inamgaon, remains of structures were found which were rectangular (18 ft. long 10 ft.), were provided with drainage ditches and regular five-foot passage between the houses, had firm and fine floors. Besides new kinds of pots and pans, five copper/bronze anklets (dia. 8 cm.) with incised decorations were found. Copper was scarce then as now and such a large number of anklets, as well as the occurrence of no less than 103 pots and pans from another house of this phase indicates that the occupants of the Early Jorwe phase were fairly rich.

While clearing below the house floor a hollow was found, containing an oval-shaped box with a lid, all of unbaked clay. Beside the box lay a small clay bull with a large curved horn, still intact, while over the box was a semi-circular clay object (which later proved to be the stand for the clay figurine within), and a headless (Sanskrit: *Kabandha*) clay

Fig. 204
Inamgaon, District Poona.
Clay figurine of Mother
Goddess, ca. 1200 B. C.





Figgs. 205-206
Inamgaon, District Poona,
Maharashtra. Unbaked clay
box and lid; Mother God-
dess figurine with head in-
side.



Fig. 207
Nevasa, District Ahmadna-
gar, Maharashtra. Terra-
cotta figurine of Mother
Goddess, ca. 1200 B. C.



figurine. Inside the box was found another clay figurine, almost identical with the one above the box, but with a head.

The oval box is about 12 cm. x 5 cm., broader in the centre and narrower at both ends, with a slight overhang, so that the lid fits tightly. The figurines are about 5.7 cm. high, with very prominent breasts. These are firm and protruding and not pendant, indicating that the bearers were young, beautiful goddesses, and not matrons. The small, semi-circular stand was meant to hold the image when taken out for worship. This is evident when the figurine is placed in the stand (maximum dia. 3.2 cm.). Another interesting feature about the headless figurine is that provision was made to seat her on the bull by making a small hole in the body of the bull, and another one in the navel of the figurine, so that with a thin stick one could show the goddess seated or standing on the bull as in the case of the goddess on a leopard at Çatal Hüyük.

Similar, but not identical, clay and terracotta figurines had been found during the two previous seasons' excavations at Inamgaon, whereas at Nevasa, a very large figure was found, again of ill-baked clay with a conical head, small breasts, and a navel; here the lower part of the body was featureless and flared. But in none of these figurines was the exact context available.

At Inamgaon, the care with which these figures were kept proves that what we have excavated is part of a private shrine of the Chalcolithic period. In a one-roomed house, or even a three-roomed flat, there is no room for a separate shrine chamber (Sanskrit: *devagriha* or Prakrit *devaghar*) for daily family worship. So the practice in millions of houses in India today is to keep the deity in a box, which might be of wood, wicker-work, ivory, gold or silver, or even of simple clay as in prehistoric Inamgaon, and to take it out for worship every morning. These clay images would then be placed vertically in the stand, the bull placed outside to the right or left of the goddess.

A preliminary distribution map of sites with female figurines, is significant. Already by Upper Palaeolithic times, about 20,000 years ago, man in Europe had his own evaluation of the significance of the female genital organs and the breasts. So he emphasised these in ivory and bone while neglecting the rest of the female form and even the head.

Some years ago, Absolon (1949) recorded 21 sites with female figurines, from Siberia through the Ukraine, Moravia, Austria, the Rhineland, Baden, Belgium, Italy and France into the heart of the Pyrenees. He further grouped these figures into 12 types of Venuses. Of these, the figures from Inamgaon and from India in general might be placed in the group of Venuses Type Ia.

Thus the first symbolic or 'impressionistic' art was born. Later this hieratic art spread gradually eastward through Crete and Bulgaria (Georgiev, 1965), Macedonia (Rodden, 1964), Turkey (Mellaart, 1963), Iraq, Iran (Schmidt, 1937, pp. 192-194, fig. 114-115), Sistan (Tosi, 1968, pp. 55 ff.), Baluchistan (Stein, 1929, pl. VII; 1931, pl. XXXI), Afghanistan (Casal, 1961, pl. XLI-XLII), through the Indo-Afghan borderland or the ancient Gandhara, to India.

Fig. 208

Distribution map of the most important discoveries of prehistoric female statuettes in Europe and Asia.



Figurines with featureless heads or without heads are absent in the Harappan or the Indus civilization, but a regular feature of the various Chalcolithic cultures in India, of which the one from Uriup in Bihar is the easternmost so far discovered. However, these female figurines seem to be typical of Maharashtra, where three sites, Nevasa, Daimabad and Chandoli, have also yielded the sacred, symbolic bull, made exactly as in the shrine at Nuzi in Iraq. The bull is shown in the form of a rhyton, without a regular head, or with a head in the form of a wide, bottle-like opening, a cylindrical body, painted in red and black stripes, a low, featureless hump, a similar tail and legs on wheels (now broken).

Another striking fact is the similarity between the figurines with and without heads, the shape of the box, and the position of the goddess when seated on the bull in Inamgaon with such figures and paintings found at Catal Hüyük in Turkey (Mellaart, 1963, fig. 10).

The nude, headless goddess, usually seated, prominently exhibiting her sexual attributes as if in child birth and with raised hands, had a long life in India. Either through survival or reintroduction during the period when trade with the Roman world flourished, these goddesses became widespread in India and were sculpted in terracotta and stone. Fine specimens of the former come from Kausambi and Bhita in U. P., and of the latter from Nagarjunkonda and Alampur in Andhra Pradesh (Sankalia, 1960).

Earlier I thought that their antiquity dated back to the Egyptian Neolithic. Now we have stratified and well-dated evidence from Çatal Hüyük, where the goddess has been represented in this position in a painting (Mellaart, 1964, p. 197, fig. 21), while frogs or toads in this position from Western Macedonia have been cited already.

As mentioned already, it seems that we may trace back the history of these goddesses even further, all the way to the Upper Palaeolithic female figurines.

RIASSUNTO

Gli scavi del 1970-71 a Inamgaon, presso Poona (Maharashtra), hanno fornito la prova che le piccole figurine di terracotta pre- e proto-storiche erano effettivamente oggetto di culto e che rappresentavano autentiche divinità e non giocattoli per bambini. Sotto il pavimento di una casa, appartenente alla fase antica della cultura di Jorwe, è stata scoperta una cavità contenente un recipiente di argilla cruda, di forma ovale. Sopra il coperchio giaceva una figurina femminile, senza testa, mentre di lato si trovava un toro. Nell'interno vi era una seconda figurina femminile, che al pari della prima, presenta seni molto esuberanti. La statuette senza testa poteva essere applicata sopra il toro, e ciò richiama la dea sopra un leopardo di Catal Hüyük. La cura con cui queste figurine erano conservate dimostra che ci troviamo di fronte a un santuario privato, di età calcolitica. La consuetudine di togliere ogni mattina una statuette da una scatola per adorare la divinità, esiste ancora in milioni di case indiane. Le figurine femminili con la messa in evidenza degli attributi sessuali, appartengono a una lunga tradizione che risale al Paleolitico superiore e al Neolitico euro-asiatico.

RÉSUMÉ

Les fouilles de 1970-71 à Inamgaon près de Poona (Maharashtra) ont démontré que les figurines de terre cuite pré- et protohistoriques étaient effectivement des objets de culte représentant des divinités, et non des jouets d'enfants. Sous le pavement d'une maison appartenant à la phase ancienne de la culture de Jorwe, on découvrit une cavité contenant une boîte d'argile crue de forme ovale. Sur le couvercle gisait une figure féminine sans tête, et à côté un taureau. A l'intérieur de ce récipient se trouvait une seconde figure féminine, qui comme la première présentait des seins très développés. La statuette sans tête pouvait être emboîtée sur le taureau, ce qui rappelle la déesse assise sur un léopard de Catal Hüyük. Le soin avec lequel ces figurines étaient conservées prouve que nous avons affaire ici à un sanctuaire privé de l'époque chalcolithique. L'habitude de sortir chaque matin une statuette de sa boîte pour adorer la divinité existe encore dans des millions de familles indiennes. Les figurines féminines dont les attributs sexuels sont mis en évidence appartiennent à une longue tradition qui remonte au Paléolithique supérieur et au Néolithique euro-asiatique.

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FUNERAL RITES IN THAILAND FROM PREHISTORIC TO THE BEGINNING OF HISTORICAL TIMES

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Since the beginning of mankind, burial of the dead has been accompanied by rituals, whose evidence in burial sites, provide archaeologists with some of the earliest traces of man's religion, technology, cult, and beliefs about the universe. Several aspects of burial rites have been found to be of significance in classifying burials. One of these is the question of the orientation of the corpse. Another is whether or not the body has been inhumed or cremated. Other significant details are the placement of stones occasionally associated with the graves and the presence of grave goods.

It is unfortunate that in Thailand many ancient burial sites have been destroyed or disturbed. In many parts of the country, where the villagers believe the soul does not depart from the body after death, farmers who find skeletons while working their land usually break the bones intentionally and then dispose of them by various means: sometimes the fragments are distributed among relatives as objects of reverence; in other cases, they may be wrapped in white cloth and presented to the nearest wat or Buddhist monastery, for fear of spirits; in still other instances, the bones may be burned immediately upon discovery (Charoenwongsa, 1972, p. 92). The persistence of these folk beliefs among Thai villagers continues to be an obstacle to archaeological enquiry.

At this time, little of significance can be said about the question of orientation in the burial sites so far examined. The only mesolithic skeleton so far discovered, in a Sai-Yok rockshelter, was buried facing north in a flexed position (Heekeren & Knuth, 1967, p. 63; You-di, 1969, pp. 13-14). The fact that orientation not been uniform in more recent sites tends to throw doubt on any hypothesis that the northern orientation may have been common in early periods. However, two exceptions may be noted: the Metal Age sites of the Lopburi Artillery Centre and Tap Tan in Uthai Thani where the skeletons in the former were oriented towards the north while those in the latter were oriented towards the northwest (Intakosai, 1971).

Modern village burials by inhumation, where still practised in Thailand, tend to orient the body towards the west. Children are always told not to lie with their heads towards the west, the direction of death. The same belief is found also among the Badarians of Upper Egypt (Clark, 1967, p. 102) and the Nuers from Eastern Nuerland (You-di, p. 38), to mention a few examples. There is little evidence to tell when the westward orientation became a widespread practice in the country.

Inhumation was undoubtedly the normal type of burial in prehistoric times, although, beginning with the neolithic periods, there is evidence of burnt bones, some of which appear to have been burnt deliberately, others, accidentally. Of sixteen neolithic burials at Sab Champa in Lopburi, less than half were found burnt (Maleipan, 1972, p. 97). Remnants of cremations which took place outside the tomb have also been found at Kanchanaburi and elsewhere.

In general, cremation has been considered a sign of the beginning of Hindu-Buddhist influence in Thailand, which marked the beginning of the protohistoric period in Thailand. Hindu-Buddhist influence is definitely present in some sites where traces of incinerated remains were found. This influence is also evidenced by funeral vessels of various types such as earthenware pots, porcelain boxes, and knob-lidded bronze urns. These latter were often found with beautifully-crafted Buddha images in the foundations of stupas and other monuments and probably indicate both the high rank and wealth of the deceased as well as his being Buddhist.

It cannot be said with certainty, however, that the practice of cremation inevitably accompanied Hindu-Buddhist influences. Inhumation had been completely abandoned in favour of cremation in the Iron Age layers at Non Nok Tha (Bayard, 1971, p. 22). On the other hand, at several Dvaravati sites, dated roughly between the seventh and eleventh centuries A. D., both inhumation and cremation were observed to have been practised at the same time in spite of the fact that Dvaravati was a well known Buddhist centre at the time.

The practice of placing a rock on or above the upper part of the body was observed in the mesolithic burial site at Sai-Yok. In the Bronze Age site at the Lopburi Artillery Centre, only one out of sixty burials evidenced this practice. However, it is known to exist in a modern village: the people of Ban Kao on the River Kwae employ this particularly curious practice to confine the spirit of a corpse to its grave forever, preventing the spirit from wandering about and returning to harm living relatives and their neighbours.

Finally, the presence of grave goods indicate some deductions about the technology and economy of the periods that they represent.

Thailand's only mesolithic burial, at the Sai-Yok rockshelter mentioned previously, contained nothing more than a piece of animal bone and some shells, perhaps the remains of gifts and food. With technological progress, we find that burial sites in later times were furnished with more sophisticated goods. Quality, of course, appeared to depend to some extent on the wealth and prestige of the departed's family.

Those grave goods from Kok Charoen, belonging to the early Metal Age, were reported by Watson and Loofs (1967, p. 253) to be the simplest while those from the Bronze or Late Metal Age at the Artillery Centre and Ban Chieng in Udorn Thani are surprisingly elaborate.

Perhaps the most promising prehistoric cemetery site in the country is that of Ban Chieng in Udorn Thani, a northeastern province. After some excavations, the site has yielded, besides bronze and iron objects, painted pottery in various patterns, reptilian (i. e. snake and lizard), stylized human figures, sigma, spiral, conchoidal, and floral, as well as incised and impressed black pottery, together with plain and cord-marked in the lowest levels. The thermoluminescent dates for three samples are B. C. 4630 ± 520 , 3570 ± 480 , and 3490 ± 275 . Traces of rice domestication and of cloth making were also found. A number of terra-cotta rollers, as yet undated, have also been discovered, since they bear incised designs, they were probably for the manufacture of printed textiles.

In burials of protohistoric and early historical times, the wealth and rank of the deceased can also often be determined by the grave goods. In addition to such objects as funerary urns and Buddha images I have already touched upon, some graves have revealed small heaps of partly-damaged coins and other domestic objects. It is obvious that these coins were damaged deliberately and then considered to be 'killed coins'. In any case, the damage might have been done in an attempt to thwart potential grave robbers.

In conclusion, it is obvious that archaeology in Thailand is still in a very early stage. Improved education on the village level should eventually halt either the complete destruction of graves by farmers or the stripping of archaeological sites of items to be sold to antique dealers. Both government action and increased excavations are necessary to save these sites.

The matter of orientation of graves is still an open question. At present it appears that, except for a few cases, orientation was of little significance to the prehistoric inhabitants of Thailand. However, the origin of current westward orientation remains obscure.

Recent findings at Non Nok Tha and at the Dvaravati sites raises the question of a possible correlation between the adoption of a cremation as the primary means of burial and the advance of Hindu-Buddhist influence (Boiselier, 1968, p. 12)). However, more enquiry is necessary before a definite answer to this problem can be found. Hinduization of Thailand obviously did not proceed at a uniform pace; but the significance of the disparities has yet to be discovered.

The placement of stones over graves, also, was not a universal practice in Thailand. Therefore, the occasions where evidence of this practice are found are very intriguing, but, again, lack of scientific study and the need to examine additional sites makes impossible any definitive statements, not only about the placement of stones but also about the occurrence of grave goods.

Supplementary Notes on the dates of certain prehistoric sites in Thailand

KANCHANABURI

<i>Ongbab Caves Si Sawat</i>	District (Mesolithic)
Lower layer	9,230 ± 180 B. C. (C 14)
Upper layer	7,400 ± 140 B. C. (C 14)
<i>Ban Kao</i>	Muang District (Neolithic)
	1,224 ± 300 B. C. (C 14)

LOPBURI

<i>Artillery Centre,</i>	Muang District (late Metal Age)
Lower layer	1,224 ± 300 B. C. (TL)
Upper layer	700 ± 166 B. C. (TL)
<i>Kok Charoen,</i>	Chaibadan District (Neolithic)
1. 1180 ± 300 B. C. (TL)	
2. 1080 ± 300 B. C. (TL)	

MAE HONG SON

<i>Spirit Cave,</i>	Muang District (Hoabinhian Complex)
Lower layer	9,180 ± 360 B. P (C. 14)
Upper layer	8,550 ± 200 B. P. (C. 14)

UDORN THANI

<i>Ban Chieng,</i>	Nong Harn District (provisionally Neolithic and Metal Age)
70 - 80 cm.	3570 ± 480 B. C. (TL)
130 cm.	3590 ± 275 B. C. (TL)
Below 130 cm.	4,630 ± 520 B. C. (TL)

KHON KAEN

Non Nok Tha, Phu Wieng District (Oldest layers dated roughly before 3000 B. C.)
The burial in which was found a copper socketed axe is.

RIASSUNTO

Le tracce più antiche di credenze religiose si possono osservare nel culto dei morti. In Thailandia non si conoscono sepolture paleolitiche. La prima sepoltura finora nota risale al Mesolitico ed è stata scoperta nel riparo sotto roccia di Sai-Yok. Lo scheletro giaceva in posizione flessa, rivolto verso Nord; ossa animali e conchiglie costituivano forse un'offerta. Una lastra di pietra era posta sopra la parte superiore del corpo. Quest'ultima consuetudine si ritrova anche nell'età del Bronzo, a Lopburi (un solo caso su oltre sessanta tombe), ed esiste ancor oggi nei villaggi. Il popolo Ban Kao la considera un mezzo per impedire allo spirito del defunto di uscire dalla sua tomba e di ritornare a compiere vendette o danni contro i vivi. L'orientazione delle tombe non è mai uniforme, sia nel Neolitico, sia nell'età del Bronzo. Nei villaggi attuali si usa seppellire con il capo rivolto verso Ovest, poichè l'occidente è ritenuto « la direzione della morte ». E' noto che presso i Badariani nell'antico Egitto e i Nuer nel Sudan si trova una identica concezione. Per quanto l'inumazione sarà il modo di seppellimento normale per tutto il periodo preistorico, tuttavia, fin dall'inizio del Neolitico si riscontrano tracce di combustione delle ossa. Comunque la diffusione della cremazione avviene con sicurezza solo agli inizi del periodo protostorico della Thailandia ed è legata all'influenza dell'Induismo e del Buddismo. Le ceneri venivano poste entro urne di terracotta, di bronzo o di porcellana, accompagnate talvolta da bellissime statuette del Buddha.

RÉSUMÉ

Les traces les plus anciennes de croyances religieuses peuvent être observées dans le culte des morts. En Thaïlande, on ne connaît pas de sépultures paléolithiques. La première sépulture connue jusqu'à présent remonte au Mésolithique et a été découverte dans l'abri sous roche de Sai-Yok. Le squelette gisait en position fléchie, orienté vers le Nord; des os d'animaux et des coquillages constituaient peut-être une offrande. Une dalle de pierre recouvrait la partie supérieure du corps. Ce dernier rite se retrouve également à l'Age du Bronze à Lopburi (un seul cas sur 60 tombes) et existe encore dans les villages. Le peuple des Ban Kao le considère comme un moyen pour empêcher l'esprit du mort de sortir de sa tombe et de retourner exécuter des vengeances ou faire des torts aux vivants. L'orientation des tombes n'est jamais uniforme, ni au Néolithique, ni à l'Age du Bronze. Dans les villages actuels, on ensevelit habituellement avec la tête tournée vers l'Ouest, parce que l'Occident est considéré comme la « direction de la mort ». On sait que chez les Badariens de l'ancienne Egypte et les Nuers du Soudan avait cours une conception identique. Bien que l'inhumation soit le mode d'ensevelissement normal pendant toute la période préhistorique, on rencontre toutefois des traces de combustion des os depuis le début du Néolithique. La diffusion de la crémation n'est assurée qu'au début de la période protohistorique en Thaïlande et est liée à l'influence de l'Hindhouisme et du Bouddhisme. Les cendres étaient déposées dans des urnes en terre cuite, en bronze ou en porcelaine, accompagnées parfois de très belles statuettes du Bouddha.

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