



CUPULES

Kumari Abhilasha and Panduranga Sabale

Deccan College Post Graduate And Research Institute, Pune, Maharashtra, India

Article Info

Volume 3 Issue 6

Page Number : 231-235

Publication Issue :

November-December-2020

Article History

Accepted : 01 Dec 2020

Published : 25 Dec 2020

Prologue- Cupules uncommon and very less known word in the world of archaeology, though discussed largely. As to address the word 'cupules', it is a cup-shaped structure. The term "cupules" was invented by the world famous archaeologist Robert G. Bednarik. The discovery of cupules have aroused an environment of discussion amongst scholars, not only in archaeological niches but to my surprise in the world of Mathematics too. The main reason for it to be discussed in different departments was the probable reason for it to be made and the possibilities of its use. Though it is even today really tough to say with a certainty as to how was it used and why was it made. Yet scholars at different places in different countries have given their best explanation which make the study very interesting and worthy to be discussed.

Keywords: Cupules, La Ferrasic, Dari Ka Chattan, Megalithic, Herostone, Aborigines, Petroglyphs.

Introduction- Cupules are the earliest known prehistoric art form which was found from all the continents. They were produced throughout the prehistoric times as well as the historic times. The earliest known cupules art have been found from central India which dates between 2,90,000 and 7,00,000 B.C. The term "cupule" was invented by the world famous archaeologist. Robert G. Bednarik. The earliest known cupules from central India i.e. from Bhimbetka and Devi ka Chattan after archaeological investigation was declared to be made by pre historic men who were using chopping tools similar to the Olduwan cultural of the early lower Paleolithic.

Appearance in Mula river basin- The cupules are mostly seen on the rock boulders instead of rock floor or wall of the cave. The oldest known cupule marks found at Bhimbetka and Dari ka Chattan occur on very hard and erosion – resistant rock surface. It is important now to discuss what cupules actually are and how have they appeared ? Cupules are man – made cup like hollows structure found on stone surface. While exploring the upper reaches of Mula river basin, a major right side tributary to the Godavari rive, these historical engravings could be seen on a rock boulder in the village "Ghoti". Any other of its kind was not found from any of the villages except for this. But it can be said that this was not the only one slab with the cupules made in the region. There must have been more such examples but we couldn't find them during our four major explorations. Ghoti was the village of tribes and herdsman. The cupules found here is associated, somehow, to the Herostones kept in the vicinity of a small temple under the open sky. The stone boulder engraved with cupules was kept under the tree along with the Herostones. This was the edge of the village settlement, and from here onwards was the agriculture field (Abhilasha. K and Sabale P.D 2016).

Appearance in World- In Europe, the oldest known cupule art is discovered from France at the cave called " La ferrasi". These cupules are eighteen in number and is engraved on the lime stone slab that covered the

grave of a child. Bednarik has mentioned that though this is a Middle Paleolithic 'Mountain' grave but this particular funerary art is dated between 70,000 and 40,000 B.C.E.

There are cupules in Europe which belongs to late Mousterian age. These are associated with early Aurignacian art and Magdalenian art, which date back to 40,000 – 25,000 BCE and 15,000 – 20,000 BCE simultaneously (Bednarik, 2008). Internationally it has been discovered throughout America, China, Japan, Arabian Peninsula, Mongolia, Eastern Siberia, Africa from Sahara to South Africa, Australia but stays exceptionally absent in New Zealand.

Appearance in India- Cupules in India appears on the walls and floors of the ancient cave but never on the ceiling (Kumar and Krishna, 2014). These cupules even appear at Neolithic sites and even on solitary outcrops. In 1993 the earlier known cupule from India was discovered from Dari Ka Chattan, Mandasour and Siroli Dongari in M.P., which dates between 2, 90,000 and 7, 00,000 B.C. as mentioned earlier. Other cupule marks were found from Kota, Ajmer, Jaipur, Sikar districts in Rajasthan (Gupte, 2018).

Maharashtra- In India cupules have been found from Maharashtra and have been widely studied by different universities and departments. They have been found from different places at Maharashtra like Jhampani, Buldhana, Chandrapur and Nagpur. The cup marks have been found from Junapani in Maharashtra, found mostly on the peripheral boulders of the stone circles. In Vidarbha, cup marks can be seen at the sites of Moharjhari, Junapani and Naikunai. The important aspect about cup marks at all these sites is that they are found at one, two or three boulders of a few circles. After the documentations of these cup marks it was found that the cup marks bearing boulders are not arranged in set position, and that they can be found in any of the direction. These cup marks are generally arranged in linear patterns and were possibly produced by pecking technique. Some cupule sites have been reworked by later artists, sometimes several thousands of years later. One of the cupule at Moda Bhata, India which was made in 70,000 BCE was re-pounded in 200 C. E. There are some engraved sites in Vidarbha while many are in Western Maharashtra. The rock graving of Ukhalgota (Pullar) lies in Chand Surajhill and Bhim Kund (kuhi), District Nagpur which lies in a hill rock (Abbas, Vahia and Mohanty 2010).

Madhya Pradesh- A report from "The Hindu" describes about the discovery of cupules marks by an amateur archaeologist from Deccan college post Graduate and Research Institute. It was discovered on a hillock in Chandrapur district of Eastern Maharashtra. It has been mentioned that these cup marks were found about three km away from Shankarpur village and resembles the world heritage site "Dari ka Chattan", Madhya Pradesh, as declared by UNESCO. Cupules are often surrounded by concentric circles carved into the stone and a linear channel that leads out from the middle. According to the archaeologist the cupules from the Chandrapur date between 10,000 and 15,000 B.C. Prakash Dolas head of "Rajiv Gandhi Science and Technology Commission, Nagpur" discovered cupules in the vicinity of the temples in 2018, near the Lonar Crater lake in Buldhana district. Dolas said that the most spectacular aspect of these cup marks found from Lonar region is its association with religious structure. Many secular and non-secular edifices in the Vidarbha region have beautiful arrangement of cupules or cup marks strewn over various parts of their build. He said cupules could very well be made on basalt and most of the monuments are made of basalt.

Cupules on Megaliths- Credit to the discovery of cupules in megalithic sites in India should be granted to Rivett – Carnac who in 1879 recounted by sighting of cupules in the stone circles of Junapani in Maharashtra. Cupules in a megalithic site can be observed on horizontal, recumbent and shanted stones as these petroglyphs are an ineffaceable component of many megaliths across the world (Das, 2009). Information of cupules on menhirs although are sparse yet they still pour in as the one from Hirapur in Maharashtra (Powar, 2013). There has been various examples of cupules related to megalith in Jharkhand. Jharkhand is a treasure house of megaliths.

Almost all the district have megaliths and one non-megalithic cupule site in is on a horizontal stone. Raja Gosain a local deity of Silwar village is an ancient menhir standing against a large tree. This megalithic shows quite a large number of cupules on it. It seems as if this was a very significant second site of the primitive men. The glory of this temple must have spread far and wide in the adjoining region. Dr. Giriraj Kumar, the cupule expert of India examined these cupules and said that few cupules were made with iron tool during "Iron age".

Utility of making these Cupules- Now, as to how were these cupules used? Many associate cupules with fertility rites, many with bone burying ceremony like "*Satbharwaan*", some associate it with the symbol of mother Goddess and some interpret it to be astronomically significant studies at a few sites outside India show that these cup marks represent the sky map. The cupules discovered from Chandrapur districts too probably had some astronomical significance. It seems as if engraved on the hillock under the open sky they somehow signify the direction of the sun or the number of members in particular family who were buried at the site. Mayank Vahia professor at Tata institute of fundamental Research department of astrophysics and astronomy is of the opinion that the orientation of the cup mark is not geometrical. They are very random and preliminary. They may have astronomical significance in terms of direction of rising or setting of the sun or may be stars. It must be noted that from sites of Chandrapur some very old tools dating back to 10,000 B.C. have been found from the area near the cupules. The other location of cupule site "Ukhalgota" must have had some different purpose to be made. These cupules are 18 in number with diameter of 15-20 cm. There were plus sign (+) and Swastik engraved in each cupules.

However, the circle and oval sign in all civilization has been associated with feminism and representation of mother Goddess. Das said that circle and oval was the representation of the Great Goddess, an appendage of the now defunct fertility cult that once had carpeted the prehistoric world. Meaden is also of the same opinion and says that cup marks were once associated with female significance and were also held as symbols of the Mother Goddess which is widely accepted now. The study conducted by Dr. Giriraj Kumar shows how these cupules can have an association with mother Goddess cult. He says that the Proto-Australoid Kolarion tribals in Jharkhand who still erect megaliths on their dead regard circular engravings on any surface as "Uri". Similarly, the dreadful poxes on humans which too have circular shapes are also called "Uri" by them. He says that in the non – technological societies of the tribals and of the ruler peasant poxes are considered to be the upshot of the wrath of the Goddess or "*Devimaa*" hence are deemed as the goddess themselves According to his interpretation the cupules or *uri* be the earlier symbols of such outbreaks chicken or small poxes. He says that engraving the cupules on stone surfaces was perhaps a way to honor the Great

Goddess to pacify her wrath. A study conducted by Meaden in 1999 certifies that this cupules can have an association with mother goddess cult as stated by Dr. Giriraj. He says that cupule making although is a forgotten custom today but is still prevalent in a different form among several non-tribal peasant communities. The day after Diwali is known as 'Godhan' and are designated to domestic cattle, in which cattle are bathed and their are with mustard oil in the morning. Thereafter, red circles replicating the archaic cupules are applied all over their body surface with an earthen lamp or diya, which too is deemed as the symbol of the mother Goddess. Now it is very interesting to observe that the Silwar villagers associate the Raja Gosain cupules with the "Satbharwan" rite. Prevalent among the rural peasants since ancient times Satbharwan ritual is a bone burying ceremony. They place the cremated bones of the dead into a small pottery and bury it beside the menhir or immerse them into the flowing river. Therefore, the name Satbharwan for the cupules leads to a hypothesis of it to be engraved as commemoration posterior to the funeral ritual of a dead person of community.

There is yet another interpretation of the cupules which associate it to fertility rites. In 1940, an archaeologist Mount Ford witnessed the making of cupules in central Australia to increase the production of eggs of the pink

Cockatoo. The rock pounded to make cupules was believed by Aborigines to contain the life essence of this bird and the mineral dust rising into the air was believed to fertilize the female Cockatoos.

Utility of making Cupules in Mula, at Ghoti- However, in the case of the cupules found from Ghoti in Mula two different conclusions can be inferred. One, it might have been engraved as a ritual to adore and worship mother Goddess and the other as the commemoration posterior to the funerary ritual of dead people of the community.

Mula valley is the resident of different tribal community who adore mother Goddess by different names like Kalamjai, Waghjai, Yedai. Therefore, to give an Honor to mother Goddess in this symbolic form might have been a prevalent ritual even in Mula valley, as ancient religious practice. The second interpretation suggests its association with the funerary rites. It seems as if there was a practice of megalithic culture here in the surrounding region, most probably in ancient days. This can be said because of the presence of stone slabs used as building material in the houses of the village near around this cupule slab.

There is a circular-oval engraving on this flat and thick slab which appears to be a ritual done for a member. Though this is a single engraving other than the cupules on the boulder but should of course not be ignored. Moreover, the presence of the cupule slab near the Herostone in the vicinity of the village temple somehow associate it to the practice of making memorials for the dead hero which was popular culture in Mula basin. Whether this engraving shows a prior and ancient way of commemoration of the dead heroes is though tough to say. But there is a great strong possibility of it to have a connection with the funerary rights and ancient practice of commemoration of a dead person who might have been socially very important.

Conclusion- Therefore, we can see that though cupules have less been studied but has a remarkable aspect to signify the social practices of ancient days. These cupules may have more than one association and reason for it to be made. But whatever it was, it appears to be an important aspect of belief and ritual, which makes it not feasible for the people belonging to the world of Archaeology to ignore it.

Reference

1. Gupte, S.S. *Select Monastic establishment in the rock art sites of central India*. The Journal of Rock Art Society of India (RASI), Volume 27-28, 2018, Pp.74-78.
2. Neumayer, Erwin. *Lines on stone-The pre-historic rock-art of India*. 1993, Manohar. New Delhi.
3. Gedam. D. Akash. *Rock Art (Petroglyphs) in Vidarbha, Maharashtra* Research paper presented in RASI, conference. 2011. Old Goa.
4. Gedam. D. Akash and Gajbhiya. P. *Mohini. Rock Art in Nagpur District*. Department of Mathematics and Humanities. 2020. All India Oriental Conference- 50th session Nagpur, AIOC Century year Celebration.
5. Bednarik. G. Robert. *Cupules*. Rock Art Research. 2008. Volume 25, Number 1. Pp.61-100.
6. Abbas, Riza; Vahia, Mayank; Mohanty. K. Ravi and Sule, Ankit. *Search for Archaeo astronomical Data from the Megalithic Burials of Juna Pani, Nagpur, Maharashtra*. 2010. Indian Rock Art Research Centre, Nashik and Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, Mumbai.
7. Das. Subhashish. *A brief study of Cupules of a few Megalithic sites in Jharkhand*. Chitrolekha International Magazine on Art and Design. Volume no. 6 No.3. 2016. Pp. 2-14.
8. Abhilasha. K , Sabale. P.D (2016). *Preliminary Report on Geoarchaeological Exploration in upper and middle reaches of Mula river Basin- A Case Study from Ahmednagar District, Maharashtra*. Historicity research Journal. 2016. Volume- 3, Issue- 2. Pp.1-9.