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# Skeletal Remains from the Kudatini-sarcophagus burial

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## Introduction

In March of 2002, while carrying out geoarchaeological analysis of the well known Kudatini ashmound in Bellary District of mid-eastern Karnataka, a joint Cambridge University-Karnatak University archaeological team led by Boivin and Korisettar (see Boivin *et al.*2002) discovered three late prehistoric pots in the section of a Public Works Department trench adjacent to the ashmound (Fig.1). Though two of the pots were slightly damaged, one was fully intact, and it was clear that the pots had been deliberately buried intact. Given the risk of further unrecorded destruction of the locality, the team decided to carefully excavate a small test trench adjacent to the pot find location, in order to obtain contextual information which might help ascertain the significance of the three buried pots (with Biovin *et al.* forthcoming). This pit revealed the existence of a sarcophagus burial of Late Neolithic / Early Iron Age date. The 87 cm long, bathtub shaped terracotta sarcophagus with six legs (Fig.2), was oriented precisely along a north-south axis (see Fig.3). It contained the disarticulated remains of a human child (see Fig.4), as well as animal bones and a red chert blade. The sarcophagus was surrounded by at least 13 pots of Black-and-Red Ware and red ware, some of which also contained skeletal material.

Although the burial did not appear to possess a stone element, it may nonetheless be classed as a 'Megalithic' burial, in accordance with the common usage of this term in the south Indian context (Mohanty and Selvakumar 2001; Moorti 1994). Burials attributed to the so-called Megalithic tradition in south India are actually extremely varied, and some do not even involve stone constructions or markers. Nonetheless, these various burial forms may be grouped together on the basis of a number of shared traits, not all of which are found in any given burial. These include, for example, the presence of black-and-red ware pottery, iron and burial furnishings such as platforms (in rocks and caves.) urns of sarcophagi; orientation relative to the cardinal directions; graffiti marks on pottery and secondary burial vs. inhumation of skeletal remains. The Kudatini burial possessed some, but not all, of these traits, and displayed certain characteristics that link it also with the Neolithic period (Boivin *et al.* Forthcoming), suggesting that it may be a very early example of a Megalithic style burial.

Relative to many south Indian Megalithic burials, the majority of which contain a few poorly preserved skeletal elements or lack a skeletal component entirely (McIntosh 1985; Mohanty and Selvakumar 2001), the Kudatini skeletal remains displayed good preservation. In addition,

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**Table 1: Inventory and preservation of human skeletal elements found with the sarcophagus and pots**

| Skull | Dentition | Thoracic cage | Upper extremity | Lower extremity |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Frontal:** L side is better preserved than the R side; | **Maxilla:** maxillary fragment with RLI1, L12 and RPm1 in crypt and Rdc, Rdm 1 and Rdm2 in situ. LC, RPm2, RM1, RLM2 (L is preserved in 2 crown fragments) | **Ribs:** there are 33 small to medium sized rib fragments, of which 25 are mid portion and 8 from the proximal (head-vertebral) ends. | **Scapula:** For R side, glenoid cavity, part of coracoid process, part of spine, acromoion; axilary border and body part. For L, side two fragments, from axillary border and part of spine. | **Femur:** L proximal extremity with greater and lesser tronchanter. |
| **Parietal:** R side is more complete than the L side | | **Vertebrae:** three cervical vertebrae including axis, 3rd and 5th. | | **Tibia:** R almost complete but distal end is missing and proximal end is damaged. |
| **L temporal** fragment including mastoid process and petrous portion; | **Mandible:** almost complete except R coronoid process and L Condylar portion. LPm 1 RC and RM2 are in crypt. R12 is isolated. RLdm 1 (R crown is half broken), RL dm2, RM1, LM2 (isolated). | One damaged thoracic vertebral body. | **Clavicle:** R almost complete. | **Fibula:** R shift portions. L complete. |
| **Occipital** is preserved in small to medium-sized fragments; R and L occipital condylar portion. | | Posterior portion of lumber vertebra including superior articular facets and spinous process. | **Radius:** R almost complete, head is missing; L shaft fragment, both extremities are missing. | There are 9 small long bone fragments. |
| | | 11 fragments of vertebral column (individual identification is not possible) | **Ulna:** R complete | Two damaged **epiphyseal caps.** |
| | | | One **metacarpal.** | **6 phalanges,** individual identification is not possible. |

skeletal remains were discovered in some of the pots that accompanied the burial, while in the vast majority of excavated Megalithic graves in south India, the multiple pots that are often found as burial furnishings are devoid of biological of cultural material (Mohanty and Selvakumar 2001). It was therefore recognised that the Kudatini burial provided an excellent opportunity to gain some unique insights into Megalithic burial practices, and to shed new light on the handling of human skeletal remains by the people who created these graves. The human skeletal material from the Kudatini burial was therefore transferred to the Department of Archaeology, Deccan College, Pune, for detailed recording and analysis by Mushrif and Walimbe. This report addresses the observations and findings that emerged from this analysis, and their implications. More detailed discussion of the Kudatini burial can be found in Boivin *et al.* (forthcoming), and colour photographs of the burial appear on the Bellary District Archaeological Project website.

## Results

### A. Skeletal inventory and preservation

After excavation, the total contents of the sarcophagus were dry sieved through a 2.5 mm sieve, while those from the pots were sieved through a 1mm to recover small finds. All skeletal material was collected and sent to Deccan College for identification and analysis. The total skeletal inventory is summarised in Table 1. Most of the Kudatini burial skeletal remains were located within the sarcophagus itself, where they were concentrated in a pile approximately half-way between the two ends (Figs.4 and 5). Some skeletal elements were also found distrib-

uted into some of the pots that surrounded the sarcophagus, however (Fig. 5 and Table 2). The skeletal elements within the sarcophagus and the pots are identical in both size and general morphological appearance. In addition, some of the remains from the pots articulate perfectly with skeletal remains found within the sarcophagus or in other pots (Table 3). For example, Pot F contained a near complete mandible, the left ascending ramus of which was found in the sarcophagus. In Pot D, two cervical vertebrae (the 3rd and the 5th) were found that were consistent in size with the axis vertebra found in Pot J. Also, no skeletal elements from the pots appear to be duplicated in the sarcophagus or in other pots. It is thus very likely that the skeletal remains from the sarcophagus and the pots all belong to a single individual.

**Table 2: Inventory and preservation of skeletal elements found within the individual pots**

| Pot* | Type | Graffiti marks | Skeletal material |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Black-and-Red Wate (large) | double curved/straight lines | n/a‡ |
| 2 | Red Ware (med.) | double curved/straight lines | none |
| 3 | Red Ware (med.) | double curved/straight lines | 1 epiphyseal cap, unidentified, but human; and 2 small-sized unidentifiable (1-1.5 cm; longbone?) fragments, some of which show signs of discoloration, possibly resulting from exposure to fire |
| A | Red Ware (med.) | arrow marks; base of inside also contains sets of double lines crossed by double lines | 1 human vetebra (missing); broken shaft of left radius, 10.3 cm long and preserved in 2 pieces (only mid-shaft portion; extremities not preserved); and 2 tiny unidentifiable bone fragments |
| B | Black-andRed Ware (small) | double curved/straight lines | none |
| C | Red Ware (med.) | arrow marks | none |
| D | Red Ware (med.) | double curved/straight lines | 2 human cervical vertebrae, 3rd and 5th, complete but lightly damaged on the body (3rd) an foramina transversarium (5th); and 1 small-sized unidentfiable bone fragment |
| E | Black-and-Red Ware (med.) | fish-shaped mark, variants of arrow mark (?), etc. | none |
| F | Red Ware (med.) | double curved/straight lines | 1 near complete human mandible, with single tooth in crypt; and 1 broken body of human thoracic vertebra |
| G | Black-and-Red Ware (med.) | double curved/straight lines | none |
| H | Black-and-Red Ware (med.) | double curved/straight lines | 1 small, unidentifiable bone |
| I | Red Ware (med.) | double curved/straight lines | none |
| J | Red Ware (med.) | double curved/straight lines | I human axis vertebra, 2 unidentifiable long bone fragments |

*Pots 1-3 were discovered in an exposed section prior to excavation, Pots A-J during the excavation itself.

‡This pot was broken, and the sediment with in had thus been disturbed.

**Table 3: Skeletal elements in pots that share strong morphological similarities to those in other pot or within the sarcophagus**

| Skeletal element in pot | Location of matching skeletal element |
|---|---|
| Brokent shaft of left radius in Pot A | Right radius in sarcophagus |
| 3rd and 5th cervical vertebrae in Pot D | Axis vertebra in Pot J |
| Nearly complete mandible in Pot F | Left ascending ramus of mandible in sarcophagus |

The representation of skeletal elements for this individual is incomplete (Fig. 5). Many of the bones missing from the skeletal assemblage are the smaller bones (eg. Metacarpals and phalanges) and finer ones (eg. The facial bones). However, larger bones like the right femur, the humeri, and the pelvic blades are also missing. There do not seem to be any clear patterns in terms of the representation of skeletal elements in the sarcophagus versus the pots, except that the pots seem to some degree to be dominated by vertebral elements. Rib bones, meanwhile, cluster in the sarcophagus.

While the Kudatini skeletal remains are well preserved relative to those in other Iron Age megalithic contexts in south India, they have nonetheless suffered substantial weathering effects. Bones are dry and brittle, with a chalky consistency when outer surfaces are scraped away with a scalpel. Protein preservation is poor, thus preventing radiocarbon dating of either the bones or teeth from the burial. A single bone fragment (in Pot 3) displayed discoloration possibly resulting from exposure to fire. Preservation of external bone morphology nonetheless permitted morphological identification and analysis.

## B. Observations

### i. Age estimation

The individual represented by this skeletal collection is sub-adult. Age has been estimated on the basis of the four long bones and twenty-two teeth found in the burial.

For long bones like the ulna, radius, femur and tibia, epiphyseal fusion is not seen. Three bones are measurable and the diaphyseal lengths of these bones are as follows:

Right Ulna: 17.3 cm
Right Radius: 15.8 cm (estimate)
Left Fibula: 24.0 cm

Walimbe-Gambhir (1994) provide charts for diaphyseal lengths of long bones for the age group '0-60 months'. They also observe that proto-historic children in this region exhibit a standard growth rate of approximately 80% of the normal growth rate (ibid.). Accordingly, the age of this individual at the time of death can be inferred to have been greater than 60 months, and probably around 6 years.

The second and more reliable indication of age comes from the dental evidence. The 22 teeth preserved for this individual exhibit various degrees of crown calcification and eruption.

All deciduous teeth were erupted and in use at the time of the individual's death. The deciduous second molar dm 2 is the last tooth to erupt in this category, around 30-32 months. This tooth exhibits a considerable amount of wear, and the occlusal morphology is obliterated to a great extent. The wear pattern suggests an age of more than 5.5 years.

Two permanent molars, URMI and LRMI, were fully erupted and in use at the time of death. Eruption of these molars is usually complete at around 6.5 years, provided there are no major nutritional insults.

Crown calcification for the second premolar is usually complete around 6 to 7 years. For this child, the maxillary RPm2 is preserved and exhibits almost completely calcified crown. Mandibular LPm2 is seen in its crypt. For this tooth also, crown calcification is probably complete. These observations suggest an age of around 6 to 6.5 years.

Crown calcifications for the maxillary first permanent incisors RLIIs, which usually finishes at the age of 5 years, are also complete. For URII, root formation has also commenced, and is approximately one third complete.

The Maxillary left canine, ULC, also has a completely calcified crown, a stage that is usually achieved at the age of 6 to 7 years.

Union of the two halves of the neural arch and the fusion of arch and body is complete.

On the basis of these various lines of evidence, the age of the individual buried in the Kudatini sarcophagus, at the time of death, may be estimated at around 6-7 years.

### ii. Sex determination

Sex determination for this individual was not possible because this is a sub-adult specimen.

## iii. Cranial morphology

Neurocranial elements are preserved in the form of disarticulated small to medium sized fragments and no bone is complete. No facial bones are represented in the collection, except the jaw-bones (Pl. and 2). The bones are delicately built because of the young age of the specimen. No distinct morphological assessment is possible on the preserved bones.

## iv. Dentition

### a) Dental measurements

Amongst the skeletal remains was a total of 22 teeth. Of these, 12 are from the maxilla (3 deciduous and 9 permanent) and 10 derive from the mandible (5 deciduous and 5 permanent). Of these, only 14 teeth are measurable; the remaining are either broken, or not fully developed and still inside the crypt.

Following Moorrees' technique (1957a, 1957b), two basic measurements have been carried out for each tooth:1) maximum crown length (mesio-distal diameter); and 2) maximum crown breadth (ducco-lingual diameter). The mesio-distal diameter (MD) is the maximum dimension on the tooth crown in the mesio-distal direction, parallel to the occlusal and the labial surface. The bucco-lingual crown diameter (BL) is the greatest distance between the duccal and the lingual surface of tooth crown in a plane perpendicular to that of the mesio-distal diameter.

The primary comparative standard in the analysis of tooth size is the crown area (CA) or the cross-sectional area of the tooth. Crown area reflects the adaptive strategies of the population in response to subsistence patterns and level of technology. Since the dentition preserved for this individual is incomplete, no such analysis was possible however. The crown index (CI), a measure of crown shape, is the ratio of mesio-distal and bucco-lingual diameter expressed in terms of a percentage, as discussed by Wolpoff (1971). The measure of crown bulk, termed crown module (CM), is the average of the mesio-distal and bucco-lingual values.

The formulae for calculating crown area, crown index and crown module are given below:

**Table 4: Dental crown dimensions and indices.**

| Tooth | Side | Crown Dimentions | | Crown Indices | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | MD | BL | CA | CI | CM |
| **Maxillary** | | | | | | |
| dc | R | 7.91 | 7.12 | 56.31 | 111.09 | 7.51 |
| dm1 | R | 7.90 | 8.73 | 68.96 | 90.49 | 8.31 |
| dm2 | R | 9.74 | 10.19 | 99.25 | 95.58 | 9.96 |
| I1 | R | (8.91) | -- | | | |
| | L | 9.28 | (7.09) | 65.79 | 130.88 | 8.18 |
| I2 | L | 7.52 | 7.17 | 53.91 | 104.88 | 7.34 |
| C | L | 9.52 | 7.67 | 71.71 | 121.90 | 8.51 |
| Pm2 | R | 8.29 | 9.75 | 80.82 | 85.02 | 9.02 |
| M1 | R | 11.95 | 11.87 | 141.84 | 100.67 | 11.91 |
| M2 | R | 10.81 | 12.04 | 130.15 | 89.78 | 11.42 |
| Mandibular | | | | | | |
| dm1 | L | 8.85 | 7.02 | 62.12 | 126.06 | 7.93 |
| dm2 | R | 10.96 | 9.51 | 104.22 | 113.24 | 10.23 |
| | L | (10.87) | 9.42 | 102.39 | 115.39 | 10.14 |
| I2 | R | 7.43 | 5.65 | 41.97 | 131.50 | 6.54 |
| M1 | R | 12.51 | 11.54 | 14.36 | 108.40 | 12.02 |

CA = MD X BL
CI = ND X 100¯BL
CM = (MD+BL) ¯2

Odontometric data is given in Table.4

## b) Dental morphology

Occlusal morphology of the deciduous molars is obliterated, thus precluding any morphological assessment. Limited morphological observations are possible on four permanent teeth, ULC, URMI, URM2, and LLMI. The Arizona State University anthropology Scoring System (Turner *et al.* 1991) is followed.

In the maxillary canines, the mesiolingual marginal ridge is normally similar in size to the distolingual marginal ridge. Occasionally, the mesial ridge is larger than the distal ridge and is moderately attached to the tuberculum dentale as seen in the ULC of this individual (Pl. 3). The expression of this feature can be rated as 'grade 2' (ASU grading system). The extreme form of this morphological feature is frequent in Africans (especially Bushmen) and has been described ad *'Bushman canine'* (Morrees 1975, quoted in Turner *et al.* 1991).

The distolingual (cusp 4), hypocone of large sized 'grade 4' is seen on URMI, while the expression is very faint for URM2, which is graded as 'I'. An additional small cusp is seen on the distobuccal surface of URMI.

For mandibula LMI, a Y-5 cusp groove pattern is seen. The expression of cusp 5, hypoconulid is of medium size (grade 3) (Pl. 4).

## v. Pathological lesions and anomalies

Important pathologies seen on this specimen include dental enamel development disturbances, attrition of occlusal surface, and lesions on one vertebra.

## a) Vertebral pathology

Three cervical vertebrae (axis, 3rd and 5th) are preserved for this individual, of which the axis and the 5th do not show any signs of bone change. However, the body and the right transverse process of the 3rd cervical vertebra shows some bone remodelling. The extent of the lesion is about 1.5 cm on the anterior part, destroying the border of the vertebral body inferior to the right side. The bone is thin along the right transverse foramina border, as compared to the left side (Pl. 5). Even the inferior articular facets (more to the right side) also exhibit some bone remodelling (Pl. 6).

It is difficult to diagnose the etiology of this lesion at this stage. It could be traumatic in origin, but it was definitely not the immediate cause of death. There are definite signs of secondary bone formation at the site, and the edges of the lesion are rounded. Unfortunately, the 4th cervical vertebra is not included in the collection, as this element could have confirmed traumatic origin of the lesion. The other possible cause of this pathology is a non-specific infection. A wide range of pathogens are known to have influence in remodelling bones of the thoracic cage. However, since this specimen is coming from the cervical region, specific diagnosis of the pathology, if any, is difficult.

## b) Enamel hypoplasia

Enamel hypoplasias are deficiencies in enamel thickness resulting from physiological disruptions during enamel formation (Pindborg 1970). The developing tooth responds to environmental stresses encountered during its growth. Disturbances in the formative phase result in lack of enamel production, and the resulting defect may occur localized within a single tooth or tooth class, or may be evident throughout the dental arcade of an individual as pits, lines, or bands of hypomineralization.

For this individual, enamel hypoplastic lines are seen on the maxillary LI1 (2 lines?), LC (1line), and RM2 (1 line) (Pl. 7). It is interesting to note that all the hypoplasic lines are seen only on the permanent teeth, which were still developing and were inside their respective crypts at the time of death of this individual. In several Neolithic-Chalcolithic period sites of the Deccan region, defective enamel formation in deciduous teeth has been taken to indicate possible nutritional or pathological stress in the womb (Lukacs *et. al.* 2001). This kind of abnormality is not observed in the deciduous teeth of the individual buried at Kudatini, however.

The hypoplastic lines are very faint, making it difficult to measure their distance from the cemento-enamel

junction. In addition, all of these teeth were still being formed at the time of the individual's death, and bear some post-mortem damage. The approximate distances of the centre of the lesion from the cemento-enamel junction are; LI1:4.9 mm (crown height 13.2 mm), LC: 3.4 (estimated crown height 11.1 mm), and RM2: 2.5 mm (estimated crown height 7.6 mm). On the basis of these measurements, it can be inferred that this individual must have experienced at least two episodes of stress, either nutritional or pathological. The hypoplastic line on the incisor is indicative of a stress which probably occurred around the age of 3 years, whereas the lines on LC and RM2 reflect a second episode of stress which took place when this individual was around 5 years old (Mushrif 2002).

### c) Attrition

Dental attrition is a normal reaction of teeth to mastication of food and other uses of teeth. The degree of attrition is based on the quality of food in the diet, as well as the techniques used to prepare it. Coarse food increases attrition rates. Rates of attrition are higher in hunting-gathering (Mesolithic) populations due to the consumption of unprocessed food (Brace 1978' Walimbe and Kulkarni 1993). In contrast, they are lower amongst farming (Neolithic/Chalcolithic) communities, in which cooked food was the dominant ingested form.

Moderate dental attrition is seen on the mandibular RLdm1s and RLdm2s. The crown of Rdm 1 is half broken, and complete gradation of attrition is not possible. According to *Standards for Data Collection from Human Skeletal Remains* (Buikstra and Ubelaker 1998), the wear pattern on Ldm1 may be scored as 'grade 2' (in which wear facets are large but large cuspe still present; see Scott 1979). For RLdm2, the pattern is 'grade 6', meaning that dentine exposed dentine is almost 3.5 mm deep (Fig. 9). This type of attrition is rather difficult to explain and may be attributed to possible caries infection, though confirmation of this pathology is not possible. The corresponding teeth in the upper jaw URdm1 and URdm2 of the maxilla, which would be expected to be affected also, are unworn and almost completely devoid of any enamel loss. Therefore, caries infection or the presence of a patch of deficient enamel on the occlusal surface appear to be the most likely etiological causes behind this unusual type of wear pattern (Fig. 7).

## Discussion

The disarticulated nature of the skeletal remains in the Kudatini burial, and their deposition not only in the sarcophagus, but also in some of the burial pots that surrounded the sarcophagus, indicate this to be a secondary burial. Analysis of the skeletal elements from the sarcophagus and pots has led to the conclusion that the remains derive from a single individual, who probably died at the age of six or seven years. There is no clear indication of the cause of death, though enamel hypoplasia patterns suggest at least two episodes of nutritional or pathological stress during the child's short life, and analysis of the vertebrae revealed a lesion on the third cervical vertebra that was possibly traumatic in origin, though may also have derived from a non-traumatic cause. Even if traumatic, however, the latter was not the immediate cause of death, which remains unknown.

Although the skeletal remains from the Kudatini burial display taphonomic effects and little preservation of protein, they are nonetheless in excellent condition relative to the remains found in many South Megalithic burials. While the fact that we are dealing only with a single individual renders it difficult to make any reliable interpretations about economic and subsistence practices on the basis of the skeletal remains, it is possible to make some tentative suggestions concerning the burial process that led to the deposition of the bones within the sarcophagus and pots at Kudatini. As indicated, it seems likely that the Kudatini burial represents a reburial of skeletal remains that were initially buried or exposed elsewhere (although the possibility that the primary burial/exposure also took place at Kudatini, and indeed within the same pit, cannot be ruled out.) The absence of many of the smaller skeletal elements (like the metacarpals that it may not have been considered necessary to gather all the skeletal elements from the primary burial site (Dulanot 2002: 110; though taphonomic effects cannot of course be ruled out). Certain elements do appear to have been important, however. For example, the pot contents display a clear preference for vertebral elements (and possibly long bones as well), while numerous rib bone fragments occur in the sarcophagus. Analysis of Table 2 did not reveal any clear pattern of association of skeletal elements with particular pot type or graffiti form.

What emerges then is picture of a primary burial (or

exposure) at time of death, followed by subsequent exhumation, manipulation and reburial of some, but perhaps not all, of the skeletal remains. Ethnographic studies of secondary rites suggest that there was likely to have been a long intermediary period between the primary burial/exposure and secondary burial, during which time the body was transformed from corpse to defleshed nones (Hertz 1960; Huntington and Metcalfe 1979; Parker Pearson 1999). As in many societies that practice secondary reburial, primary and secondary rites may also have been spatially segregated (Barrett 1996; Parker Pearson 1999), such that exhumation of the bones was followed by their transfer from the original burial or exposure ground (perhaps located at or near a settlement site) to Kudatini for final burial. The entire process, from initial burial/exposure to final burial, may have been understood, as it is in a number of contemporary societies, as representing, enabling or assisting the transition of the person's 'soul' from the world of the living to the world of the dead (Hertz 1960; Huntington and Metcalfe 1979).

It seems clear, based on the structured placement of the remains and burial furnishings within the grave, that the secondary reburial at Kudatini was an event of ritual significance during which the skeletal remains were manipulated in particular, no doubt meaningful ways. In societies that practice secondary burial, manipulation of the exhumed bones in the context of secondary rites is a common practice: bones may be scraped clean, washed, wrapped, laid out in a particular arrangement or grouped with the bones of other individuals , for example (Huntington and Metcalf 1979; Parker Pearson 1999). In Neolithic Britain, it has been hypothesised that disarticulated bones were continually shifted around, within and sometimes even between different megalithic tombs, for the purpose of asserting a particular collective ethic (Barret *et al.* 1991; Shanks and Tilley 1982, 1987).

In a similar way, the selection or exclusion of particular skeletal elements at the final burial of the Kudatini remains, and their deposition within either the raised, north-south oriented central sarcophagus, or lower, peripheral pots must certainly have had some sort of meaningful aim. It may be that this arrangement drew upon structural oppositions between high and low, and inside and outside, for example, and/or upon symbolic meanings associated with particular cardinal directions. Ethnographically, cardinal directions and other structural oppositions are often linked to fundamental social and symbolic distinctions between the sacred and the profane, male and female and life and death, for example. These kinds of associations may have been played upon during the course of the reburial ritual to reaffirm cosmological understandings that may perhaps have been particularly challenged by the death of a young member of society. It is likely that by organising the child's skeletal remains in the way that they did, the graveside mourners at Kudatini drew upon wider structural principles and symbolic associations to comment upon the death that had occurred and to comprehend its place in their overall cosmological understanding of the world, its renewal and the place of the ephemeral individual within this continuous scheme (Bloch and Parry 1982).

The discovery of well-preserved skeletal remains in a Megalithic burial context is an important find for the archaeology of south India. In particular, the identification of skeletal remains in burial pots is exciting, since such pots are usually found to be empty in Megalithic graves. However, it is important to bear in mind that the Kudatini burial cannot be taken as representative of south Indian Megalithic practices in general, which have shown abundant evidence for variation both across space and through time (McIntosh 1985; Mohanty and Selvakumar 2001). The particular manipulation of skeletal remains practiced at Kudatini in the case of the present burial made sense within local strategies and cosmologies which need not necessarily have held wide currency across south India. Regardless of how wide-ranging the practices suggested by the Kudatini skeletal remains may or may not have been, however, their investigation in the present paper constitutes an important contribution to archaeological understanding of the Megalithic phenomenon in south India.

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