Abstract: This thesis examines the megalithic monuments of peninsular India – commonly accepted as belonging to the south Indian Iron Age (roughly 1200BC – 500BC), for intentional alignments of the whole monuments or design components to points of astronomical interest on the local horizon. This is in order to understand the level of intellectual development and status of knowledge systems extant among the cultures that authored these monuments, which is not revealed by conventional archaeological examination of the material culture of these peoples. The methodology employed was to arrive at a shortlist of megalithic monuments/sites to be visited from extensive survey of the available literature and conduct reconnaissance surveys of these. In all 33 sites (20 in Karnataka, 8 in Kerala, 3 in Vidarbha region of Maharashtra and 1 in Tamil Nadu) were visited. Of these, orientation surveys were carried out at 12 sites, partial surveys at 4 sites and complete surveys at another 4 sites. The sepulchral/memorial megaliths were found to have different orientational practices in different regions. We have recorded sites with no preferred orientation, exclusively south-facing monuments and others that showed a preference for east/west facing orientations. We have proposed, based on stylistic chronology of the monuments, that the earliest megalithic types had no preferred orientations to cardinal directions or were exclusively north-south oriented. The later, architecturally more developed monuments preferred east-west orientations. However, it is the study of the non-sepulchral megalith type called menhirs/alignments (or avenues) that yielded the main result of this investigation. We have found that there is a unique megalithic “avenue” type monument in southern coastal Karnataka consisting of several menhirs (either quarried slabs or natural boulders of elongated cross-sections) that are erected on end in specific patterns that are aligned to the extreme rising/setting points of the Sun and Moon on the local horizon. This megalithic type, that we have named the “Nilaskal type” after the extensive type site south of Hosanagara, is represented by 5 sites – Nilaskal, Byse, Heragal, Mumbaru and Aaraga Gate. We have also studied Nagbhid – a similar site in Vidarbha, which extends the geographical range of this type. Two hitherto unrecorded sites were discovered during this study.

Keywords: Archaeoastronomy, megaliths, menhir, stone alignment, solstices, lunistics, Nilaskal, Byse, Heragal, Mumbaru, Aaraga Gate