

IRON AGE MEGALITHIC BURIALS OF MALABAR WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO NADUVIL , SREEKANDAPURAM AND VELAM (KANNUR)

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ABSTRACT:This paper tries to unfold some of the major iron-age megalithic burials of northern Kerala, Kannur. There is an existence of many megalithic sites like Naduvil, Sreekandapuram, Velam, Ezilode, Korom, Churathottukar, Tachankundu, Kottakunnu, Kurishumukku, Matilda, Chengal, Trikott, Kozummal, Onakunnu etc in Kannur. This region is highly connected with the megalithic culture as proven by archaeological evidence. But very least attention is given to these sites as compared to the explorations in southern parts of Kerala. The burials that are discovered here are quite different. These sites are closely connected to the Pazayagadi river belt. This gives an advanced level of living culture along with settled agricultural practices. The major archaeological remains from this region include Thoppikal, Kodakal, menhir, urn burials, stone circles, cist, dolmens etc. This study tries to deal with some major sites like Naduvil, Sreekandapuram, and Velam.

Keywords: Megaliths, Naduvil, Sreekandapuram, Velam, Kannur, Northern Kerala.

INTRODUCTION

The archaeological artefacts of the megalithic period are the major pathway for understanding the past megalithic culture. The monument of granite rock built over a burial is called Megaliths. The archaeological findings from Kerala connected with megalithic culture make an advancement in the history of India. The prehistoric evidence from Kerala gives a better understanding about the shift of the period from Palaeolithic to Megalithic culture. The megalithic burial is seen as the major material evidence for the study of the Iron Age period in Kerala. The presence of the Iron Age is reported based on the burial findings. Also, the monuments and burials show the possibility of human settlements.

EARLY ATTEMPTS

There were very limited studies done regarding the understanding of megalithic culture. The British government under Madras's presidency made a massive attempt to document the megalithic sites of Northern Kerala¹. William Logan had excavated a rock-cut chamber along with megalithic assemblages including pots and iron implements from Thaliparamba². Robert Swell's "List of Antiquarian remains in the presidency of Madras" brought out taluka wise distribution of Megalithic burials. This list was the most helpful for conducting field research for relocating sites and also for bringing out new sites. Swell was the last one to provide data for the same. Thereafter no serious attempts were made regarding it³.

¹Babington, J. 1823. "Description of the Pandoo Coolies in Malabar" Transactions of the Literary Society of Bombay 3: 324-330.

²Logan, William. 1887 (2000). Malabar Manual Vol I and II. Trivandrum.

³Sewell, Robert (1882). Lists of the antiquarian remains in the presidency of Madras Vol.1. Madras.

METHODOLOGY

The colonial period was the last time the discussion regarding the megalithic period happened. There are only two major sites excavated from this area of study that is Naduvil and Benglamottapparamba. Most of these sites accidentally came out with the help of locals during construction work. There is no documentation done and discarded by the people after a few days. These are in the hands of private people thus due to a lack of knowledge regarding the importance of the artefacts they ignore them. Thus none came in to record. A regional-wise reporting of such findings needs to be made for a better understanding of future studies.⁴ Only two methods are used for documentation that is a village-to-village survey, second is the collection of information from locals related to the discoveries that they made. The memories were the major way to get information by connecting with more people. Primary documentation includes understanding the features of monuments and geographical uniqueness. The second is dealing with the geo-cultural aspects like topography, vegetation, water etc.⁵

The region under study is densely populated thus a detailed excavation is not possible. The only possible way is the systematic exploration and its scientific documentation. Nearly thirty-four megalithic sites were discovered and documented in the Kannur district. Multiple hood

⁴Mohanty, R.K, Selvakumar, V. 2002. "The Archeology of Megaliths in India: 1947-1997" in S. Settar, Ravi Korisetar. *Pre history Archeology of South Asia Voll*. Manohar, New Delhi.

⁵Rajesh, K.P. 2011. *Historical Geography of Kolathunadu: A study of the regional formation in medieval North Kerala*. Unpublished PhD thesis, Calicut University.

stone circles, rock-cut chambers, umbrella stone and urn burials were found. The major megalithic monument was rock-cut chambers. At Sreekandapuram rock-cut sepulchre and chamber with square-type doors were found. The chambers consist of port holes at the top of the roof and are covered with a laterite stopper.

Naduvil: Multiple Stone Circle, fourteen decorated stone blocks. Among the three one explored earlier. Major artefacts include a bronze vase unidentified bronze equipment, knives, chaise, iron saucer lamp, dagger, iron sword, iron tripod, earthen vase, quartz bead, crystal bead, pot and ring stand. Its topology was laterite hillock near to eastern mountain. Chapparapadavu Kuppam river belt.⁶

Sreekandapuram: Rock-cut sepulchre single chambers with a round pillar at the centre and a stone platform on the north eastern side of the cave, the entrance remained still unopened. Twenty-two pots in red and black colour each pot with lid, iron chisel or spearhead, and bone fragments were major artefacts. The topology of this is the small hillock slope near to paddy field Valapattanam river belt.

Velam: Umbrella stone huge orthostat titled four stone block as clinostat in dilapidated condition, Urn burials, two rock-cut sepulchres single chamber with port hole decorated door jamb. All these are found in garden land very close to Velam vayal, the Valapattanam river belt.

⁶ John, K. J. 1990. "Unpublished excavation report of Naduvil, Kannur district" Calicut University, cited in Manjula Poyil. (2006). Death Funeral and Ancestors : cults of the dead and the Malabar tribes. Unpublished PhD thesis, Calicut University.

A destroyed pillared chamber was found from Sreekandapuram. The difference in the size and structure of the burials shows that the megalithic builders were leaning toward some kind of concern for the dead based on their social power or status. A cluster of the huge stone circles and rock-cut sepulchre inside the circle is reported from Naduvil. Umbrella stone with massive mushroom type orthostat made of a single laterite stone block and the clinostat made of three, four slabs at the bottom is found at Velam also there is local information to bring out the discovery of urn burials from Velam.

Most of these were found out by locals but due to lack of attention most of them were destroyed and the only way now to reach out is through the memories of people. Locals had given important pieces of information like one powder discovered from an extended human burial, also pots like black and red ware, red slipped leg jar with lids or stands from a rock-cut chamber from Sreekandapuram. But none of them was preserved.

Water availability was an important factor in selecting settlement sites. The distribution of the megaliths in river belts brings out the preferences of early settlers. The megalithic sites found around this region show the importance and need for detailed archaeological exploration. Rock-cut sepulchres were the major burial type found in this region. The area of study is the laterite area and monuments are found on slopes of laterite hillocks slopes.⁷

Some of the major patterns of the burial sites show their uniqueness. Most of the megalithic monuments are found majorly in high rocky grounds unfit for cultivation. Connected to the waterside. Due to the lack of fertility of the soil, the area is unproductive and soil deposition

⁷ Moorti, Udaya Ravi. S. 1994. *Megalithic Culture of South India*. Ganga Kaveri Publishing house, Varanasi.

does not happen regularly. We can see a cluster of rock-cut sepulchres spread over a particular area, this highlights that there is an existence of a separate area for the dead. This plot is seen mostly close to the settlements.⁸ Burials are a sign of the existing historical importance of the region. Due to fear or respect for the ancestors, most of the burials are untouched by locals thus all these are still present. The burials are a great pathway to knowing about settlements in that region. The area where megalithic burials were found witnessed a high population⁹. In a general sense, there is evidence of remains of temples, dwelling spaces and scared grooves. There is also evidence of skilled occupational practices in these regions¹⁰. This can be proved by the monolithic monuments and unearthed burial goods. This can be only formed in a society with surplus accumulation. The megalithic period is the best example of an increased population and specialised craft groups.¹¹

The megalithic period is a transition from a hunting and food gathering society to a sedentary agricultural-based society. This can be understood based on the burial goods found in this region. But irrigation-based agriculture was the feature of post megalithic period.¹² There are also references to the accessibility of alloy technology with the findings of copper and bronze from regions like Naduvil. This shows the existence of an exchange system.¹³

⁸ Sastri, K.A. Nilakanta. 2009. *The Illustrated History of South India: From Pre historic times to the fall of Vijayanagar*, with an introduction by R. Chambaka Lakshmi and an epilogue By P.M. Rajan Gurukkal. OUP. New Delhi. 7.

⁹ Narayanan, M.G.S. 1972. Index to Chera inscription (c.800-1124 A.D) a companion Volume, to the doctoral thesis on "Political and social conditions of Kerala under the Kulasekhara empire", University of Kerala.

¹⁰ Mohanty, R.K, Selvakumar, V. 2002. "The Archaeology of Megaliths in India: 1947-1997" in S. Settar, Ravi Korisetar. *Pre history Archaeology of south Asia Vol I*. Manohar, New Delhi. 313-351.

¹¹ John, K.J. 1982. "Perambra 1979; New lights on Kodakkals of Malabar" R. K. Sharma, Indian Archaeology New Perspectives. Agam Kala Prakashan, New Delhi. 148-154.

¹² Gurukkal, Rajan. 1992. *The Kerala Temple and the Early medieval agrarian system*. Sukapuram. 16-17.¹³ Rajesh. K.P. 2014. Iron Age Megalithic Burials of Perumba, Kuppam, Valapattanam and Pazayangadi River Belt, Kannur District, Northern Kerala, India. *Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies in Archeology* 2(2014). 383- 404.

SOCIETAL GROWTH

A social progression, to a certain degree, from the Stone Age to the early notable period is apparent within the current archaeological databases of Kerala. Neolithic substance Citrari, Ummichipoyil and copper or bronze Naduvil, Paithoth, Chakkoththuparamba etc remains yielded from the Megalithic setting, it is conceivable to contend that the Iron Age culture of Kerala covered with the concluding stages of Neolithic- Chalcolithic culture. The accessible Iron instruments and objects like a

trident, spearhead, sharpened stones, knife, sickle, sword, tripod, light, ploughshare etc from the Iron Age archaeological settings have shown that the Iron innovation come to an advanced stage during the Iron Age and early memorable periods. Subsequently, the megaliths have spoken to an advanced organise of press innovation.

The megaliths are the burial practice of the Iron Age and early historic periods. The mortal remains from the megaliths have uncovered that the Iron Age society followed different shapes of burial hones. Both essential and extended burial practices were broadly practised in South India. Mainly spoken to the presence of different social bunches who followed different frames of burial frameworks. It moreover underscores the conceivable increment of population and development of settlements within the Iron Age period. The megalithic landmarks are treated as the pagodas of the predecessors and the living society was given offerings. The dead got the status of the soul after passing even now and the individuals accepted that they have powerful control to control the universe.¹⁴

¹⁴John, K.J.(1974). "Rock-cut chamber Tombs of Chitrari: Some new lights on the Rock cut cave tombs of Malabar" Journal of Kerala Studies, 1(4). Thiruvananthapuram.

Iron age society had different forms of subsistence like chasing, nourishment gathering, cattlekeeping, farming, fishing etc. There is no particular evidence that the Iron Age residence setting from Kerala, the burial monuments and grave artefacts are the major archaeological sources for the historical analysis of the Iron Age and early historic period. They selected non-productive regions as the burial ground. The megalithic builders are mindful about the seasonal changes. The megalithic builders appear to have formed the shape of the upper portion of the monument Kodakkal as umbrella in arrange to illuminate the weathering issue of laterite due to unremitting rain.¹⁵

K.V. Ramakrishna Rao examined the numerical and galactic ideas of the megalithic builders and contended that the Megalithic builders must have went through much time to discover out the connection between circle and square¹⁶. The megalithic monuments and the unearthed burial artefacts have shown the possible formation of different gifted occupational groups. The understanding of megalithic innovation remains a new region and it requires point-by-point logical analysis.¹⁷ The crystal and quartz dots from the stone circle at Naduvil show the nearness of the bead-making crafts or the inland trade organise of the locale. The megalithic society used pots for storing water and cooking food items. The pots were too utilised for filling away toddy. The pot producers must have obtained abilities of inverted burning technology. The wide dissemination of black and red wares pointed to the possible development of inverted burning innovation from Sreekandapuram.

¹⁵ Devadas, V.P (2014). "Megalithic Phase of Eranad". Hari Priya M (Ed). Signature of Eranad-Historical Perspectives. Research Publication committee, NSS College Manjer. 120-131.

¹⁶Ramakrishna Rao, K.V.(2010). "Megaliths: Mathematics and Astronomy". P. Chenna Reddy. Recent Researchers in Archaeology, History and Culture Vol 1. Akam Kala Prakashan, Delhi. 97-116.

¹⁷Gurukkal, Rajan, and Raghava Varier (ed). (1999). *Cultural History of Kerala*. Cultural Publication, Thiruvananthapuram

CONCLUSION

Understanding the megalith concepts of northern Kerala is important for the distribution of rock-cut chambers and laterite terrain. The Megaliths and the artefacts from them indicated the societal situation. The megalithic monument also showcases the existence of a settled agricultural society with surplus accumulation. This is a shift of semi-nomadic pastoral groups. But there lack evidence of habitation sites in this area. Megalithic burials are also used to show ancestral worship of the early historic period. The formation of an agrarian society increased population and the emergence of specialised groups. There is also evidence of a stratified society. Yet there is a lack of consideration by archaeologists in northern parts of Kerala. Excavations were conducted only in three sites till now. Hence a better understanding of these cultures with the proper use of archaeological methods will help us bring out the hidden gems of the megalithic period in northern Kerala.

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