

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES OF MEGALITHIC TRAITS IN CALICUT

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ABSTRACT

This paper intends to make an attempt to investigate the various types of megalithic traits of Kerala. Megaliths are the monuments built of granite rocks erected over the burials. Megalithic monuments are the main archaeological findings of Kerala to reinterpret her rich past history. Pre historic period can reconstruct with the help of archeological evidences. It gives a clear-cut frame work to history. It forms the most important and sometimes the sole source for the ancient and medieval history of the region. Thus archeology forms a sound base for the scientific history of Kerala for the study of the evolution of Kerala culture. Megalithic monuments like Kudakallu, Toppikkalu, Menhir, Dolmen, Port-holed cist, Stone alignment, Rock curt caves etc. transfer us to her past. Shifting through archeological evidence to reconstruct and reinterpret the history of Kerala during the megalithic period is a challenge that has to be met. This paper makes an attempt to investigate the various types of megalithic monuments in the Calicut district and their historical significance.

KEYWORDS: *Dolmen, Kudakkallu, Megalithic Monuments, Menhir, Toppikkallu, Port-holed cist, Stone alignment, Rock curt caves,*

INTRODUCTION

For centuries, humans have tried to commemorate, pay respect to, or idolize the dead in various manners, often leaving contemporary historians, archaeologists and students to study and shed some light on civilization built colossus structures like pyramids. Such burial sites hold key to past civilization and that wad unwritten or lost in time, which was awaiting brilliant minds to unravel the history. India is considered as a citadel of civilization, each submerged over another, sometimes buried in unfathomable depths, often leaving historians scratching their heads. Even now to a great extent, our history depends heavily on foreign accounts or excavations.

In such scenario, it is very important to discuss the condition of tens of thousands of burial sites of varying proportions found across the country, especially in northern Kerala. Social scientists and noted historians explains that the burial sites in Kerala shed light on Kerala's unknown history that could even debunk tales of *Parasurama* legend. Buried in the backyard, paddy fields, or standing atop hilly terrains, these massive stone structures remain a subject of numerous local lores. A sense of antiquarian sensibility has prevented the ruin of many megalith burial sites in Kerala. However, the dwindling numbers of such structures show how a slow and steady death is falling upon monuments constructed to commemorate death or memorialize the dead.

Archaeology is the study of human past through their material evidence discovered from the archeological sites. These remains can be any objects that people created, modified, or used. Portable remains are usually called artifacts. Archaeologists use artifacts and features to learn how people lived in specific times and places. Archeological

investigations are a principal source of knowledge of prehistoric, ancient and extinct culture. The goal of archaeology is to understand how and why human behavior has changed over time. Archaeologists search for patterns in the evolution of significant cultural events such as the development of farming, the emergence of cities, or the collapse of major civilizations for clues of why these events occurred. Archaeology has enabled the historian to come up with useful information.

As the term 'megalith' suggests, those monuments use large stone blocks in the construction and are remnants of the Iron Age. The megaliths are the most important archaeological findings in the ancient period of Kerala history. Many megalithic sites are excavated all over south India. The megalithic culture of Kerala has to be seen as a part of South Indian megalithic culture. R.D. Banarji and Mortimer Wheeler have suggested that the South Indian megaliths have many similarities with the megaliths found in the West Asian and Mediterranean regions. Some historians argue that the megalithic culture was brought to south India by the people who had migrated from West Asia and therefore it is related with the emergence of the Dravidians in South India. A wide range of megalithic burials recently discovered in some northern districts of Kerala during a research project have thrown light on possible links between the Mediterranean and Kerala coasts in the stone Age between 6000 BCE and 2000 BCE. The archaeological studies on Malabar mainly depend on its megalithic culture. Though there is uniformity in the character of the megalithic burial monuments in Malabar, there are some differences in the mode of construction. Sadly, megalithic structures are fast disappearing and we are long losing an ample opportunity to learn, embrace and augment our unknown history.

The study of the past is an enthusiasm for many scholars and that put down the foundation to unravel the mystery behind the discipline of Archeology. 'Megaliths' are the monuments built of granite rocks erected over the burials. The contribution of Kerala to the cultural heritage of India stands unique in every sense. Recent findings in various parts of Kerala have provided enough proof of its greater antiquity in the geological features and pre-historic cultures. The prehistoric evidences obtained from Kerala constitute various cultures beginning from Paleolithic to megalithic period.

Megalithism, or the art of using huge stones to depict sites of sacred pagan monuments, prevailed among the pre-Dravidian tribes of Kerala and other parts of India. Several studies and historians contradict the origin of dolmens and how it came to the country. The first set of people of Kerala can be identified only with reference to their burial practices. These people constructed burial monuments in granite, laterite and pottery, most of which are strikingly similar to the megalithic monuments of west Europe and Asia. Kerala is rich in megalithic monuments, viz. rock-cut caves, rock-cut pits, urn burials, Umbrella stones (*Kudakkallu*), hat stones (*Toppikkallu*), slab cists, Port-holed cists, dolmens, menhirs, multiple hood stones and stone circles. Among these monuments, the port – holed cist is the most typical of the megalithic burials. The monuments and burials called 'Megaliths' are the predominant archaeological remains of the Iron Age that represents a formative phase in the history of Peninsular India in general and Kerala in particular. Distinguished by the practice of raising big stone monuments to the dead, Iron Age is commonly named as megalithic Age. Historians generally differ in fixing the period of the megalithic culture of Kerala. As per the available evidence, it could be inferred that the megalithic culture existed in Kerala during the period between BC 6th century and 2nd century BC.

Colonial documentation on the megaliths of south India dates back to the early 19th century CE. They form the first corpus of published literature on prehistoric remains found in south India. Prior to that, as can be observed from these writings, burials were part of the everyday life of the local populace, who followed various death rituals and traditions. The first published report on the excavation of a megalithic burial site in India was by J. Bbington (1823). It describes his

excavations at Chataparamba, in Kozhikode district of Kerala. Towards the end of 19th century, a number of studies surfaced as short articles in journals published by the Royal anthropological institute of Great Britain and Ireland. Many of them are primarily descriptive in nature and focus on comparison between sites and artifacts. The archeological survey of India has reported on a number of Kerala's megalithic sites in the post-independence period.

MEGALITHIC SITES

Calicut, originally known as Kozikode, is a district of historical importance. Calicut was the capital of *Zamoodiri* Kings and historically it is famous as the district where Vasco D Gama, the Portuguese explorer landed in the year 1498. In the past, William Logan, who authored the book *Malabar Manual* has carried out large scale excavations in the Kozhikode district. Years later, renowned anthropologist A. Ayyappan excavated the megalith monuments near Farook, Kozhikode. Both have agreed in principle that umbrella stones in Kerala had an origin somewhere between 100 B.C and 300 AD. Scythes, household implements and agricultural weapons unearthed from these burial sites indicated that the civilization during the period knew how to extract iron from ore, a skill; we must understand that was unknown to the Indus valley civilization.

At the same time, historians agree that the absence of detailed studies into megalithic structures has left more unanswered questions instead of answers. In Kerala, the megalith structures exist in various forms, shapes and arrangements. Lot of megalithic sites can be seen in Calicut district such as Kalppalli, Cherooppa, Iringalloor, Kannadikkulam and Atholi. The distraction of the kodakkal megalithic site in Perambra, in Kozhikode, is one of the best examples to show how human ignorance and lack of awareness could lead to the defacement of unprotected monuments. In 2011, the existing plot owner hired a JCB bulldozer, crushed the kodakkal structure here and demolished the entire site to sell a plot. After protests from locals, the police took the bulldozer and driver into custody. Since the site was include in the list of protected archeological sites.

KALPPALLI

Kalppalli was the place which lies between Mavoor and Chooppa in Calicut. This cite known for *Thoppikkalu* or umbrella stone. This monument was situated in Mukkarakkal Thodikayil which was approximately fifty meter near the river Chaliyar. This monument has approximately 178 cm height and around 190 cm diameters. The archeological features of this site were a beautiful megalithic umbrella stone related with the Iron Age culture. The site was preserved by the local people. Archeological survey of India also documented it. This place was an important Kadavu or small boat point in ancient times and it was an important water route between the Calicut and other districts of Kerala. This place also holds a *Kudakkallu* closely near to the banks of Chaliyar.

CHEROOPPA

Another important site was also reported near Mavoor was Cherooppa, which was situated in a hilly area. The destinations name is Kudakkal Parambu and this monument also known in the name as *Kudakkallil Amma*. The importance of this site was a megalithic umbrella stone related with the Iron Age culture in Kerala. This site was preserved by the indigenous people biased with the myths and believes related to this monument. This site has 1.5 kilometer distance from Cherupuzha, an important tributary of the river Chaliyar. This monument was considered as a *Bhagavathi* or *Devi Swaroopam* by the indigenous people. Cherooppa is well known for a megalithic rock cut cave related with the Iron Age culture in Kerala.

This was a rectangular chamber with two compartments each equipped with separate rock cut cots and partitioned by a central wall. The entrance of this monument was 56 cm height and 50 cm width with beautiful structural carvings. This monument had a stone entrance door in earlier time which was demolished later. This was an ASI spotted site. This cave also engulfed with two well-built stone bunches which clearly reaffirm synchronic rituals which practiced in ancient ages.

IRINGALLOOR

Rock cut cave at Cherooppa was situated near the national highway NH 17, the place name is Iringallur which is situated between the places Thondayad and Pantheerankavu, near Calicut. This monument is also a certain type of rock cut cave which still considered as the temple spot of lord Ayyappa. Some terracotta figures also found near the site that depicts the artistic skill of the ancient people.

KANNADIKKULAM

The Kudakkallu in Kannadikkulam was another monument situated in the place Kacheripparambha near Kulathara between the places of Faroke and Kunnath Paalam. This monument was spotted near Kacheriparamba A.M.L.P. School and the behind this monument holds a close relation with the near *Bhagavathi* Temple. These fixed umbrellas are more than thirty in its number from Kadugallur to Kasaragod and one of the important among them was situated near this temple. Peoples also got some artifacts like iron axe and some potteries far near region from this monument.

ATHOLI

Another significant monument which was situated 1.5 kilometer distant from Atholi town in Calicut was the megalithic umbrella stone related with the Iron Age. The myth behind this monument was closely related with the ancestors of the hero of northern ballads. A beautiful rock cut cave related with the Iron Age culture is situated 1.5 kilometer distant from Atholi town in Calicut district. Local peoples believed that it was a hiding place of chieftains from the attack of British colonial rulers. Myths and beliefs played a significant role in the preservation of the monuments directly or indirectly.

PERAMBRA

The most historical significant site is situated in near Koothali, approximately eight kilometer far from the township of the place Perambra in the northern part of Calicut city. The archeologists got more than fifteen urn burials from this location. These artifacts evidenced about the megalithic burials and the local information correctly ratified one fact that this area was one of the most important latent areas with related with a highly archeological potential especially the burial practices related with the megalithic culture and the cult practices of them. So it is essential for the future studies about these sites which will frequently helpful for lighting much historical knowledge for future generations.

CONCLUSIONS

An inevitable contribution of Archaeology is that it enables us to have a better understanding of our cultural heritage and social traditions. The megalithic monuments in Kerala have great historical significance. Recent findings in various parts of Kerala especially Calicut has provided enough proof of its greater antiquity in the pre-historic cultural heritage of India. The prehistoric evidence obtained from Kerala constitutes various cultures beginning from Paleolithic to megalithic period. Megalithic peoples constructed burial monuments in granite, late rite and pottery. Kerala is rich in megalithic monuments viz, rock-cut caves, rock-cut pits, urn burials, umbrella stones, hat stones, slab cists, port-holed cists, dolmens, menhirs,

hood stones and stone circles. Iron tools and implements are common in almost all the burial graves. The most common tools are flat iron axes, shaft whole axe, flanged hoe, pick axe, bill hooks, iron wedges and crowbars. A large number of spears, arrow heads, blades, knives, chisels, tripods, shreds, daggers, swords etc. were also obtained. These iron artifacts points towards different economic functions of that age, life style of the people, their culture, social structure and religious beliefs. The megalithic people of Kerala might have led a semi-nomadic pastoral life combined with high land agriculture and the iron tools enable them to clear the forests. The difference in the size of the burials indicates to the social inequalities in the society. One of the most important findings related to megalithic culture in Kerala is the Kudakkallu, which is like a unique mushroom shaped megalithic burial monument of Kerala. Nowhere else in the world is this kind of megalithic burial site found.

Our knowledge of the megalithic culture of Kerala is limited because megalithic habitation sites have not yet been identified in the region. The only clear indication of human activity from the period, apart from the monuments themselves, has been obtained from different parts of Calicut. Our current understanding of the megalithic monuments and the societies that built them will be furthered by the detailed documentation of sites and their landscape context's, complemented by theoretical approaches that seek to understand archeology as an independent body of evidence, and not as secondary to texts.

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