

## MEGALITHIC MONUMENTS IN THRISSUR IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

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**ABSTRACT:** Megalithic monuments are the main archaeological findings of Kerala to reinterpret her past history. Pre historic period can reconstruct with the help of archaeological evidences .Thrissur district is fortunate to have a large number of megalithic sites. Megalithic monuments like Kudakkallu, Toppikkallu, Menhir, Dolmen, Port-holed cist, Stone alignment, Rock-cut caves etc. transfers us to her past. Sifting through Archaeological evidences 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 Thrissur district and their historical significance.

**Key Words:** *Dolmen, Kudakkallu, Megalithic Monuments, Menhir, Toppikkallu*

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### INTRODUCTION

‘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 has provided enough proof of its greater antiquity in the geological features and pre-historic cultures. The prehistoric evidences obtained from Kerala constitute various culture beginning from Paleolithic to megalithic period. 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.

## MEGALITHIC SITES

A lot of megalithic sites can be seen in Thrissur district such as Cheremanganad, Porkkulam, Kakkad, Eyyal, Kattakambal, Chowannur, Ariyannoor, Kandanassery, Machad, Mangad, Thiruvilvamala, Vellarakkad, Varandharappilly, Ramavarmapuram etc.

The *kodaikals* (umbrella-stones) are found at Eyyal, a village 17 miles from Trichur. Of about 35 of them, only three were found pulled down. Each *topikkal* rests on four quadrantal clinostatic stones joining together into a square at the base on the outside, and *leveled* in such a way as to close up along diagonals of the square. The hat-stone is a low cone on a wide circular base which is chambered towards the inside presenting a circular edge with a pendant appendage.

The hood-stone is like the *topikkal* without supporting slabs; the capstone rests directly on the ground. It has the nearest appearance of a *kundankudai* without a handle. Porkulam, about 2 miles north of Kunnankulam, and Cheramanangad are the main sites where they are found.

Numerous dolmens are also found on the Cochin hills. A number of them bounded by a single stone circle would indicate the communal character of the monuments. Groups of them are found in the Palapalli reserved forests. They are built on bare rock within 3 or 4 feet of each other. Each dolmen has four verticals (orthostats) and a capstone. They are also found at Karikulam, in a rubber estate at Pattikad, on the hills of the Vaniampara tract.

The menhirs are characterised by their rarity. Two menhirs were observed by Ananthakrishna Iyer in the Trichur taluq. Krishnaswami found menhirs rooted in laterite and scattered far and wide. Usually they are monolithic, rude granite slabs oriented north-south, and standing high above the laterite ground. The menhir at Anapara, called *pulachikallu*, is reminiscent of a memorial stone on a battlefield, and commemorates a Pulayan woman (Pulachi) who died at the spot.

**A. RAMAVARMAPURAM :** Starting from the stone age, Thrissur must have been the site of human settlement. This is evidenced by the presence of megalithic monuments at Ramavarmapuram. The Ramavarmapuram Menhir is in granite and is 15 feet height and 12.4 feet broad. From 1944, it is under the protection of the Department of Archaeology. The monument is locally known as patakallu or pulachikallu. Menhirs are memorials for the departed souls put up at burial sites. They belong to megalithic age of Kerala, which is roughly estimated between 1000 BCE and 500CE. The Ramavarmapuram menhir is also believed to be a monument belonging to the sangam period in the South Indian history.

**B. ARIYANNOOR :** Ariyannoor is a megalithic site with huge umbrella-like stones covering the burial. Six umbrella stones stand here in a group. Among them, two are partly broken. An umbrella stone consists of a curvilinear laterite. The place is made up of laterite outcrops.

**C. CHEREMANGANAD:** Cheremanganad is well known for the typical megaliths of Kerala state, i.e., umbrella stones, *Thoppikkallu*, stone circles, and hood stones. It is the laterite zone. There are 69 megalithic monuments grouped in a small area. The largest *Kudakkal* has 270 cm in height from the apex to the middle base, which is 150 cm long while the other measures 210 cm x 130 cm above the ground out of nine, one *Thoppikkal* was excavated and it yielded three pots without any bone remains. Excavation conducted here

in 2010-12 and unearthed some funerary findings including urns in red ware, bowls of russet coated ware, vase and bowls of black and red ware, one copper bowl, iron implements and few bone pieces. The site is a protected monument and under the control of Archaeological Survey of India since 1951.

**D. CHOWANNUR:** The cave at Chowannur is situated on the northern, side of the Kunnamkulam- Wadakkancheri road, about 2 miles northeast of the town of Kunnamkulam.' It is entered through a recessed opening on the east, the entrance being 1 ft. 6 in. wide and 1 ft. 1 in. high. The inside surface of the cave is unusually smooth, testifying to the advanced workmanship of its builders.

**E. KANDANISSERI:** The cave at Kandanisseri, which is situated half a mile south of Ariyannoor in Ariyannur-desam, is also entered through a recessed opening, although the opening here is inclined towards east-south-east. The inner recess, 2 ft. 3 in. wide and 1 ft. 10 in. high, leads into a chamber with a hemispherical dome and a paraboloid floor, on all sides of which, excepting the entrance-side, are three benches, each with three legs cut out of the rock, the hollowed-out space between the legs taking the shape of the base of the benches; they are only 6 in. wide and do not extend under the whole width to the back of the benches.

**F. KAKKAD:** The cave at Kakkad, situated on the slope of a hill 1 mile north of the town of Kunnamkulam, has a narrow entrance on the east, 1 ft. 9 in. wide and 1 ft. 7 in. high at the outer edge, and its top opening, 2 ft. 4 in. in diameter, places it in the same category as the Kandanisseri cave. The cave is dome-shaped and paraboloid on plan with an almost straight edge on the entrance-side.

**G. PORKALAM:** At Porkalam, 2 miles north of Kunnamkulam, two caves were examined and surveyed. Both of them face west-north-west and are situated one behind the other, with a gap of 6 ft. 3 in. between them, Porkalam-2 lying to the north-west, of Porkalam-1. The entrance of Porkalam-1 is 1 ft. 4 in. wide and 1 ft. 6 in. high. Its top-cutting is not exactly horizontal; instead, it is slightly curved on either end, thus having the shape approximately of a horizontal arch. There are two benches inside the cave. Porkalam-2 has no bench at all; nor has it a vessel-stand. But both the caves have a rock-cut central pillar. The entrance of Porkalam-2, originally 1 ft. 6 in. wide and 1 ft. 8 in. high, but now unsymmetrically wide owing to the disintegration of the rock, is also horizontally arched. The central pillars in both the Porkalam caves are narrowest in the middle, from where, both downwards and upwards, they gradually spread out, until at the top, which is 3 ft. 1 in. high in Porkalam-1 and 2 ft. 9 in. in Porkalam-2, they merge with the surface of the vault. A similar tendency of gradual broadening may also be observed in the pillar of the cave near Calicut.

**H. EYYAL:** At Eyyal, 2<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> miles south of Cheramanangad on the Kunnamkulam-Wadakkancheri road, is situated a double-chambered cave, the same outer court leading in front to the main chamber, X, with its roof now partly collapsed, and on the right hand, side to a smaller chamber, Y. The main chamber faces east and is nearly double the dimensions of the side.

The bench inside X, 8 in. high from the floor, is of irregular width and runs along] all sides except where the entrance is situated. The wide pedestal-like base of its central pillar is only an extension of the middle portion of its bench on the western side.

Chamber Y has no central pillar but has a bench, 5 in. high from the floor, its width varying from 1 ft. 6 in. to 1 ft. 9 in., running along its eastern and northern sides. In the south-western corner of the cave and in the middle of its western side are two very crude and irregularly-shaped flat-surfaced blocks of the same height as the bench. The irregular platform may have been used for keeping vessels and other objects.

**I. KATTAKAMPAL:** Two furlongs west of Kattakampal, which lies about 5 miles north-west of Kunnankulam, there is another multi-chambered cave, comprising in all four chambers, X, X' and Y and Y'.<sup>1</sup> Chambers Y and Y', situated laterally, face east, while the remaining two chambers, X and X', situated opposite each other across the outer court, face north and south respectively. Chambers Y' and X', on the northern side, are replicas of Y and X respectively on an east-west median line, bisecting the entire composite cave into two halves. It may be observed that the Padinyattamuri four-chambered cave is also built on a corresponding plan.

The Eyyal and Kattakampal caves should be distinguished from the others not only because they are multi-chambered but also because their floors are rectangular and their ceilings horizontal. On general plan, the *Padinyattamuri* caves investigated by Logan agree with the Kattakampal caves, except that the former contain two benches each and also a central pillar each, leaving aside the so-called fire-places, the exact nature of which is difficult to make out from his plans.

## CONCLUSION

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.

The contributions of Kerala to the cultural heritage of India stand unique in every sense. Recent finding in various parts of Kerala has 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. 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 most typical of the megalithic burials is the port – holed cist.

Iron tools and implements are common in almost all the burial graves and they are similar also. Among the most common tools are flat iron axes, shaft whole axe, and a variety of flanged shape hoe, pick axe, bill hooks, iron wedges and crowbars. Spear like objects, arrow heads, blades were also found. A large number of knives, chisels, iron tripods, bell like objects, shreds, lamps, spear heads, daggers swords, bronze hilts etc. were also obtained. These iron artefacts' points towards different economic functions of that time. Hunting was a major economic function of the people at one stage as the tools used hunting was very large among the findings.

Towards the end of the megalithic period the cultural phase was undergoing a transition from pastoralism to agriculture. From the objects which we got from these megalithic sites, we can interpret the lifestyle 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. Agriculture was practical and iron tools enables them to clear the forests and till the land in a systematic manner enabling them to produce results.

The iron objects like arrow heads, spear heads, sword, dagger, tripods etc. indicated that warfare was a common practice at that time. The difference in the size of megalithic burials indicates to the social inequalities in the society. Some of the burials have precious stones and other objects which denote to the political and religious importance of the person buried.

Historians generally differ in fixing the period of the megalithic culture of Kerala. From available evidence, it could be inferred that the megalithic culture existed in Kerala during the period between BC 6<sup>th</sup> century and 2<sup>nd</sup> Century BC.

One of the most important finding related to megalithic culture in Kerala is the 'Kudakkallu', which is a unique mushroom – shaped megalithic burial monument of Kerala. Nowhere else in the world is this kind of megalithic burial site found.

The megalithic monuments in Kerala have more historical importance. Through the study of megalithic sites of Kerala, we can reconstruct its early history. By urging the students of history to know about the relevance and importance we can conserve our historical sense. Encouraging Field visit to all these megalithic sites in Kerala, we can create great historic potential in the minds of students.

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