

**MODULE-2**  
**IRON AGE AND EARLY HISTORICAL SOCIETY**  
**TOPIC- SOURCES-ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCES -MEGALITHIC**  
**SITES & CULTURE**

PREPARED BY  
PRIYANKA.E.K  
ASSISTANT PROFESSOR  
DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY  
LITTLE FLOWER COLLEGE,GURUVAYOOR

- The term Megalith derived from two Greek words; mega lithos means big stone which is coined by Algernon Herbert, a British Antiquarian
- Monuments built of granite rocks erected over the burials
- Important findings of the ancient period of Kerala history
- Considered as iron age period- as iron objects are found at megalithic sites
- Discovered almost all over south India-megalithic culture of Kerala was seen as a part of South Indian megalithic culture

- History of Megalithic researches in Kerala starts with the discovery and excavation of a few burials at Bangla Motta Paramba in Kannur district by Babington in 1823.
- His discovery and excavations in the Malabar regions like Puddiangaddy and Neelaparambu stimulate an antiquarian interest on these monuments.
- Subsequently several British administrators and many other scholars explored and excavated a large number of Megaliths and published their findings.
- After that the Archaeological Survey of India and the Archaeology Departments of the Travancore and The Cochin states excavated a large number of Megalithic sites.

- In 1882 Robert Sewell published '*The list of Antiquarian Remains in the Presidency of Madras*' gives a list of megalithic sites in Kerala.
- In 1887 William Logan published '*Malabar Manual*' in which he gives a detailed description on the explored and excavated megalithic sites of the Malabar region and tried to interpret the megalithic burials in connection with religious practices
- In 1901 Fawcett explored the Wayanad region and discovered the megalithic burials around the rock engraving site of Edakkal and proposed that the makers of carvings could be the builders of innumerable stone circles near the site.

- In 1911-12, a rock-cut chamber was accidentally discovered at Chevayur near Calicut by Longhurst and found a sarcophagus and few ceramics in it.
- In 1927, The Kerala Society was started and published a journal titled Kerala Society Papers
- It contained many papers dealing with the megalithic burials in Thiruvananthapuram and surroundings
- In 1930 Cammiade did an extensive study on the Urn burial from Wayanad region and explored 16 urn burials and excavated a few around the region of Sultan Batheri.

- His excavation reports give extensive information regarding the exact location and extent of the sites
- He also attempted to study the grave goods such as iron implements and beads from the megalithic burial of Malabar and made a comparative study of these Urns with those from Tamilnadu.
- In the same year Codrington conducted a general survey of Megaliths and grave goods in South India and noticed the architectural similarity between the Megalithic Rock cut chambers and Buddhist Caves.
- He also used Sangam literatures to explain and understand the Megalithic burials.
- Plenderlieth (1930) attempted one of the early scientific studies on pottery from the megalithic pottery in which he studied the black polished pottery from Wayanad urn burials

- Systematic investigations of the Megaliths began only in 1940, when Krishnaswami undertook field studies in collaboration with Anujan Achan and classified the Megaliths of the Cochin region.
- In mid 1940' s B .K.Thaper excavated an urn burial at Porkkalam.
- From the beginnings of 1960' s dolmens and other megalithic monuments were widely reported in Kerala
- After Porkalam, several Iron Age sites in Kerala such as Machad and Pazhayannur , Perambra , Cheramangad, Arippa , Mangad, Kurumassery etc. were excavated that enriched our understanding of the past life ways and culture of the Megalithic builders of Kerala

# TYOLOGY OF MEGALITHIC BURIAL MONUMENTS

- An important feature of the Iron Age culture in Kerala as well as in Peninsular India is the presence of huge burial monuments known as megalithic monuments.
- A variety of these monuments are found in the Iron Age sites of Kerala.
- Initial attempts in devising a suitable typology for these monuments were made by Wheeler at Brahmagiri.
- Later several scholars attempted to categorize and study them. Among the studies V.D. Krishnaswami, Sundara, McIntosh, A Moorthi deserves special mention.



- Apart from the general types, Kerala is credited with distinct type of Megalithic monuments such as umbrella stone (kudakknllu), cap stone (topikkallu )and rock-cut chambers.
- Based on the geographical a physiographic features, the land of Kerala can categorized into three well defined parallel each of which contains distinctive types monuments, and also we can say that the nature the monuments being determined largely by material available.
- Thus, the dolmens are to found in eastern mountainous region; the rock chambers, menhirs and the umbrella stone on the lateritic plain,- and urn burial with menhirs on the alluvial sea board.

- Though exist uniformity in the burial character of monuments. differences in its mode of construction culminates into various types of megalithic burials.
- The major types of megalithic monuments found in Kerala are Rock cut-cave, Urn burials, Umbrella stone, Cap stones, Dolmens, Menhirs and Alignments, Slab cist, Sarcophagi, Pits and Multiple hood stone

# 1. Rock cut-cave:

- The rock cut caves are generally encountered in the lateritic zone of the districts of Trissur, Malappuram, Kannur, Kozhikode, Thiruvananthapuram and Pathanamthitta.
- These caves have been made by scooping out a square stepped pit in the rock approached by rock cut steps.
- One or more doorways were also cut in the sides of the pit. Each doorway about 60 cm high to facilitate the workman to scoop a dome shaped cave.
- These are mostly quarried into monolithic lateritic belts.
- They have an opening either on the side or on the top surface as determined by the landscape. The opening is generally a small rectangular or circular aperture of about 2x2feet size or 2feet diameter, leading to the chamber through a passage/ generally sealed by a port slabs. Both pillared and non pillared types are found in Kerala

- Monolithic cots are scooped inside the chambers that provide berths for the interred. The rock cut chambers have domical or flat roofs. In some instances the open courts leads to more than one cave. For example at Eyyal the main cave faces east while the second one faces south
- Y.D.Sharma (1955)has classified the rock cut caves of Kerala in to four types. They are (I) Caves with central pillar (II) The caves without central pillar, (III) Caves with a top opening and (IV) Multi chambered caves.
- Many of these rocks cut chambers had grave goods found associated to the burial. These mainly include iron tools, beads, bronze artifacts etc



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## 2.Urn Burial:

- Earthen pots used for the deposition of the skeletal remains and other assemblage found buried below the ground are called Urn burials.
- These urns are generally sealed by a granite or laterite cap stone and cairn packing.
- Urn burials occur singly or in clusters and are found usually in the laterite middle land plains and in the granite high lands of Kerala
- Urn sizes vary from 180X100 cm to 60X15 cm and vessel thicknesses can be up to 2 cm in the largest example.
- The Urn burials of the highland and mid land regions of Kerala yield funerary goods like etched carnelian beads, pottery, ashes, bones etc

- Sometimes Urn Burials are also demarcated with stone circle.
- Typical megalithic potteries, iron objects, beads, were found in the urn burials at Machad, Porkalam, and Vellimatukunnu etc.
- The urn burials are found in almost all the parts of Kerala. Three types of urns are found in the Kerala megaliths.
- They are pyriform jars, legged jars and pointed jars





**IRON-AGE BURIAL URN**  
CIRCA 7<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY B.C. - 1<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY A.D.  
DISCOVERED NEAR PERAKANAL AND  
PRESENTED TO MNM RANGE CLUB BY  
M.R.P. LAPPIN

<https://images.app.goo.gl/bLa3BmzVzsUkHg8Z8>

### 3.Umbrella Stone (Kudakkallu):

- The umbrella stone, known as 'kudakkallu' , represent a unique and the most beautiful types among the Kerala megalithic monuments.
- The name 'kudakkallu' is derived from the local Malayalam words 'kuda' and 'kallu' which means 'umbrella' and 'stone' respectively.
- They are found mostly in the lateritic areas of Kannur, Kozhikode, Malappuram, Palakkad, and Trissur.
- The 'kudakkallu' is modeled in the shape of a mushroom on laterite which looks like a typical palm leaf umbrella which is common in Kerala till recent times

- rarely, some small artifacts are found.
- For instance, some bones and pottery have been found at Eyyal, while Perambra provides the evidence of iron objects and bronze vessel



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## 4. Cap Stones:

- The Cap stones, locally known as 'toppikallu' are hemispherical in shape, and are made out of dressed or undressed granitic stones, which are used as the lids put on burial urns.
- These are rests directly on the ground. V.D. Krishnaswami called these monuments as 'hood stones', which looks like an umbrella stone without parabolic support
- The cap stone has a very limited distribution mainly confined to the Trissur district of Kerala
- Cheramangad, Porkkalam, Eyyal, Vandiperiyar, and Thiruvilvamala are the major sites where these monuments are reported.
- These monuments carry a large amount of grave goods which mainly includes pottery, bronze vessels, beads etc.





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## 5. Dolmens:

- Dolmens are the rectangular box like chamber, which is constructed with four slabs forming orthostats and fifth is used as the cap stone
- Dolmens are mainly reported from the highland areas of the region.
- The dolmens are reported from Palakkad, Trissur, Idukki Alappuzha and Tiruvananthapuram, etc. and they are rich with grave goods such as iron implements, jars, and beads





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## 6. Menhirs and Alignments:

- A menhir is a single huge granitic or lateritic monolith standing upright and set up over or near the burial
- These huge stones mark the neighboring presence of an urn burial. Menhirs are also known locally by various names such as 'nattukkallu' , 'patakkallu' , and 'pulachikkallu' .
- They are found mainly in the district such as Palakkad, Trissur, Eramakulam, and Kollam etc





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## 7. Sarcophagus:

- A sarcophagus literally means 'legged coffin' made out of terracotta.
- In Kerala, generally, two types of sarcophagus are found. They are bovine shaped sarcophagus and small legged terracotta sarcophagus
- The bovine shaped sarcophagus is found from Perungulam and Kattakambal, and the small legged terracotta sarcophagus is reported from Chevayur.
- These are generally placed inside the rock cut chambers



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# NATURE OF BURIALS AND ITS MATERIAL CULTURE

- In Kerala, most of the megalithic burials are fractional or secondary in nature.
- The fractional burials are the post excarnated in which the dead body was exposed to natural elements first and subsequently the left over bones were collected and buried.
- From the megalithic monuments, we got fragments of charred or decayed bone remains.
- Based on the remains of such charcoal fragments and ash, it is believed that they practiced cremation.
- No complete or inhumation burials are reported so far from the megalithic monuments also strengthens the above assumption.



- As far as the associated goods or material evidences of the Megaliths are concerned they are of great utility in explaining the cultural ethos of the Megaliths and its authors which consist mainly of ceramics, beads, iron implements and gold ornaments
- **CERAMICS:** The ceramic assemblage of the megalithic people consists of a variety of wares such as Black and Red Ware, Russet coated Ware, painted Red Ware, Red slipped Ware, polished Red Ware, Black Ware, etc
- the shapes include bowls with flat bases, jars, dishes, vases, ring stands, \_globular pots and different kind of urns such as legged, perforated, pyriform Types, pointed ones, and those with variously fashioned rims, shoulders, sides and bases.

- **FAUNAL REMAINS** The bone fragments and ashes are the important faunal remains from various Iron Age site in Kerala.
- Kerala megaliths have yielded charred bones and ashes, which indicates post cremational nature.
- No complete skeletons were found in any megalithic sites in Kerala.
- However, in 1997, Rajendran has recovered a child's cranium at Arippa

- **BEADS:-**Stone beads have been reported from thirty two Iron Age sites in Kerala.
- Machad in Trissur district had 147 beads mostly in stone with a few in terracotta and glass
- In fact, the largest single cache of 136 stone beads were found inside a burial Urn in Kunnukara in the Periyar basin during trial excavations in 1996
- Semi-precious stone beads are found in approximately 10 % of the Iron Age burials in Kerala. These are made of carnelian, quartz, chalcedony, agate, jasper and feldspar
- These beads are non- local and must have come through some form of exchange during Early Iron Age.

- The nearest source of beryl and quartz is the Kangayam mines in Karur region in Tamil Nadu.
- The possible source of agate and carnelian is the Khambhat region in Gujarat which was exploited since the Indus Civilization.
- The carnelian beads with etched designs are similar to those found in other parts of peninsular India and have been dated to both Early Iron Age and Late Iron Age.
- The etched beads from Kunnukara in Periyar basin, Niramakulam in Pathanamthitta and sites in Palakkad and Malapuram in Bharathapuzha basin are also similar to each other suggesting their contemporaneity.

- IRON IMPLEMENTS AND ITS TECHNOLOGY-one of the most important material remains from megalithic site
- It reveal that wide range of iron technology was greatly practiced by the megalithic people and it had a considerable influence on the socio-economic life of the people
- Due to the quantity and quality of the iron implements, the culture has got its name.
- The culture is characterized mainly by the wide spread use of iron in the form of implements



# DOLMEN





# UMBERLLA STONES





# ROCK CUT CHAMBER



# HAT STONE





Markazhi.com



- Remains of plough share- Wayanad regions- wide spread agriculture was not practiced
- Led a semi- nomadic pastoral life combined with high land agriculture
- Process of agriculture- primitive & their principal means of living was pastoral & semi-nomadic
- Some historians- discovery of iron objects sites point to tribal conflicts



- Primitive type of exchange b/w people proved by discovery of glass at some sites
- Difference in size of megalithic burials indicate social inequalities existed in then society
- Some burials have precious stones & other objects- denote political & religious importance of person buried
- Towards end of megalithic period- cultural phase was undergoing a tradition from pastoralism to agriculture
- No unanimity in fixing period of megalithic culture in Kerala
- One group megalithic culture existed b/w BCE200 & CE50

- Some others- BCE300 & CE200
- 3<sup>rd</sup> group- BCE600 & CE400
- Megalithic culture existed on the eve of wide spread usage of iron
- usage of iron started in Kerala from BCE 5<sup>th</sup> century
- Megalithic culture existed b/w BCE6th & 2<sup>nd</sup> C