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# Misfortunes of the Megaliths of North Malabar: Revisiting the Umbrella Stones (*Kodakkal*) Site of Perambra, Calicut District, Kerala

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**Abstract:** *Megaliths, the burial monuments, are the major archaeological source material for the study of the Iron Age and Early Historic period of peninsular India in general and Kerala in particular. The numbers of accidental discoveries of Megaliths are increasing due to the rapid growth of modern construction works and most of them are destroyed or not properly documented or preserved. The number of scientific excavations in Kerala is inadequate and many of the excavation reports remain unpublished. The number of the protected Megalithic sites is too meager in Kerala and totally absent in its northern part. This paper tries to reveal the misfortunes of the Megalithic burials of North Malabar with special reference to the recently destroyed umbrella stone sites of Perambra, Calicut district. It also tries to reveal the historic value of these monuments and the worst condition of the preservation of the cultural heritage of Kerala. The lack of the State and public involvement for the preservation of the Megaliths are also conveyed.*

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**Keywords:** Megaliths, North Malabar, Perambra, Kodakkal, Heritage of Kerala, Iron Age, Early Historic

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## Introduction

Megaliths are the burial monuments of Iron Age and Early Historic period of South India in general and Kerala in particular. The term Megalith is derived from two Greek words; *mega lithos* means big stone and this term is coined by Algernon Herbert, a British Antiquarian, in his book *Cyclops Christianus* in 1847 (Herbert 2010). There are different types of Megaliths in Kerala like umbrella stone (*Kodakkal*), cap stone (*Toppikal*), rock-cut sepulchre, cist, dolmen, stone circle, urn, sarcophagus, menhir, etc. Megaliths are mainly made with laterite, granite and terracotta. The Urn and Sarcophagi were made in terracotta and had no lithic association. Therefore, many scholars hesitated to use the term Megaliths; instead, they termed it as Iron Age burial monuments (Leshnik 1974, Gurukkal et al. 1999). There is no consensus regarding the chronology of the Megaliths of Kerala. Based on the Porkkalam and Mangadu excavations, a period between 4<sup>th</sup> -3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE and 1<sup>st</sup> century AD is ascribed (Thapar 1952: 6, Satyamurti 1992: 9) to the

Kerala Megaliths. Roughly, a period between 1000 BC to 500 AD is generally considered as the period of Kerala Megaliths (Gurukkal et al. 1999: 127-128). As these monuments covered a long period of cultural pasts of Kerala from Iron Age to Early Historic period, the Megaliths are considered here as the available major sign of the human involvement in the aforesaid period in Kerala.

North Malabar, which includes the present Kozhikode, Kannur and Kasargode districts of Kerala, has a unique position in the typologies of Megaliths. The major types of Megaliths found in the northern part of Kerala include rock-cut sepulcher, umbrella stone, cist burial, dolmen, stone circle, urn, menhir, etc. Certain types like rock-cut sepulchre, umbrella stone, and capstone are confined to these districts only. These monument types are made with highly dressed laterite stone blocks. The rock-cut sepulchres are the single or multi chambers carved out in the laterite plateau. There are port hole chambers and pillared chambers. Similarly, the stone circle made with dressed laterite stone slab is confined to this region. Generally the stone circle made of rough granite stone or such locally available rough stone have been found almost all parts of Peninsular India. But the stone circle made with dressed laterite stone blocks is found in the northern part of Kerala only.

A number of sites have been accidentally opened in recent days and the documentation of such finds often reduced into press releases in the regional column of newspapers. The discoveries are often celebrated by the local people for a few days and later the site is discarded forever. The finds from such sites are always kept under private hands and not to the archaeological records of Kerala. Unfortunately, no serious attempts have been initiated to document such sites from the part of Kerala State Archaeology Department or any other government institutions including universities.

The only exception is probably the documentation made as part of South Indian Atlas project of Pondichery University in 2006 and the recent initiation of the Department of Archaeology of University of Kerala. The attempt of listing the published reported sites by the researchers as part of their doctoral work is also remarkable (Peter 2002). But such lists are lacking the exact geo coordinates and other necessary details of the nature of sites. However, a region wise reporting of such discoveries and finds has to be done in a systematic manner in order to comprehend the pattern of burial distribution. In this context, the present paper tries to reveal the wretched condition of the Megaliths of Kerala in general and its wide destruction and disappearance in the northern part in particular.

### **Studies on Megaliths of North Malabar**

The Megalithic studies in India started from the northern part of Kerala with the excavation of a capstone at Chattapparamba (Feroke, Kozhikkode) by J. Babington in 1819 and the report of the same was published in 1823 (Babington 1823: 324-330). This site was reinvestigated and reported in 2006 (Darsana 2007: 100-108). Robert Sewell conducted extensive field survey and documented the archaeological relics, and

published a detailed taluk wise list of archaeological remains of Malabar (Sewell 1882: 241-43). William Logan excavated a rock-cut chamber at Banglamottaparamba (Logan 1887[2000]:181-83)<sup>1</sup>. After the colonial time a few excavations were carried out such as the rock-cut tomb excavation at Citrari in Kannur district (John 1974: 385-89), umbrella stone excavation at Perambra in Kozhikode district (John 1982: 148-154) and the excavation of the cluster of rock cut tombs at Ummichipoyil (Ramamurti 2002, Nair 2008: 13-22) in Kasargode district.

Recently a cluster of urn burials has been excavated at Kinalur (Calicut district) under the guidance of Government Arts and Science College Meenchanta (2015-16) and the Kerala State Archaeology Department. A rock-cut cave was excavated by the Department of Archaeology, University of Kerala at Kuttikkol in Kasargode district (Abhayan 2017). Many salvage excavations were carried out by the State Archaeology Department at Kuruvattur, Cheliya, Kodakkad and Kakkodi (Krishnaraj 2015). The insufficient numbers of excavations and explorations have indicated the necessity of a systematic documentation of the available sites in order to study the Iron Age and Early Historic cultural pasts of Kerala.

## Burial Forms

The Megaliths contained mortal remains and belongings of the dead person. The available mortal remains from the excavated Megaliths indicate that there were two types of burial practices in the Megalithic period in South India; primary burial and secondary burial. The first type contained extended human skeleton in which the dead body is buried along with the potteries, metal objects, semi-precious stone beads, etc. Such types of burial have reported from Adichanellur in Tamil Nadu (Rao 1975: 257) and so far not discovered from Kerala. The second types are fractional burials in which the bone fragments, probably collected from different parts of the dead body, are buried along with burial goods. The bone fragments contained in the fractional burial have been collected either from the disposed or from cremated contexts. The stone circle excavation at Anakkara yielded bone fragments of both exposed and burnt contexts (Gurukkal 2008).

The Tamil *Sangam* works of Early Historic period, contemporary to the Megalithic tradition, like *Puranānūru* refers to *Idukavantō* and *Cudukavanto* (poems 239) means the exposed and cremated respectively. The *Manimēkhalai*, a post *Sangam* epic, mentioned about different kinds of burial practices of the Early Historic period as *suduvōr Iduvōr thodukuzhipaduppōr thāzhvayinadaippōr thāzhiyilkavippōr* as part of its description of the necropolis at Puhar or Kaverippattinam (*Manimekhalai* VI 65-73 -Rajan 2000: 11-12). About five types of burial practices are mentioned as *suduvōr* – those who cremated, *Iduvōr* – those who laid dead body for expose, *thodukuzhipaduppōr*- those who laid the body or mortal remains in pits dug in to the ground for the purpose, *thāzhvayinadaippōr*- those who interred in sub-terrain cist, *thazhiyilkavippōr*- those who placed the body or the remains thereof inside a burial urn and inverted a lid over it (Rajan 2000:11-12). The megalithic typologies have corroborated these literary references.

## Fate of Megaliths

As we fail to trace the habitation cum burial remains of Megalithic builders from Kerala so far, it is necessary to trace the distribution pattern of the burial monuments built by the Megalithic people in the region to make some knowledge about the contemporary society. The burials have represented the existence of the settlements of their builders in the region. The settlements of the dead personal may be located in the surrounding locale of the burials. The recent excavations at Porunthal and Kodumanal in Tamil Nadu yielded habitation contexts in the nearby area of the burial monuments (Rajan et al. 2014). This pattern can be applicable to the Megalithic builders of Kerala as well. The burials are located not far away from the habitation sites even in the modern times. In most cases, the Megalithic burials are found as clusters in the garden lands or hillock slopes. It has to be realized that the Megaliths are the major available archaeological data for the study of our cultural heritage of about 3000 years before. But unfortunately, the Megaliths are facing many misfortunes and disregard from the contemporary modern society. The following part will explain few instances of the misfortunes of the Megaliths in the northern part and consequently the total extinction of these cultural remains from the locale.

## Sites in Kannur District

I have conducted extensive fieldwork to understand the historical geography of the Iron Age and Early Historic period in the Perumba, Valapattanam, Pazhayangadi and Kuppam river belts of the present Kannur district during 2007-08 (Rajesh 2011: 100-116, 2014: 399-401). The fieldwork has exposed the awful condition of the Megaliths found in the private lands. Many of sites are not documented by the archaeologists or any other academic personals. The local people shared their memories about the accidental discoveries of the monuments which include rock cut sepulchres, urns, umbrella stone, etc.



Figure1: Multiple Stone Circle,  
Naduvil



Figure 2: Rock-Cut Chamber inside the  
stone Circle, Naduvil

A totally abandoned stone circle with about fourteen dressed laterite stone blocks is found at Nenthravattam, Naduvil near Thalipparamba (12°07'16.57" N 75° 28'59.34"E)



(Figure 1). The site was excavated by K. J. John in 1990 and yielded a bronze vase, an unidentified bronze equipment, iron sword, dagger, trident, knives, chisel, iron saucer lamp, iron tripod, a crystal bead, a quartz bead, earthen vases, ring stands and pots. But the report of the same is not published yet. The details of the excavation are available in the doctoral thesis of his student Manjula Poyil (Poyil 2006: 94-95). A rock cut chamber with square entrance is found inside the stone circle and John must have excavated that chamber. In 2008, when I revisited the site, the chamber was filled with wastes and total area was almost treated as waste land and remained as unprotected monument (Figure 2).



Figure 3: Rock-Cut Chamber, Ezhilode, Kannur district



Figure 4: Potteries from the Rock-Cut Chamber, Ezhilode, Kannur district

A rock cut chamber with arched entrance and port hole was accidentally discovered at Ezhilode(12°05'43.52" N 75° 14'31.35"E) while the concrete building construction work



was progressing at Mariyamman Kovil near Payyannur in 2006 (Figure 3). The site yielded Black and Red Ware, Red Slipped Wares, four-legged Red slipped jars, black wares, black lid and bases. All these artefacts were kept in the rainy ground (Figure 4). In 2008, when I revisited the site again the entrance of the chamber was filled with laterite stone pieces and become the part of the surrounding wall of the temple.



Figure 5: Porthole – Rock Cut chamber Kurissumukku near Kunneru



Figure 6: Rock- Cut sepulchre Badiramanaparamba near Kunneru

A rock cut sepulchre has been found in the laterite plateau at Kurissumukku near Kunneru, Payyannur (12°10'10.25" N 75° 11'30.74"E). The porthole portion was opened and inside space was filled with waste and water (Figure 5). The local people were ignorant about the historical importance of the monument and they have not even recognized it as an archaeological monument. Another well-dressed rock cut sepulchre was found at Badiramanaparamba near Kunneru (12°02'27.68" N 75° 12'35.98"E) and interestingly the plot owner decided to preserve it only because of the beauty of the monument (Figure 6). But unfortunately, it was located in a laterite quarry and the surrounding space of the monument was already quarried and the monument was under threat. The plot owner informed that the monument contained two small pots in red and black colours and four legged jars. All these artefacts were destroyed at the time of the accidental discovery.

A cluster of abandoned rock cut sepulchres were found in the laterite plateau at Ezhumvayal (12°02'13.32" N 75° 21'36.14"E) near Talipparamba. The settlers of the area were newly occupied and totally ignored about the local tradition in connection with monument. The porthole portion was the only visible part of the monument and the settlers of the region did not even recognize the monument as the sign of their cultural heritage. Another single porthole sepulchre with decorated door jambs and porthole with a laterite lid were found in a rubber plantation of Ezhumvayal (Figures 7 and 8) and according to the local information few potteries and terracotta lamp were also found from this chamber.



Figure 8: Porthole – Rock-cut sepulchre,  
Ezhumvayal



Figure 8: Lid of the Porthole,  
Ezhumvayal

A single chambered rock-cut-sepulchre with round pillar at the centre and a stone platform in the northeastern side of the cave was found at Alexnagar, Sreekantapuram (12°02'40.69" N 75° 30'28.88" E). The southwestern side of the chamber was accidentally opened and the entrance portion remained unopened. It is informed that the chamber yielded about 22 pots in red and black colour, each pot had lid, iron objects, seem to be chisel or spear head, and bone fragments. A cluster of single chambered rock-cut-sepulchres with port hole and decorated door jamb and long passage were found in an unoccupied area at Tiyattimalika (12°06'37.10" N 75° 12'56.81"E), Echilamvayal, near



Payyannur. The site was already disturbed and the local people has opened and scooped the chambers. A multi chambered rock cut sepulchre in a worst condition was found at Menachur ( $12^{\circ}02'40.69''$  N  $75^{\circ} 30'28.88''$ E) near Thalipparamba. A well-decorated rock cut sepulchre, found in a school's compound at Kunjimangalam, was filled with waste at the time of my visit during 2008 and it is happy to know that the site is now under the protection of the school. A cluster of rock cut sepulchres, disturbed and scooped earlier, were found in a garden land at Mathil ( $12^{\circ}10'06.16''$  N  $75^{\circ} 15'13.14''$ E) near Payyannur. A multiple stone circle has been found as part of a sacred grove at Purathukavu ( $12^{\circ}01'02.53''$  N  $75^{\circ} 20'42.69''$ E). Since it is a part of the sacred space, it is almost remained undisturbed.



Figure 9: Umbrella Stone,  
Chempottikunnu



Figure 10: Umbrella Stone,  
Kunjimangalam



Figure 11: Umbrella Stone, Velam



Similar Megalithic monuments have been noticed and documented from the above mentioned river belts of the Kannur district. They include a cluster of well finished mushroom type umbrella stones in a hillock named Chempottikunnu ( $12^{\circ}10'10.38''$  N  $75^{\circ}11'39.35''$  E) near Payyannur (Figure 9) and an umbrella stone looks like a traditional hearth made of rough laterite stone blocks near Kunjimangalam (Figure 10). Interestingly, the place of this umbrella stone is known as Aduppoottippara. A tilted well finished umbrella stone at Velam, near Mayyil, which is termed as Yakshimudi (hair of Yakshi) by the local people probably because of its appearance in the laid down posture (Figure 11).



Figure 12: Rock Cut sepulchre, Bhuthan Colony, Cherupuzha



Figure 13: Porthole of the Rock Cut sepulchre, Bhuthan Colony

### A Few Sites in Kasargode District

The local people of Bhuthan colony at Cherupuzha, in the border of Kannur and Kasargode districts, accidentally discovered a rock cut sepulchre (Figure 12). It is located towards the east of Karyankode river. The sepulchre has a porthole with 38 cm diameter and 45 cm thickness (Figure 13). Local people informed that it yielded two legged jars, four potteries and one terracotta lamp. All these were destroyed immediately after the discovery due to the absence of the systematic excavation procedures. As informed by the local people a similar type of sepulchre has been discovered from Vazhakkundam, near the Christian church at Pulingom in the Tejaswini river belt (one of the tributaries of Chandragiri river). The discovery of the monuments is celebrated by the local people for few days and ignored the historical significance of the site for ever. I reached at the site in such a time and it has been almost transformed as a waste pit.

### Rock Cut Sepulchres of Cheemeni, Kasargode District

A cluster of rock cut sepulchres was found at Cheemeni Kizhakkekara in Kayyur Cheemeni Panchayath, (ward number 5) in Kasargode district. Locally these caves are mentioned as *swamimata* (the shelter of saints). About Five caves were noticed. All these were disturbed and filled with water due to the rain. Sepulchre No. 1 had an entrance with doorjamb and a porthole with 35 cm diameter and a passage with 5 metre length (Figure 14). The cave faced towards northeast direction. Sepulchre No. 2 was transformed as a septic tank by the plot owner after closing the entrance part. He has

converted the porthole as the gas outlet of the tank (Figure 15). He was unaware of the historical importance of these monuments and innocently he had shown the gas outlet and so proudly presented his clever idea of converting the porthole into gas outlet. Sepulchre No. 3 located about 200 metre towards north of cave 1 and it was completely covered with soil. The only part found above the surface was the porthole. Sepulchre Nos. 4 and 5 were located on the north of sepulchre 1 and they were also filled with soil. Local people informed that they opened two rock cut caves earlier in the private plot of Adukkandy Kunjatha at Cheemeni Padinjarekkara, near Vishnumurti temple. Accordingly, the caves yielded a number of potteries and one of them contained long paddy husks. The caves had long passage, porthole and lid.



Figure 14: Rock cut Sepulchre No. 1, Cheemeni



Figure 15: Porthole converted as Septic tank, Cheemeni

A rock cut cave sepulchre with porthole and long passage was found at Iriyanny near Government higher secondary school, Kasargode Taluk by the local people. It yielded iron objects and potteries including Red Slipped Ware and Black and Red Ware.

All the above-mentioned sites are located in the occupied private land and many of the landowners are unaware of the importance of these monuments or not interested to maintain it for long period. They seem to have either destroyed these monuments or converted it according to their contemporary need as the plot owner had converted a rock cut sepulchre into a septic tank. The real-estate business is another serious threat for the destruction of Megaliths all over Kerala. The next portion will present one



example of how the real-estate business tradition of modern Kerala annihilated the cultural remains of a locality.

## Revisiting the Megaliths of Perambra

The revisit aims to look at the present status of the archaeological site or locate the site that has been reported earlier and also to explore the later discoveries if any from the region. Perambra, Calicut district, is an old settlement area with few Megalithic monuments. The revisiting of the umbrella stone site at Kodakuthi near Koothali school road, east Perambra, (N 11°34'31.3", E 075° 46'45.0") helped me to add some more details to the existing published report including photographs and also lead to the unreported accidental discoveries of the Megaliths in the surrounding locale. There was a cluster of well finished mushroom type laterite umbrella stone at Kodakuthi (Figure 16). About five intact monuments were there until 2011 March. One of the monuments was excavated by K. J. John in 1979 and unearthed typical burial assemblages including the large pyriform jar of dull-Red Ware with lid, Red Ware and a bronze bowl (John 1982: 148-153). I revisited the site in 2010, after 31 years of the John's excavation and made a detailed documentation including photographs, probably the last available pictures of this site. The site is located in a garden land on the bank of the Tanikkandy rivulet of Kuttiady River. The umbrella stones have finished mushroom type orthostat with a projection at the bottom, which is fixed on the well-dressed clinostat made of laterite (Figure 17). This structural feature is unique to the monument of this site.



Figure 16: Umbrella Stones- Kodakuthi, Perambra

According to local myth, the monuments were placed by Pāṇḍavar<sup>2</sup>, the epic heroes, and believed that these monuments are the seat of some supernatural power. Owing to this belief the site was unoccupied until 2011 and nobody was ready to purchase the plot as well. In 2011, the existing plot owner hired a JCB bulldozer, crushed the monuments, and demolished the entire site to make the plot for sale. Because of the local resistance and complaints, the local police took bulldozer and driver under custody and released



after few hours without charging even a petty case. The Kodakuthi Megalithic site was not included in the list of the protected archaeological sites of Kerala and for that reason, the police men did not move to further procedure to register a case against the destroyers. This site was almost similar to the umbrella stone site of Ariyannur (Trissur) which is a protected site of Archaeological Survey of India.



Figure 17: Umbrella stones with finished mushroom type orthostat - Kodakuthi, Perambra

When I revisited the site, based on the local information, a few more Megaliths were also noticed and documented in detail. It includes a pillared rock cut chamber that is located very close to the umbrella stone site and near the present Gramam bus stop at Paithoth (N. 11°34'23.1", E 075° 46'27.9"), which is about 100 m away from the above-mentioned *Kodakkal* site (Figure 18). The Paithoth rock cut chamber had a square type inner space and about 1.5 m height form the base to roof. The entrance part of the cave and the entire area around the monument was demolished owing to the laterite quarrying. The site yielded very significant artefacts including the broken pieces of the Coarse Red Ware, Black and Red Ware, Red Slipped Ware, iron objects and a few bone fragments. This site is located in a private plot where the laterite quarrying was rapidly progressing. As the photograph shows the surroundings of the cave was completely quarried by the plot owner. The site has more significance as it is found nearby the cluster of Kodakkal at Kodakuthi. Both these monuments are found in the garden land in the catchment area of Tanikkandy rivulet of Kuttyadi river. It is very sad that nobody identifies the significance of these monuments that furnishes the history of the formation of Iron Age



and Early Historic settlements in the catchment area of the rivulet. Since the burials locate not far away from the habitation site even today, the clusters of the Megalithic burials have shown the possible spread of Iron Age and Early Historic human settlements in the nearby locale of the monuments.



Figure 18: Pillared Rock Cut Chamber, Paithoth



Figure 19: Cist Burials, Chakkottupara



Figure 20: Bronze lid, Chakkottupara

### **Chakkottupara -Cist and Urn Burials, Calicut District**

A cluster of cist burials made of granite slabs was found near to a laterite quarry at Chakkottupara (N 11°36'38.5", E 075° 47'35.5"), Changaroth Panchayath near Panthirikara, Perambra, Calicut District (Figure 19).<sup>3</sup> About four cist burials were there and one among them was found opened and partly destroyed. During the salvaging operation, a few iron implements and a copper object were found. Another important object found was a broken piece of bronze lid (Figure 20). This site is very near to the Perambra Kodakkal site from where K. J. John had discovered a bronze bowl. A few fragments of bones were also unearthed. Few pieces of typical Megalithic potsherds including Red Slipped legged jars and Black and Red Ware were also discovered. All these artefacts are coming from a single context.<sup>4</sup> Very close to these cist burials, a destroyed urn burial was also found. According to the local information, a number of small potteries in red colours were found from the urn and all these were destroyed.





Figure 21: Umbrella Stone, Cheriyepparamba



Figure 22: Red Slipped Wares, Rock Cut Chamber at Cheriye Paramba

### **Pampirikkunnu-Kodakkal, Calicut District**

An umbrella stone has been found at Pampirikkunnu of Pannimukku near Perambra (N 11°32'56.63", E 75° 43'51.50") (Figure 21). It is located in a private garden land. It is made of dressed laterite blocks and found intact.

## **Cheriyeri Paramba-Rock Cut Sepulchre, Calicut District**

Near to the Pampirikunnu umbrella stone site, a rock-cut sepulchre was found accidentally during a house construction work at Cheriyeri Paramba (N 11°32'56.63", E 75°43'51.50"). As informed by the plot owner, it was a multi-chambered rock cut sepulchre. They refilled the cave immediately after the opening. The plot owner has shown some of the remaining pottery which include a three legged red slipped jar, two red slipped pottery with graffiti marks (Figure 22). Now these potteries are preserving at the Department of History, CKG Memorial Government College Perambra. Different types of graffiti marks could be found in these potteries. They were found below the neck body part in the potteries.

## **Discussion**

The above-mentioned examples have shown the shameful state of the preservation of the cultural heritage of Kerala. The state authorities are not giving special attention to protect the Megalithic monuments or not even making serious effort to document the monuments and salvage the artefacts from the accidental discoveries properly. The local people are not able to recognize the importance of the Megaliths in the history of their region. Always the accidental discoveries are celebrated locally for few days and ignored forever. In such cases, most of the grave goods were also destroyed. All these sites were found in the private lands. The main purpose of the above narrative is to present the deplorable state of cultural remains of a society prevailed about 3000 years back. It also pointed out that there is no proper state government mechanism or policy to preserve or document the Megalithic monuments in Kerala. Though the State Archaeology Department is functioning in Kerala from the colonial period onwards, it is lacking a team of field archaeologists. This problem can be solved through the appointment of trained archaeology graduates in the post of field research or through funding for the field research projects by the State Archaeology Department to document the accidental discoveries and revisit the reported sites throughout Kerala.

What is the importance of Megaliths in the history of our locale? Probably, it is the earliest known archaeological evidence *insitu* found in almost all part of Kerala. The available distribution map (Gurukkal et al. 1999: 110, 2018: 45) has shown that the Megalithic builders were inhabited in almost all districts of Kerala. The distributions of Megaliths have indicated the population increase in the Iron Age and Early Historic period (Mohanty and Selvakumar 2002). The huge magnificent monument types of Megalithic builders have evidently demonstrated their advanced architectural and mathematic knowledge and their mastery in iron technology (Gurukkal et al. 1999, Rajesh 2017: 486-506). As the archaeologists are not able to find out the solid archaeological remains of the Iron Age and Early Historic habitation or habitation cum burial in Kerala, the only available cultural material belonging to Iron Age and Early Historic period is the Megaliths.

Why the archaeologists are unable to unearth burial cum habitation sites or the evidence about the habitation in the nearby area of the burial monument sites in Kerala? The

absence of excavation attempt in such an outlook by the archaeologist may be one reason. The habitation remains may not survive in the undulated topography of Kerala where we are regularly getting two incessant monsoon seasons. The remnants of the pasts seem to have been washed out from the living surface in every monsoon. In contrast to the Megalithic assemblages of Tamil Nadu region, from where the archaeologists unearthed fine Black and Red Ware and such other typical Megalithic potteries, we are getting highly weathered potteries from the burial contexts. This is not only because of the regional disparities in clay or pottery making technologies but due to the disturbances occurred in the original alignment of the burial by the reason of monsoons and continuous later occupation in the modern times. The Megalithic monuments are perpetually found to occur on high rocky grounds unfit for cultivation. They are mainly distributed in the unproductive hillocks, hillock slopes, laterite tableland and in its slopes. They are often located in the proximity of the water courses. The clusters of the Megaliths are spread over in a single plot in most cases. It shows that the contemporary people had separate space for the dead, probably in the nearby areas of their settlements.

The rock cut caves, cist burials, urn burial, stone circles and umbrella stones are the major types found in the northern part of Kerala. The rock-cut caves, which are abundant in the North Malabar, are not like an ordinary burial. The shape of this monument is quite interesting. The inner space of almost all the caves are found in dome size with portholes and structurally it looks like a big pot. The porthole at the top of the cave is often covered by a stone lid, very much resembles to the neck portion of a pottery. Did the Megalithic people carve an urn in the laterite surface? Was this an urn sepulchre carved in the laterite? However, when compared to other Megalithic types, the construction of rock cut sepulchres requires more skilled labour support and it represented the formation of an advanced form of settlement.

The Iron Age habitation and burial contexts were excavated at Porunthal and Kodumanal region of Tamil Nadu (Rajan et al. 2014). It revealed that the Megalithic people arranged burial grounds not far away from their settlements. In the absence of archaeological evidence, it can be assumed that, similar to that of Tamil region, the habitation sites of the Megalithic people in Kerala must have located in the surrounding areas of their burial sites. In another words, the Megalithic people must have buried the dead bodies in the nearby area of their settlement plots. In short, the Megaliths represent the expansion of human settlements with settled agro-pastoral subsistence and advanced technological skills and man power (Gurukkal et al. 1999, Rajesh 2017: 486-506) of the Iron Age and Early Historic period.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> *Some of the existing studies wrongly quoted the site Bangla Motta Paramba, in Kannur district excavated by William Logan as the site excavated by J. Babington (Gurukkal et al. 1999: 104, 2018: 43, Mohanty and Selvakumar 2002: 313-351). J. Babington excavated the Megaliths of Chettaparamba, near Farook, Calicut dist.*



- <sup>2</sup> *The Pandava story of the epic Mahabharata spread in connection with Megaliths of South India. Various terms like Pandavan Para, Pandavakuzhi, PandavarKuda etc. are prevalent to mention the Megaliths in Kerala as well. According to this myth, the Megaliths have a close link with Pandavas, the opponent of Kauravas in the Mahabharata war. It has argued that the Megalithic funerary monuments also known as Pandoo coolies probably the corruption of Mandavarkuli, means the burial pit of the dead, which are often associated with human skeletal remains and burial structures (Srinivasan 1946: 10). K. Rajan, eminent archaeologist of Tamil Nadu, during a field exploration at Porunthal near Palani, Tamil Nadu, has shared his opinion to me that the Pandavar is nothing but the Mandavar in Tamil, means the person who dead and Pandavarcooli stands for the place where the dead body buried. Later, in the case of Kerala, Mandavar seems to have been erroneously termed as Pandavar. J. Babington also termed the Megaliths as Pandoo coolies, which must have been the local term of the Megalithic monument of Kerala.*
- <sup>3</sup> *The site was located with the help of the students and teachers of C.K.G.M. Government College, Perambra. Special thanks are due to P.R. Shithor and Ranjith, the Research Scholars, Kalady University.*
- <sup>4</sup> *Now all these materials are preserved in the Department of History, C.K.G.M. Government College Perambra and according to information given by the present writer the State Archaeology Department visited the site and made documentation. But no further action was taken to recover the cultural materials from the dilapidated cists.*

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