

# HISTORICAL HERITAGE OF THE TAMILS

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# Megalithic Monuments and Megalithic Culture in Tamil Nadu

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We broadly classify the ancient prehistoric world as Palaeolithic Age, Neolithic Age, and Iron Age or Megalithic Age. The Megalithic Age is corresponding to the Iron Age of the Prehistoric world. Megalithic tombs and related monuments constructed usually of large slabs or blocks of stone, either in their natural form or roughly quarried and trimmed, are more abundant in the Deccan and South India than any other category of ancient structures.<sup>1</sup> It is interesting to note that these Megalithic Monuments show a similarity with Megaliths in other parts of the world, particularly in the Mediterranean and the Atlantic in the caucasus, and in Iran.

This significant factor induces our interest to investigate the relationship of our land with the far off countries. The important requirement for such an investigation is to acquire knowledge of the megaliths in our country, their character and distribution, their way of life and culture etc. through which we can compare the foreign element in a broader context. Still a pride privilege for our people is study and understand the megaliths of our Tamil country. We have no doubt travelled a long way in studying the megalithic monuments but yet more careful and scientific study has to be taken to explore the entire megalithic sites in our Tamil Country. Due to the undaunted, unremitting efforts of numerous scholars in the field during the

last two decades we understand more about the prehistoric people and their culture. An earnest effort has been taken in this article to bring about the significant contributions made so far in the field.

### Megalithic

The term "Megalithic" was used to describe a class of monuments in Europe consisting of huge undressed stones which were termed as Dolmens, Cromlechs and Menhirs. Etymology indicates the word "Megathos" or the magnitude and "lithoi" of the stones. The megalithic sites are generally located on the slopes of a hill or in an elevated place. In India megalithic tombs at Malabar attracted the attention of the scholars in 1823<sup>2</sup>. The tombs at Malabar were termed as "Pandoo Coolies." Since 1823 many scholars took interest and many monuments were excavated for their studies and contributions. These megaliths represent a widespread phenomena and its geographical significance varies from place to place. Interrelationship between the areas and social customs are not an easy one. But the megalithic sites in Peninsular Indian, particularly in Tamil Nadu, are far more impressive than their resemblances elsewhere. Some megalithic monuments are also to be seen on rocky high ground unfit for cultivation and near irrigation tanks.<sup>3</sup> The beginning and end of this culture on the Indian soil is an unsolved problem.

### TYPES OF MEGALITHIC MONUMENTS

#### A) Dolmen Sites

These sites built of stone structures above for partially above ground with out the circle of stones. A single slab of stone supported by several orthostatic boulders or slabs built on the surface of the ground in such a way as to enclose a space or chamber beneath the capstone. It may or may not be wholly or partially covered by a barrow or cairn. A dolmen may be with or without port hole. A number of dolmens surrounded by a ring stone circle is known as multiple dolmens. In Tamil Nadu dolmen sites could be seen in North Arcot, *Kollur*, *Palani Hills*, *Nilgiris*, *Tindivanam*, *Chingleput*, *Pallavaram*, and other place including in Kerala.

## B) Dolmenoid-CIST

This is a burial chamber made of stones both for the sides and the cap, the whole circumscribed by a single stone-circle. Some variants are as follows. In Chingleput it is made of dressed lateritic boulders to form a rectangular chamber, but dressing is only on the inner side. Sometimes the Cist-chamber is seen just above the ground level. It looks like more a cist than a dolmen. Secondly 'both for the chamber and bounding circle granite rocks are used. A capstone rests on the orthostats of each chamber which may be single or multiple. Thirdly the rude stone orthostats are almost completely buried so that the capstone poised upon them appears at ground level. The cairn packing sometimes conceals the whole including the capstone.

## C) Cromlechs

Stone structures above or partially above the ground and which are surrounded by a circle of stones, constructed with three stones or slates placed edgewise in the ground enclosing three sides of a square or parallelogram as supports or walls with one at top as a cover, usually larger than others and having one side open, usually north or north-west. Normally there is also a flooring slab. The cromlechs were discovered in Pondicherry, *Pudukkottai*, Nilgiri, *Puliconday*, and Anamalai Hills.

## D) Cist

A cist is a box like grave built of stone slabs normally below the natural surface of the ground. Usually it consists of a single stone of orthostat for each side and a cover or capstone on its top. It may also have a floor stone. One of the orthostats has sometimes a circular, semi-circular or trapezoidal opening which is known as port-hole. Such a cist is known as port-holed cist. Variant is the transepted cist with ante-chamber. A port-hole is present in the main cist wall. The saptum dividing the cist into roughly equal halves is always oriented east-west, one half, not approached through the ante-chamber, is again divided into upper and lower by a horizontal slab with separate port-holes one below the other for approach. It is

demarcated by stone circles. When the cist underground it is covered by a cairn. This type is restricted to *Pudukkottai* region.

### E) Cairn Circle

The cairn circles comprise of a stone circle surrounding a cairn. Beneath the cairn is found a single, multiple urns or legged terracotta sarcophagus.

### F) Cairns

It is a mound of heaped up stone rubble. A circular enclosure formed by a rough stone wall or heap or single stone. It may be surrounded by a circle or not. Under these cairns is a grave or graves, stone-chest or chests in which bodies and sometimes funeral urns have been deposited.

### G) Hood Stones

This is a dome shaped burial with dressed lateritic stone resting with its flat face directly on a number of hood-stones at the ground level are surrounded by a circle of clinostatic lateritic stones which tending to cover at the top.

### H) Menhir

This is a single monolith set up at or near a burial mound. The monolith may be small or gigantic in height with its base fixed in the earth. Sometimes two standing stones also seen facing each other. In such cases one standing stone is smaller than the other. The local people call them as the King and the Queen. The monoliths may be plain or ornamented. In some menhir sites no burial is seen. At Devikulam in Travancore a burial-urn containing four pots and an iron axe was found beneath a menhir.<sup>4</sup>

### I) Rock-Cut-Caves

These are the caves scooped out into the laterite rock. The dome is vaulted. It may be oblong or circular. Some times benches are found. In some caves there is a central pillar. These rock-cut caves are found in Kerala,

### J) Topikal

The topikal (தொப்பிக்கல்) type has a dome shaped stone. This rests upon four quaderantal clinostatic stones joining up together at the base into a square and dressed up to give the shape of a truncated paraboloid to the entire monument. The topikal is also called as cap-stone or hat-stone. This topikal rests on that runcated surface.

### (K) Hero Stones

This is nothing but menhirs. But the main difference is that the hero stones are smaller in size compare to the menhirs. These hero-stones are referred to as Nadukal in Tamil Sangam literature.

### (L) Sarcophagus

The term is derived from the Greek-words 'Sarco' means flesh, 'fagus' means eating. This is a coffin used as a depository for skeleton remains. In India megaliths have yielded mostly terracotta legged sarcophagi. Usually these are found in dolmonoid-cists. Some of them are seen from rock-cut caves also.

Besides the above monuments there are some technical names in use mentioning the monuments. They are tumuli, Barrow, Alignment, and Avenue. Tumuli refers to all mounds raised above the level of the ground having circle of stones. The barrow refers to all mounds raised above the level of the ground without any circle of stones to mark the edge or encircled by a ditch and sometimes also by one or more circles of stones. The alignment is the name given to a series of menhirs placed in lines on definite pattern. The Avenue refers to two or more alignments parallel to each other. These are large rocks which have been placed regularly in diagonal lines with open squares between each four rocks.

## Megalithic Monuments Excavated in Tamil Nadu

### Coimbatore District

The stone cists at *Makinaikenpatti* and *Nattupplayam* near Pollachi, partitioned into four chambers with two port-holes

in the big stone slab of the eastern wall was noticed.<sup>6</sup> There is another significant study made on the cists. The burials have been divided into three classes. They are, cist with north-south-longer axis, rectangular cist with port-hole on the northern slab and cist with a subsidiary cist inside the main one and with a port-hole on the east.<sup>6</sup> These types suggested on evolution of ideas connected with the burials.

### **Dharmapuri District**

The report of the excavations conducted in Dharmapuri Dist. reveals the significant features of the monuments. The different types of megaliths found in the district were : (a) Port-hole cists in **Doddamanchi, Dodda Timanahalli, Gummanur, Kottur, Nanmandahalli, Nakarapalayam, Palayur, Sengoda Chemanahalli, Suligunta and Timi-jepatti** (b) Cairns-packed cists with stone circles in **Doddamanchi Gunduvalam, Kurumabanahalli, Natarapalayam and Ratna giri.** (c) Dolmenoid-cists with circle stones in **Bethamugalam Bilalam, Hangadevanahalli, Kanavanapalli, Kundukottai, Mallikarjunadurgam, Manchugondupalli Mariyalam, Palaiyamkottai, Puram and Tottikuppam.**

### **Pudukkottai District**

Results of the excavations of megalithic burials at **Sittannavasal, Arnipatti, Surendapatti, and Tachampatti** and **Thodayur** were reported significantly. The interments were urn and cist burials. The cists are cells formed of stone slabs buried in the ground. Transcepted cists also existed. There were no traces of human bones in any of the tombs. All the vessels contained sand mixed with lime. A stone ball, probably, a sling ball, was recovered.

On the basis of surface indications the monuments can be grouped into (a) stone circles around cairn heaps, (b) cists, & (c) cists without any circles.<sup>9</sup> According to internal evidence the megaliths can be classified into pit-circles, Urn burials, both associated with stone circles and slab-cists with several variants namely completely buried, cists with slabs-projecting

above the ground on the eastern or northern orthostat, trans cepted-cists and cist within a cist. The third classification based on the mode of disposal are two ; post-excar nated dis-articulated and fractional and the complete inhumation. North-south orientation of the dead body was the normal feature. Some significant features noticed were (a) cists are family and clan or settlement vaults, (b) structural variation and different modes of disposal indicate the presence of divergent groups, (c) cists and dolmens came late. Their association with the dominant group eclipsed the influence of other groups in the sphere of material culture (d) cist was brought here by a people using Black and Red ware and iron in the middle of the 5th Century B. C., (e) difference in monuments is indicative of different cultural elements. The megaliths are not the product of one people. New traits and old funerary traditions mingled and gave rise to a complicated pattern of funeral repositories.

Dolmens are still erected by some tribes.<sup>10</sup> But the earliest dolmens are the largest. The ordinary dolmen was built of six flat stones to form a cubical chamber. The eastern wall had a circular opening of about 45 c. m. in diameter.<sup>11</sup> The stones were not shaped. These dolmens have been attributed to the Pandavas. A row of sculptured and connected dolmens, forming fine partitions, are found near Nidi Mand, in Nilgiris. The weapons collected from another dolmen site at Kunur were elaborately ornamented.

The late phase of neolithic period overlaps with the megalithic culture in South India. For the first time in 1965 at Hallur, a habitational area, near which dolmens abound and the cist in the neighbour **Payampalli** in North Arcot dated to the close of the second millennium B. C. and to the beginning of the third Century B. C. respectively.<sup>12</sup> The discoveries from the cairns of **Tirunelveli** are interesting to note. The urns were surrounded by a chamber of unhewn stones and they contained pulverised bones, several iron implements namely spear-heads, axe with ring etc. and small earthen vessels. The pots were similar to those found in Anamalai and Nilgiri monuments.<sup>13</sup>

An excavation in Chingleput district reveals the three types of megalithic monuments.<sup>14</sup> At **Virachinnamanalpuram** in Madurai apart from the usual cairn circles with bounding stones placed in circular fashion, monuments bounding stones forming an oblong pattern were also noticed. At the **Pudur** and **Saippapillaiyar** Nattam sites habitational vestiges were also noticed. The cairns at **Kallukulam** recalled those from **Tirukkattala's** (Tiruchi). Some of the cairn were multiple urn burials three in a line. The cairn rubble consisted of broken laterite bits. The bounding stones were of natural laterite art into rectangular shape.<sup>15</sup> Extensive Urn-field was noticed at **Kadiyapatti** (Tiruchi), The bounding boulders were mostly of laterite with quart and laterite rubble for cairn filling.<sup>16</sup> At **Kaliyur** in Nilgiris a peculiar massive cairns was found. Excavation of this site revealed a large stone placed upright in the middle well under which were found urn pieces and miniature buffalo and human figures in clay.

An extensive urn burial site was found at **Nachchir<sup>a</sup>** **Pettimedu** in South Arcot Dist.<sup>17</sup> Urns similar to the **Tirunelveli** ones occur in the Coimbatore Dist.<sup>18</sup> These urns were found interred in cist surrounded by stone circles and contain bones and spear or arrow heads of iron. These chest-like chambers with circular openings were habitations of a pygmy race. Another extensive urn burial site was found at **Goplasamy Paramba**, in Madurai.<sup>19</sup> The megalithic site situated at the base of a hill to the north-east of Pallamcottah was excavated. Several urns were excavated both inside and outside the urns were found bronze and iron objects, skeletal remains and pottery.<sup>20</sup> Particular interest among the collected objects was on iron sancerlamp, a gold head and a concave pottery lid with looped handle. In one of the burial sites found at Nanjalur and another at **Kattumannarkudi** (near Chidambaram). Urn-fields without any megalithic appendage were found<sup>21</sup>. The urns had a granite slab covering. One monument enclosed two urns with a common capstone wick was rather unusual. In one burial at **Pulvayal** in Tiruchi District, it was observed that each urn enclosed the entire human

skeleton in a squatting position holding a short bladed sword in one arm while the other rested on the thigh.<sup>22</sup>

Monuments in Chingleput, Pudukkottai and Cochin, though forming a common complex yet are different in types. The dominant type in Chingleput is the dolmenoid-cist enclosing sarcophagus interment. Cochin's topikal and rock-cut caves and the transepted cists with port-hole of Pudukkottai are the significant monuments of the concerned regions.<sup>23</sup>

The types studied are: **I Dolmenoid:** (a) representing monuments of laterite orthostats dressed on the inner side, (b) the half-concealed orthostatic dolmenoid cists and (c) the fully concealed orthostatic dolmenoid cists.

**II. Cairn Circles** (a) single urn (b) double urns (c) multiple urns and (d) sarcophagi. **III. Kerala type transepted cists with anti-chamber.**

On the analogy of classification adopted in North Europe, the following typology can be used in India.<sup>24</sup> (a) Dolmen (b) Under ground rock-cut passage caves (c) Menhirs (d) **Topi-kallu** (e) **Kudakallu** (f) cist. These can be further divided into: **I Imported types, II Indegenous types, III Origin not established - cairn, cairn, circle, tumulus etc.** The cist with a short passage at Brahmagiri, stone benches in the cist at **Porkalam** (Trichur) and **Sulur** (Coimbatore), three pillars inside the circular cists supporting a cap-stone at **Terdand** (Bijapur) and a cist of the "cross-type" having pillars along the principal exist at **Halingali** might have received inspiration from the rock-cut passage caves of Kerala.

### Monuments of Kerala

A monument common to Tamil Nadu and Kerala was traced at **Porkalam** which yielded etched carnelian beads, the designs on them being similar to some dated ones found elsewhere.<sup>25</sup> Kerala was once a part of the Tamil Country and also called as Chera Kingdom. Race and cultural contact between the other Chola and Pandya countries megalithic monuments in Kerala also reveal the similarities and cultural unity.

But there are certain peculiarities and specialities in Kerala megalithic monuments. *Kodaikallus*, Umbrella stones, Kist Veens, menhirs and burial urns are numerous in Kerala.<sup>26</sup> But the rock-cut caves, hoot stones and hat stones or topikal are special kinds of this land. Numerous kinds of urn burials were discovered at *Chengamenad* in Kerala. But in many of the urn burials bones were not found.<sup>27</sup> The types of megalithic monuments discovered in Kerala are reported as follows. (a) menhirs of laterite type similar to the type at *Tirunakkara*, (b) menhirs of granite as at *Athirampuzha*, (c) cairn circles as at *Athirampuzha*, and (d) Dolmens as at *Kanakari* and *Kuru* in *Lengad*.<sup>28</sup>

Special types of monuments at Kerala are the rock-cut caves. The types of these caves were (a) caves with central pillar, (b) caves without pillar, (c) vases with top opening and (d) multi-chambered caves. The topological evolution of them are (a) benched port-holed cists, (b) caves with central pillar, (c) caves without pillar, (d) caves with top opening and (e) caves developed into multi-chambered.<sup>29</sup> The rock-cut cave tombs excavated into the laterite bed-rock are restricted to Kerala and are mostly distributed in the District of Calicut, Cannalore and Trichur. These are single door way or doorways and the chamber proper. The shape of the chambers vary from circular to rectangular. Out side India such tombs called shaft-graves are common in Palestine and Cyprus Megiddo, Gezer, Jericho, Tell Ajjul, Tell Fera, Lapithos, Ajjos Jakavos, Vouni etc. are some of the typical sites.

On the hill slopes a huge giant size boulders exceeding 1.8 m. in length were used for the bounding circle in the downward gradient while small boulders or none at all in the upper level.<sup>31</sup> In the megalithic levels three successive floors with port-holes were encountered. From the disposition of the port-holes it could be judged that the huts were generally circular, oval or ablong on plan. The circular was varied in diameter between 1.5–3 m while the rectangular ones from 1.7 m—4 m in length. Floors were made of stone chips covered with winnow (*muram*) and invariably plastered over with lime. Normally the houses were single roomed.<sup>32</sup>

The burials at *Adichanallur* are observed on the highland waste unsuited for cultivation. Objects were seen both inside and outside the urns. Traces of cloth were found sticking to some bronze objects.<sup>83</sup> At *Perumbair* (Chingleput), burials situated on rocky high ground. The burials enclosed sarcophagi, urns, pottery, iron implements, personal ornaments of shells etc. Results of the excavations from three burials in N. Arcot Dist. shows that besides usual megalithic interments some special mentions in this monuments are : (a) number of decorated incised chank-shell, (b) Iron plates with conical copper discs (rivets), and (c) a peculiar bird figure (peacock?) attached to an iron sheet.<sup>84</sup>

Bones and skulls suggest many useful informations about the tribes. One of the skulls collected from the *Adichanallur* burials was an Australoid type exhibiting similarity of Dravidian. It is observed that the aboriginal South Indian was similar to the present day Australian native. The finds of Dravidian skull would indicate that the mixture of invading people had taken place before the time of burial. Australian resident of Tirunelveli was not the most primitive type of Indian but was the descendant of Talgai-like race<sup>85</sup>

### Megalithic Monuments of South India

South Indian monuments belong essentially to the Iron Age. In one of the studies, comparing the South Indian Monuments with the monuments at Nubia says that they are closely similar but the metal iron is completely absent at Nubia.<sup>86</sup> But for the complex burials the whole of Peninsular India, Gujarat, Malwa and Orissa have a common material culture, Pottery, tools and weapons typical of Indian Iron Age culture. Megalithic cult was adopted or introduced in to South India by a people who had already come into contact with the Iron Age people in Northern and Central of India. Maritime theory is not acceptable. The finding says that Central and South India was a meeting place of ideas from the east as well as west.<sup>87</sup>

### Features of the Monument in Tamil Nadu

From a study of the megaliths of the Peninsular India it is concluded that the megaliths were a crude form of stupa; votive

stupas were originally meant for commemorations and reference to the departed soul and for the peace of the living. The graves should be made only in the barren soil, on a level ground inclining towards north where water flow from a south-easterly directions. The monuments should always remain exposed to Sun and be easily approachable for worship. The structural pattern according to the Satapata Brahmana are (a) rounded tumulus, cairn or stupa, (b) cave types, megalithic caves and barrows. Cairns and dolmans fall under the first category while the Malabar caves and other chamber-types in the second.<sup>38</sup>

Urn burial and inhumation in pits are indigenous contributions of the Neolithic-chalcolithic communities of South India. It is likely that the megalithic folk borrowed the ceramic types from these communities. The pottery and iron implements encountered in the various excavations, both inhabitations, and burials in South India suggest three possible megalithic phases namely the dolmen, rock-cut cave and cist phases. (a) the white painted B & R ware would go with the first, (b) the plain B & R ware with the second, (c) the distinguishing feature being the presence of russet coated painted pottery in discountable numbers in the second and its predominance in the third.<sup>39</sup>

It was reported that all the resources needed for the Iron Age man were present in Pudukkotai. Stone-circles, cairns, dolmens, and cromlechs are abundant. Neither Vedic Aryans nor the Indus people were responsible for these monuments. Egyptian origin for this cult has also been indicated in the reports.<sup>40</sup> The beginning of the megalithic and urn burial culture is to be found in the Presangam Age and earlier than the effective Aryan impact on South Indians.<sup>41</sup> The megalithic monuments bore witness to a highly advanced state of civilization with the knowledge of iron and community living.<sup>42</sup>

Terracotta legged sarcophagi excavated from the megalithic monuments are very interesting to study. One such sarcophagi

was excavated at Kallur (coromendal coast) has fifteen legs.<sup>43</sup> A noteworthy feature was that in one megalithic monument that is in cairn-circle excavated at *Kunnattur*, Chingleput Dist., there terracotta sarcophagi were found outside the main burial pit but within the bounding stone circle.<sup>44</sup> The significant monument of the Chingleput district is the dolmenoid-cist interring legged sarcophagus.<sup>45</sup> In a cairn-circle a terracotta sarcophagus contained disarticulated bones. Eighteen iron arrow-heads and pots were placed around the sarcophagus. The pit was closed by a rubble packing.<sup>46</sup> Excavation of a burial monument around the *Tirisulam* Hills near *Pallavaram* yielded sarcophagi three to seven feet long and pottery in numbers.<sup>47</sup> At *Perumbair* excavations of crombechs yielded legged sarcophagi.<sup>48</sup>

### Megalithic Culture in Tamil Country

Several megalithic monuments in south India resembles the similar monuments in the Mediterranean Countries, Europe and England. There are similarities between the megaliths of south India and those of the west while a few hold the view that they were indigenous people. The beginning of this culture would go back to 1000 B. C. while the terminal date would be C. A. D. 500. Sangam works particularly *Purāṇnūru*, *Akaṇṇūru*, *Pattuppāṭṭu* etc. are full of references to burial monuments.<sup>49</sup>

The megalithic builders did not bury their dead in arable land. They are found in association with irrigation tanks forcing the calculation that the megalithic people were responsible for the excellent tank - irrigation system (e. g. Chingleput burials). They had a settled community life and mutual contact with others.<sup>50</sup> They knew smelting and forging of iron for their implements and weapons. They also believed in life after death. Their tombs are known as *Pandukuzhis*, *Pandukuris* or *Pandavan Koil* etc.<sup>51</sup>

The emergence of the megalithic culture characterised by lavish iron implements in the Peninsular India and its maturity suggesting an intrusion of a perfected tradition, remains no longer a riddle.<sup>52</sup>

### Dravidian Migration

There is similarity between the South India megalithic and the Mediterranean megalithic monuments. Hence scholars believe that the people from Mediterranean should have moved to South India. There are resemblances between certain customs of the people of western Asia and the Dravidian.

So some writers held the view that the Mediterranean people migrated to South India through Makaram, Baluchistan and Sind. Place names in Iron and Mesopotamia are shown to be similar to Dravidian forms.<sup>53</sup> The Mitanni, the Hurrian and Kassite languages possess an affinity with the Dravidian languages. The scholars noticed surprisingly marked resemblance between *Adichanallur* finds and those discovered in the tombs at Cyprus and Palestine. Iron is found in South India megalithic sites but not in Western Asia. Dravidians learnt the use of Iron during or after their immigration into South India.<sup>54</sup>

Rev. Father Heras read old Tamil straightaway into the Indus Valley inscriptions. Some other evidences also show to prove the origin of the Dravidians in South India. They are: (a) The prevalence of snakecult in Persepolis could be traced the same in South India. (b) The similarity in structure of temple and tanks in Sumeria and South India.<sup>55</sup> (c) In 1969 a team of Finnish scientists deciphered the Indus scripts. Asko Parpola one of the men in the team held that the bearers of the Indus Culture were Dravidians.<sup>56</sup> (d) In 1970 a group of Russian Scientists under the leadership of Yu Knovzov announced that the language of the Indus Valley is identifiable with the Dravidians. (e) Recently I. Mahadevan claims to have deciphered the script and says that the Dravidians are pre-eminently related to old Tamils. (f) Megalithic people worshipped Lord *Muruga* and they practiced snake worship. These customs are, no doubt, Dravidians.<sup>57</sup> The custom of earboring existed in South India and Ceylon. The same custom was practiced in ancient Greeks, Hebrews, Persians and the people in many islands of the Pacific. The excavations made in different places in Tamil Nadu yielded Roman coins and Roman pottery. This prove that the megalithic people had close commercial and cultural contact with the Romans. A study of

Brahmi letters on the potteries shows that in the early centuries of the Christian era the script used was Brahmi and the language spoken was Tamil.<sup>68</sup>

### Social And Economic Conditions

Society was divided on the basis of the professions followed by the people. The excavations conducted in various places in Tamil country throw a volume of light on the social customs, manners, food habits, sports and passtime activities of the people in the period.<sup>69</sup> People practised a number of professions such as agriculture, Iron Industry, carpentry, weaving, beads industry, ceramic industry etc. Hunting was the most favourite and popular game among the people.

The excavations of the megalithic monuments reveal the economic activities of these people. Granary like brick structure found at *Tirukkampuliyur* suggest that they had wide agricultural activities. The discovery of iron sickle, pike, tips of ploughs etc., give us evidences that they had the practice of cultivation in the Tamil country in the early centuries of the Christian era.<sup>69</sup> Hunting and fishing supplemented the food supply of the people. There were other activities such as pottery, weaving, dyeing, metal work etc. The art and industry reached a high water mark and high perfection and sophistication in the megalithic period in 300 B. C. to 300 A. D. A bunch of silk thread which looks like fibre was found in between two walls of the granary in the course of the excavations at *Tirukkampuliyur* which may be ascribed to about 4th or 5th Century A. D.<sup>62</sup> Terracotta human figures excavated are adorned with garments of different kinds. Some round pieces of pottery with a central hole which were used as spindle for spinning. These objects prove that the people practiced weaving and dyeing for their livelihood. Evidences to prove the weaving industry has been discovered from different megalithic monuments in Tamil country. The *Arikamedu* excavations yielded a brick structure which was identified with a dyeing tub. A similar type was discovered in *Uraiyur* also. Some terracotta figures excavated from *Tirukkampuliyur* shows the curly hair style similar to that in the Gandharam figures. The megalithic people used many kinds of ornaments made of beads. They used terracotta, glass, shell,

beads and semi precious stones. They used large number of beads and bangles with painted for their ornaments. They practiced aristocratic and aesthetic life. They spent their time by playing different games. Numerous painted designs lavishly made on the pottery of the period suggest that decorative art had reached a good state of maturity and sophistication.

The megalithic people made good progress in building operations and constructions. They constructed the houses with mud - brick, mud walls and thatched roofs. During the early centuries of the Christian era they used burnt bricks and used lime and mud plastering.<sup>63</sup> The literature of the period is full of references to the existance of famous cities like *Vanji*, *Kanchi*, *Madurai*, *Uraiyur*, and *Kaveripumpattinam* with palaces, temples and well planned streets and houses. In Tamil literature it is stated that the houses were built according to the *sastras* with the help of the architects who knew planning and house building.

The principal food of the people was rice and probably barley and other grains. A large quantity of paddy husk was collected from the excavated sites in Tamil Nadu. At *Chokkanad* peak near Devikulam there was found a large earthen jar containing paddy husk.<sup>64</sup> The very fact that the megalithic monuments are found near the tanks or rivers shows that their main occupation was agriculture.

The next occupation was hunting. Hunting was regarded as the most favourite game. Other sports activities were swimming, boating and various local games were also practised. The *graffiti* marks show the diagrams of boats and other plays. Such marks reveal that they used boats, bow and arrows for hunting etc. for different professions. Some objects resemble "chess men" were also discovered. This indicates that the people played chess. Different kinds of toys discovered show that the young were fond of sports in ancient times.

No large scale excavation as at Harappa or Mohanjadaro have been tried yet. Such excavation would record the different aspects of building operation in Tamil Nadu. The megalithic age marked a period when man made large strides. The steady

improvement of tools, weapons, and utensils, the extended conquest of the materialism and the laying down of essential bases on which the society of the present is raising the standard of comfort and on evolving the worthy form of burial for their leaders.<sup>66</sup> One very significant discovery made in *Porkulam* (Kerala) is that in an area of two acres, Kodikals, dolmenoid cists, and urn burials covered by granite slabs enclosed by circles and caves are found existing side by side, each keeping its respective place, as if all were contemporaneous and part and parcel of the same cultural unit.<sup>66</sup> The monument was finally sealed with a capstone.

## ARTS AND INDUSTRY

### (a) Ceramic Industry

Three types of potteries were excavated in megalithic sites. They are (a) Black and Red ware, (b) Black ware, (c) Russet coated and painted Red ware. Pottery industry reached a high water-mark during the megalithic age in Tamil Nadu.<sup>67</sup> The black and Red ware potteries were made out of a special process of firing them as the "inverted firing". The fine finishing, bright and polished surface of the potteries reveal the notable skill. The Mauryan potteries known as Black polished ware were discovered in *Korkai*.<sup>68</sup> This shows that the Tamils had contact with the Mauryans in 3rd or 2nd Century B. C. This evidence shows that Buddhism and Jainism spread in Tamil Nadu. Another very attractive and designed pottery with the russet coated ware. This type is found in large numbers in Coimbatore, Salem, and Madurai District.

Excavations at the habitation site of *Sengamedu* yielded Black and Red ware associated with shell beads, bangles, bone arrow head etc., It was the first site excavated in Tamil Nadu to afford for the occurrence of the Black and Red ware of the megalithic fabric along with habitation deposits.<sup>69</sup> The pottery industry was the earliest industry. Pottery from a dolmen at *Tiruvilyamala* (Kerala). The designs consisted of wavy lines, loop-cists etc. The pigment used was usually white and must have been executed while the pots were wet over which a slip was applied before firing.<sup>70</sup>

Pottery collected from the excavations at *Paiyampalli*, consisted, besides the usual megalithic wares, of a thin coarse red ware painted on the exterior in chocolate or light brown and was found abundantly in the habitation area of *Paiyampalli*. The design repertoire comprised symbolic representation of human and plant figures, shapes were bowls, tulip-shaped vessels, jars, in Black and Red ware, funnel shaped lids in all Black ware and tall three legged vases, pyriform storage jars in Red ware.<sup>11</sup> In decorating pottery incision applique and stamping techniques are adopted designs included nail-and-finger, tip palm-leaf pattern, wavy lines and triangular notches, occasionally stamped leaf designs was also noticed.

At the same site a special thick coarse Red ware often decorated with incised and applique designs was discovered. Types in this ware were ring stand, vessels with collared or beaded rims, conical vases with painted baser and jars with excured rims,. Shapes in the Black and Red ware included tulip-shaped vases or basins bowls with a bevelled rim, shallow dish conical vase. Funnel shaped lid was the only shape in all black ware. Although sparse in Malwa this ware became dominant in Iron Age replacing other elements. As one moved South the forms got elongated and new specialised ceramic forms appeared. There is homogeneity in this ware and hence we are not justified in distinguishing megalithic and non-megalithic wares. These two main material constituents, the Black and Red ware and Iron came from the north.<sup>12</sup>

There are five varieties of the Black and Red wares while connected problem is three fold namely (a) the genetic relationship, if any, in this chronologically and spatially distributed ware, (b) the technique of manufacture and (c) the origin of the technique whether indogenous or diffused. Ordinary kiln without any special arrangements can only produce either wholly Red or wholly black pots, irrespective of its position in the kiln. Double firing either firing the potred/black first and again refiring the same into black/red with special arrangements would be necessary to produce this ware. Pots of Black, Black and Red wares found both inside and outside the urn; th

pottery was wheel-made and salt glazed of particular interest would be the four legged jars.<sup>73</sup>

The excavations at Tirunelveli yielded the pottery of usual Black and Red, Red etc. The texture found was thin and well made very rare instance of painting consisted of dotted slanting lines occur from the rim.<sup>74</sup> Urn was thick and coarse and red in colour. Pottery obtained from the cairns of *Kallukulam* urn burials were thin and highly polished. A flat circular pottery piece collected from here resembled a coin.<sup>75</sup> Iron was brought with the Black and Red ware into South India.<sup>76</sup> Solution for the megalithic problem lies in this particular ware. Black and Red ware in Ahar, Rajasthan can be dated to 1500-1200 B. C. or earlier. This ceramic traditions spread in time and space and has become one of the constituent elements of the early historic cultures of the Gangetic basin. The megalithic complex is linked with the Black and Red ware and iron. The basic form in Black and Red ware both in south and Central India are common towards the development of this industry. But no independent origin for both could be postulated.

One of the first to collect the russet coated and painted Red ware type was Robert Bruch Foote, the father of Indian Pre-history. He made his collection in 1879.<sup>77</sup> He collected this type from Madurai and *Vellalur* in Coimbatore District. Col. W. H. Tucker reported that he collected this type in 1930 at *Sulur* and other megalithic monuments in Coimbatore District. Similar types were collected at Tiruvilwamala in Cochin state by Govinda Menon. These types belonged to the third Century B. C. So it is reported that the Coimbatore pots must be the oldest known examples of this types.

All black ware type potteries were excavated in megalithic burial sites all over India. The painted variety of this type was found in the lower most state along with Black and Red wares. A uniform slip has been applied generally on the exterior of the pots but in a good number of specimens one notices that the slip has been applied on both sides. The distinguishing factor of this pottery from the North India and Tamil Nadu,

Sir Mortimer Wheeler says that the black ware of North India had a fine fabric and was well fired and usually highly polished.<sup>78</sup> The pottery from Coimbatore and Tirunelveli and those from the Cochin megalithic and rock-cut caves fall into same culture complex.<sup>79</sup> But the black ware in South India was coarser, less well fired and usually not so highly polished.

There are *graffiti* symbols. Brahmi letters and other decorative designs outside and in some potteries, inside. The *graffiti* marks, a bow and arrow are evidences to prove that the megalithic people practised hunting.<sup>80</sup> The *graffiti* symbol resembles a trident may indicate that they worshiped Lord Siva.<sup>81</sup> There are 40 different *graffiti* symbols so far discovered. In Tamil Nadu the Brahmi script was used on potteries during 1st and 2nd Century A. D.<sup>82</sup> Other symbols, discovered are sun, moon, trisulam, svastika, ladder, symbol of a balance etc. are the evidences to show that they worshiped nature. A *graffiti* symbol which has trisula-like mark was discovered in *Alagiri* excavation. The symbol of a balance was the mark of their trade. Another symbol represents a kind of diagram which has long been in use in the Tamil Country for playing a game by name Pulikkattam. It was and is still a favourite game among the village folk. One other symbol, one horizontal line at the top from which are drawn two vertical lines with some interval between them. It looks like a *Sumaitangi*.<sup>83</sup>

The whole complex of ceramics, iron objects and burials are held together by the interlocking megalithic tombs with a port-hole slab, and, above all, the Black and Red ware. Besides being buried in megalithic tombs of many shapes and kinds, some involving two or three chamber and rock-cut tombs of similar style hewn out of laterite, the main forms of burial are in pyriform urns and large pottery sarcophagi. All these types of burials belong to one basic South Indian culture. Certain modes of burial and funerary adjuncts, such as tripods and four-footed urns, are to some extent, regional, but the megalithic grave with a port-hole stone has a very wide distribution extending to the far south and covering the whole of the area of the Dravidian culture complex. Numerous painted

design lavishly made on the pottery, beads and bangles of the period suggest that decorative art had reached good state of maturity and sophistication. The Black polished potteries known as Mauryan potteries were discovered in *Korkai*. This shows that the Tamils had contact with the Mauryans in 3rd or 2nd Century B. C. This was another evidence to show the spread of Buddhism in Tamil Nadu. The Roman influence in Tamil Nadu was also considerable. The Roman traders introduced a type of pottery called rouletted ware. This type was made out of fine clay and first introduced by the Roman merchants. These Roman potteries were locally made but imported fine amphora ware, another type of Roman pottery, also discovered along with them in *Kanchi*. This amphora ware was in conical bottomed particularly used as wine jars. Both the local made and foreign made amphora ware were discovered in the same layer. This was the evidence to show that the Tamils very easily and quickly learnt the art of manufacturing Roman potteries.<sup>84</sup>

### Terracotta Objects

The terracotta objects of many types were discovered such as human and animal figures, toys, linga, ear-ornaments, gamesmen, spindle wheels, rings, oven pieces, cones and cylinders. This industry was much influenced by the similar industries in the North. Human figurines had some Negrito racial characters i. e., thick lips, and a protuding chin. This is of the Dravidian tribal characters.<sup>85</sup> The figure has a flat appearance, with a round face, short neck, broad shoulders, long ears, very prominent eye brows and nose. The expression on the face is one of seriousness. The eyes are wide open. There are holes in the ear lobes suggesting that the figure originally wore ear - ornaments suspended from holes downwards. On the back of the head, the hair style is shown by small incised circles which effect was produced by pecking small circles all over the surface with a hollow cylindrical tubing. On the top of the head the hair is done into a top - knot, as it is usually shown on the head of Balakrishna. It is probable that the identification of

the figure may either be that of a *acharya* or teacher of Buddhist or Jaina sects.

The antiquity of terracotta art in Tamil Country may now be traced back to Neolithic times. The terracotta male and female figurines in various poses with different kinds of drapery nicely worn collected from *Arikamedu*, *Uraiur* and *Tirukkampuliyur*. Terracotta objects both of a secular and religious nature have been found besides toy objects and beads. The terracotta art reached its zenith of perfection during the early Centuries of the Christian era. Terracotta figures in Tamil country were mostly hand made and local in character. Some of the terracotta figurines are solid and some others are hollow. Some figures show the foreign influence. One figure collected from *Tirukkampuliyur* shows the curly hair style similar to that in the Ghandara art. The terracotta figures are useful for getting an insight into socio - economic and aristocratic tastes of the people, they tell us that people worshipped the forces of nature, Gods and Goddesses. They suggest the type of ornaments and dress the people wore. Both men and women wore upper and lower garments. The women wore nicely woven sarees and blouses. The method of wearing dress by women is similar to the modern days; Men were particularly fond of turbans. Like women, men also made different kinds of knots of their hair.

The pottery is generally wheel turned. They are decorated and majority of types is treated with a red ochreous slip. The painted designs comprise triangles, chequers, loops or festoons, wavy lines, parallel uprights, flower designs, ornamental punched etc.

In 1945 the Archaeological Survey of India, at *Arikamedu* near Pondicherry discovered an extensive Indian Ceramic Industry by its association with imported Mediterranean pottery and glass of the first Century A. D. The Industry included distinctive type of polished black or black - and - yellow disc bearing in the inside of its base two or three concentric rings of pattern formed by a cogged cylinder or roulette held against the unbaked vessel as it rotated on the potter's wheel. This roulette pattern is foreign to Indian Ceramic and was derived from

the imported Mediterranean (Arretine) pottery to which it is normal. On some of the potteries from an urn field around Pondicherry a few scratched signs were observed. These were engraved in the thickness of the coating only. Twenty seven lines were observed. It was believed to be potter's marks or those of the deceased themselves. They may perhaps be auspicious signs.<sup>86</sup>

### Iron And Other Metal objects And Manufacturing Skill

Our knowledge of South India iron implements of the prehistoric period come entirely from the excavated implements in different sites. The megalithic tombs yielded a wide range of iron weapons, tools and utensils with the arrival of the metal processes of figuration developed. From that time, the engraving instrument, or burin became the principal tool. Literary evidences say that the iron was introduced in a date around 1000 B. C. in India. Large number of iron objects collected are chisel head, arrow head, nail of round section with knob head, spike, sharp end hooks, barbed arrow head, ring, barber's knife, cylindrical rod, nut cracker, knife blade with a pointed end and sharp edge etc., copper objects are bangles, rings, antimony rods etc. The discovery of iron objects such as sickle, pike, tips of ploughs etc. give evidences that the megalithic people had the practice of cultivation in the Tamil Country in the early Centuries of the Christian era.<sup>87</sup>

Evidences for iron smelting was discovered at *Paiyampalli*, North Arcot Dist.<sup>88</sup> The metal industry also reached a high degree of skill and knowledge of scientific methods like smelting, casting and carving.<sup>89</sup> The megalithic people used iron, copper, tin, silver bronze and gold. The metal was smelted and beaten to bring about the required shapes. Copper and silver were used for making coins.<sup>90</sup> The coins of early Cholas and Pandyas were in copper. The excavations at *Adichanallur* reveal the use of bronze objects by the megalithic people. But they did not use gold for ornaments. The existing evidences prove that the late megalithic people used gold ornaments.

Theory of Major Munn states that the megalithic builders were mining for gold, copper, iron and diamonds. There is some connection between gold-washing and gold-washers and megalithic builders, so too between deposits and megalithic monuments.<sup>91</sup> In South India Iron Age succeeded the Neolithic Culture. The Megalithic Culture was an advanced iron-using civilization.<sup>92</sup> Megalithic iron technology might have been handicapped in the beginning due to the lack of knowledge of environment but in course of time along with pottery a steady increase in iron implements in the different phases is noticable. The iron implements and the pottery implements encountered in the various excavations both in habitations and burials in South India suggest three possible megalithic phases namely the dolmen, rock-cut cave and cist.<sup>93</sup> Identical tool-types in iron found in large number from places as far as *Adichanallur* and Nagpur would testify to the diffusion of closely knit iron works.<sup>94</sup>

The rarity of bronze objects and their use as personal ornaments is very worthy of observation.<sup>95</sup> A bronze bowl was obtained in a megalithic site at *Cohin*.<sup>96</sup> In few places gold diadems and necklaces were discovered in the urn burials.<sup>97</sup> The early Tamil literature speaks about the goldsmiths known as *Porkollar*. In the first Century A. D. Roman gold flowed into Tamil Nadu. The introduction of Roman gold coins were the raw materials for the goldsmith population of the Sangam Age.<sup>98</sup>

### **Beads, Shell And Glass Industries**

Shell bangles, beads and pieces collected from different sites at Tamil Country show the stages in the technique of making shell working was of considerable antiquity in Tamil Country. Semi-precious stones include cryptocrystalline (Carnelian, agate, Jasper) and Phenocrystalline or Citreous varieties of the quartz family. Semi-precious stones constituted an important class of material for the bead making industry and other personal ornaments of the people. Garnet is another semi-precious stone out of which heads were made by

the megalithic people. Soap stone with its smooth surface and soapy feel, which is an ideal material for beads has also accounted for some of the beads. Well shaped but unfinished stone beads and tiny rock crystals collected show that the bead making industry also flourished Tamil Country.<sup>99</sup> Carnelian beads were collected from Sangapadai site at Madurai.<sup>100</sup>

Glass was another material out of beads and bangles were manufactured. Glass objects collected from Tirukkampuliyur were bangles, beads and studs of various sizes and shapes. Glass bangles seen to have been widely popular and opaque glass was used for the manufacture of bangles. The thickness of the bangles varies from 2 m. m. to 5 m. m. The beginning of this industry was in 4th Century A. D. The colour varies from violet to red and their sizes from 1 m. m. to 15 m. m. The shapes were oval, cylindrical, spherical, biconical, truncated, barrel, faceted, multi-faceted, fluted or semented and collared ones.<sup>101</sup> This collared beads are of special interest because they are reported from number of sites in Tamil Nadu dating from about 3rd Century B. C.

The beads are of various shapes and sizes. Their shapes are found in sphered barrel, tabular, round, bi-conical, faceted, segmented, collared and their length or height varies from 1 m. m. to 10 m. m.<sup>102</sup> They occur in a variety of colours like white, green, yellow, blue, violet, black, red and orange. Very tiny disc-like beads which form a unique variety by themselves deserve mention. These tiny forms show the minute workmanship and skill involved in the bead making industry of this region.

From the excavations at *Korkai*, Tirunelveli District, reveal the stages and the periods of the objects. In the first stage along with Black and Red ware and Red ware, shell bangle pieces, cornelian beads and bone ornaments were collected. In the second stage Red ware, Red slipped ware, black ware, brown ware, sawed conches, terracotta objects like beads, spouted pot sherds etc. were found.<sup>103</sup> Similar findings at *Arikamedu*, *Uraiyur* and other places also suggest that the beads and bangles were popular industries along with ceramic industry.

## Religious Belief

The megalithic people believed that the spirit of the dead survived and therefore they prepared some cists for preserving the remains of the dead. The body was placed in an earthen ware pot which was placed in a pit and filled with sand. Along with the pot the dead man's stone tools and implements were laid side by side with some food stuffs. There was also the idea of ancestor worship. Megalithic people worshipped the great power of nature. The literary evidence shows that they worshipped various elements of nature such as sun, moon, sea, river, tank, mountain, pillar, tree, plants etc. They worshipped different Gods and Goddesses of the major religions such as Lord Siva and Lord Vishnu. A figure of a God was discovered in Lower Cauvery basin. This figure resembled Lord Vishnu or Surya.<sup>104</sup> Mother Goddess was also discovered here. A Naga head with five hoods was also discovered in lower Cauvery basin. It was a Naga Linga figure. It is an evidence to show that the cult of the Linga and Naga worship prevailed in Tamil Nadu in the second Century or 3rd Century B. C.<sup>105</sup> The *graffiti* marks discovered show that they worshipped animals, sun, moon, plants, hills, rivers etc.

The worship of Mother Goddess is one of the outstanding features of the Hindu Religious beliefs. Mother Goddess is to defend against evil, offer all to the needy and save the people from natural destruction. This has been believed by the Tamil people for generations and even to-day the worship of Mother Goddess prevailed throughout the Tamil Country. Mother Goddess is believed to be more irritable and capricious in Her temper and moods, more dangerously spiteful and prove to inflict disease if offended or neglected. The worship of Mother Goddess is an aspect of Sivism or force of Sakti.

## Some Interesting Findings from the Megalithic Sites

From the excavations at Nilgiris there is a belief that buffalo was the most frequently represented animal. Bronze bowls were found in an inverted position at Nilgiri tombs. A bronze bowl and an iron razor had traces of cloth wound over them. The bronze found here contained high percentage

of tin. The human figures found here seldom resembled the Todas.<sup>106</sup> Other interesting findings are: (a) Cromlech near *Pulicondah* in the Carnatic is compared to "Kit's Coty House" near Aylesford in Kent. It is believed to be of the Celtic origin.<sup>107</sup> (b) The Turanians or Scythians came to South India through the Southern route along the Malabar Coast where cromlechs are found.<sup>108</sup>

In the Nilgiris and Anamalai mountains they first settled. (c) Urn burials without megalithic appendage were noticed at *Mokanur* (Salem), *Sengamedu* and *Erumanur* (South Arcot)<sup>109</sup> (d) A double chambered port-holed cist was found at *Kalapatti*, near Coimbatore.<sup>110</sup> (e) The study of the megalithic monuments at Nilgiris reveal that a race called *Kurumbars* professed Buddhist faith and were destroyed by the Cholas.<sup>111</sup> (f) The cairns of Tirunelveli were of Buddhist or Jaina in origin.<sup>112</sup> (g) From the collections made from *Panduvaran Dewal* in Southern India (North Arcot) it is learnt that either the sepulchres (tombs) were of high antiquity or the people who built them were of pre-megalithic period. (h) Absence of sculptures or inscriptions indicated that these people were not well advanced in civilization though they could make fine pottery. (i) Some scholars say that these monuments were not of Buddhistic or Jainic or Bhaminic origin.<sup>113</sup> (j) The monuments resemble the Dravidian circles and cairns. (k) Monuments similar in architecture and contents have been found in the mountains of Circastia and the vast plains of Tartary and Northern Europe. (l) These belonged to one family of human race speaking one language who migrated in course of time from a given centre. (m) Megalithic burials with pyriform urns were found at *Porear Koil*, *Tulukenveli*, *Perumalsaikenpalayam* and *Nattamedu*<sup>114</sup> (n) From the excavations at *Paiyampalli*, (North Arcot) a goldsmith's stone mould was found. A terracotta lamp circular in shape having eight lips for wicks was discovered.<sup>115</sup> (o) The topological and regional forms of megaliths differ from region to region. The megalithism might have arrived into India from the west and equally by overland route, along the coasts or across the sea. By around 300 B. C. it is already well established on a large part of lower Southern peninsula.

(p) The shapes of pottery, megalithis, coffin etc. recall analogues in Egypt, Palestine, Crete, Persia and Arabia. (q) Megaliths in Tamil Nadu were similar as the Non-Aryan tribes in burial ceremony as different from cremation which was an Aryan trait in India. (r) The Indo-Aryans had no alphabet. The Dravidians invented Brahmi script. The Indian megaliths builders were Dravidians. They migrated into India by sea in the latter half of the first millennium B. C. There were no Dravidians in the North.<sup>116</sup> (s) There are extensive reference from Tamil inscriptions and Tamil literature viz., *Tolkappiam* and other Sangam works. *Manimegalai* mentions five kinds of urn burials in South India.<sup>117</sup>

### Some Observations of The Megaliths In Tamil Nadu

Excavations of burials reveal more or less identical burial practices in societies widely removed, spatially, ethnically and culturally. For the proper interpretation of burial furnishings different standards of social behaviour and the concept of a full normal life have to be taken into account. Neither the different ethnic nor racial elements in a particular burial in a given place would justify the postulation of diffusion or contact with other cultures. Variance in burial practices is due to the different religious sanctions governing the several circumstances of death and varying concepts of full normal life.

The megalithic people are classified into two types. Those who buried their dead with attendant sacrifice in cairns\* and those who buried their dead without sacrifices and interred the collected ashes in urns inside kistvaens and cairns.<sup>118</sup> Megaliths are wide-spread throughout the world and are perhaps the work of a race having some connection with each other. Burial in jars could have been possible only in a sitting posture. Similar jars and similar customs of burial are prevalent in the present day Africa. Female was buried in oblong tombs in horizontal position while the male was buried in round ones in sitting posture.<sup>119</sup> Differences in arrangement or plurality of the method of disposal of the dead may be due to the different castes or sections of the tribes.

There is lack of evidence for the simultaneous development of megalithism and iron in South India, as seen from the absence of rudimentary pioneering steps. The idea that the megalithic people were intruders among the primitive people of South India is established. Megalithic people settled in North-western India and they were pushed into the South by the Aryans.

The tombs and simple funerary monuments are considered places of *Samadhi* of sages. The places where Buddhist sages attained *Nirvana* are still seen at Kuttakallu and are rendered unmistakable by the rosary of beads, lamps, arrows and earthen ware found in them. In regard to urns found in *Korkai* R. Coldwell refers to the popular belief that old people, when diminished by age were put in urns with food and provisions and buried alive. Such urns are found in Tirunelveli, Madurai, the southern parts of Travancore on both sides of the Ghats and also in the Wynad area on the road to *Vayatiri*. Similar jars are also found in Babylonia where they are coated with bitumen, a black smear prepared from the juice of *Autilon indicum*. Burial is supplemented by other pre-cautions against the return of the ghost. Graves are provided with mounds, tomb stone on enclosures to keep the dead from walking or to prevent the ghosts from returning to the old haunts. Megalithic tombs, many of them, have a common structural elements notably the port-holed chambers. These port-holes were provided to enable the spirit of the dead to pass out and return back into the tomb.

Some of the controversial points are yet to be solved. Conventional methods give a date ranging from 3rd Century to a little earlier to the 4th Century A. D. Iron diffused into India from two points, one from the North and the other a point of contact on the west coast. Megalithics have a world wide distribution. Chronologically they may be dated to the neolithic times. Different types of mounments even though belonging to the same period reflect cultural diversity. Urn burials are characteristic of Southern districts of Tamil Nadu.

### CONCLUSION

The topic Megalithic Monuments and Megalithic Culture is a vast area of research study. The megalithic monuments in

different parts of the world present such a uniformity of structure that it is hardly compatible with theory of independent origin. Who were these builders? What happened to them after certain time limit? Different scholars express different theories and views. Some of them say that this is not some vastly remote pre-historic period but that of the early historic period i. e. between 322 B. C. to 500 A. D.

Megalithism is still a living institution in Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Chotanagpur and Assam. The *Kols* have a custom of erecting monuments over the buried ashes of the dead. The *Malayarayans* in Kerala erect miniature dolmens in honour of those dying an unnatural death. The *Kurumbas* of Malabar erect dolmens. The megalithic monuments of Tamil Country bear eloquent witness to the historic and cultural achievement of ancient Tamil land and constitute a heritage of incalculable value which it must be our privilege to guard and hand over to posterity.

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