
Archaeological Discoveries of Pre- and Proto-historic Cultures from North Kerala, South India

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Received: 26 July 2016; Accepted: 23 August 2016; Revised: 01 October 2016

Heritage: Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies in Archaeology 4 (2016): 627-636

Abstract: *This paper presents the new archaeological discoveries in Northern Kerala and seeks to situate the same in the cultural milieu of the region. An evaluation of the discoveries in light of the known record suggests the region to be occupied since the Lower Palaeolithic times.*

Keywords: Lower Paleolithic, Mesolithic, Neolithic, Megalithic, Handaxe, Adze, Ceramics

Introduction

The archaeology of North Kerala is comparatively one of the lesser understood regions in the South Asia. Even though some of the early discoveries of the presence of Neolithic and pre-historic art of South Asia had taken place from the same region, subsequent investigations in the area have been sporadic and limited. However, of late there has been a spurt in the archaeological investigations in the region resulting in several new discoveries. The paper in this regard presents new archaeological discoveries datable to Prehistoric and Proto-historic times in the region (Ramesh 2016).

Archaeological Discoveries in the Region

In Kerala, the evidence of the presence of prehistoric cultures was first established by Todd at Chevayur in Kozhikode district. He identified certain artefacts datable to the Mesolithic from this region in 1930-35. Subsequently, Pre-historic research since 1974 in Kerala by Rajendran established the existence of cultural evidence ranging from the Lower Palaeolithic to Megalithic periods. Along with their discovery, his work also brought to light the survival of some of the pre-historic cultural traits among the tribes which inhabit the densely forested zones of the western ghats (Rajendran 1989; 2005a, b).

The Palaeolithic evidences were discovered from Kattikkandam of Vanimel river basin in Kozhikode district and Cheerakkayam and Anakkayam river basin of Chythravahini river of Kasaragode District, which flows to Valapattanam river. The Palaeolithic

evidences include pointed handaxe, pointed choppers, borer-cum-scraper and side scraper. The Mesolithic site was found at Panom forest, Kozhikode district. Neolithic Adzes have been found at Komiyodu and Pandikkadavu river basin of Vanimel River. Several Megalithic sites discovered in the region include the Urn-burial jar (Nannangadi) at Vellakunnu near Panoor and Laterite Dome near Kodiyei in Kannur District.

A typical lower Paleolithic pointed hand axe found from the high terrace of the river Vanimel was made of quartz and measures 16.5 cm in length, 6.6 cm in breadth and 4.4 cm thickness (Fig.1.). Its ventral side is fully flaked leaving a prominent ridge running end to end and half of its dorsal surface retracts cortex, while the remaining part is flaked (Ramesh 2015). Similar such implements were earlier discovered from Thenkara in Palakkad district (Rajendran 1989).



Figure 1: A lower Palaeolithic pointed hand axe from Vanimel river basin

The Lower Paleolithic industry in Kerala is mainly non-acheulean, chopper- chopping-scraper assemblages, exclusively made of the locally available quartz (Rajendran 2010). A set of Lower Paleolithic implements were found at Cheerkkayam and Anakkayam river of the Chythravahini river basin in Kasaragod District, which originates from the Konnakkadu forest. These are from the terrace of the river. They have the

characteristics of pointed choppers of the Lower Palaeolithic (Fig. 2), and are made of heavy split pebbles of granite. The third one is a Borer-cum-scraper made of a large flake. Its ventral surface has a single flake scar while several flake scars are seen on the dorsal side and a notch near the borer end and the dorsal ridge are conspicuous. The forth artefact is a side scraper on a flake. Unifacial secondary flaking from the dorsal surface along the two margins is clear and the tool is slightly rolled (fig.2). These Palaeolithic implements were discovered for the first time in Kozhikode and Kasaragod Districts of North Kerala (Ramesh 2013).



Figure 2: Lower Palaeolithic pointed Choppers from Anakkayamand Cheerkkayam of Chaithravahini river basin, Kasaragod District

A Mesolithic site was found at Panom forest, Kozhikode District, which lies 1500 feet above the sea level, bordering the Kozhikode and Wayanad forest range. The tools have been found near the stream of the forest. The finds included spear- head with shouldering on a flake, concave side scraper, broken blade, unifacially flaked side scraper on a flake, which retrains cortex opposite to the working edge (Fig. 3.). Spearhead with shouldering on a flake is a rare Mesolithic find in Kerala.



Figure 3: Mesolithic Artefacts from Panom forest, Kozhikode District

In general, the Mesolithic sites from Kerala yielded larger tools especially from Podippara and Malampuzha and they show similarity with that of the Magnanapuram industry of Tinnvelly area. A good number of smaller tools have also been obtained along with bigger implements from Malampuzha, Podippara, Walayar, Mankara, Ayanur, Pandikkad, Kulappalli, Attappadi, Wayanad and Thenmala (Rajendran 1989).

The Neolithic evidences were found at Kommiyod and Pandikkadavu river of Vanimel river basin. The finds include four Neolithic Adzes. The stone Adzes made of quartz are well polished and it is more or less symmetrical shape. The length, breadth and thickness of the adzes are 10.1x5.8x2.4 cm; 8.6x4.3x1.7 cm; 9.1x4.6x2.2 cm (Fig. 4.). They have more or less straight to convex working edges at the distal end (Ramesh 2014). Similar evidences are earlier reported of Kunnnoni in Meenachil river basin in Kottayam District (Rajendran 2000), in Wayanad (Fawcett 1901), and more recently Antokuriyan near Tharappathukavala, Wayanad District (Ramesh 2016).



Figure 4: Neolithic Adzes from Kommiyod and Pandikkadavu rivers, Kozhikode District

New Evidences from the Megalithic Sites

Babington's work got commendation due to the fact that it was the first published work on Indian Megaliths. John Babington noticed many 'Kodey Kulls' and 'Topie Kulls' in the region of Malabar in November 1819. He excavated a few 'Kudey Kulls' found in the region of Malabar in November (c.f. Darsana 2007).

During a land clearing operation a Laterite dome (Rock-cut cave) was been sighted at Karaltheruvu near Kodiyeeri in Kannur District. It has a rectangular entrance with two framings measuring 54 cm and 64 cm length. The entrance has a width of 42 cm, an in situ cut pillar in the middle of the dome measuring 75 cm in height. The dome has semi-spherical shape with diameter of 2 m. Two laterite cut benches are seen within the dome along with a large number of ceramics. The ceramic varieties included Black-and

-Red Ware, Black Polished Ware, Three legged jars with geometrical painting (Figs. 5 and 6) Red Ware with incised linear paintings. A few iron implements were also part of significant finds from the megaliths (Fig. 7). The painting and incised motifs seen on the pottery express two distinct artistic aspects of the Megalithic culture. Such type of geometric designs on pottery has been reported from Poredam in Kollam District (Rajendran 2005).



Figure 5: Three legged jar with geometrical painting within the laterite dome, Kodyeri, Kannur District

Another Urn-burial site was exposed at Perumundassery near Nadapuram in Kozhikode district. The rim of the pots was found at 1.5 feet depth within the laterite soil. The large pointed Urn contained Red ware and Black Polished pottery, Black Polished lid with knob (fig. 8.), iron dagger and chopper (fig.9.) and eagle head-like figurines (fig.10.). The weapons are found within the large pointed Urn, while the smaller urn did not contain any artifact but the pot was filled with river sand (?). The eagle head-like figurines are not a common feature in Megalithic sites of Kerala. It may be speculated that the Megalithic people had used this type of figurines for ritualistic purposes (Ramesh 2016).

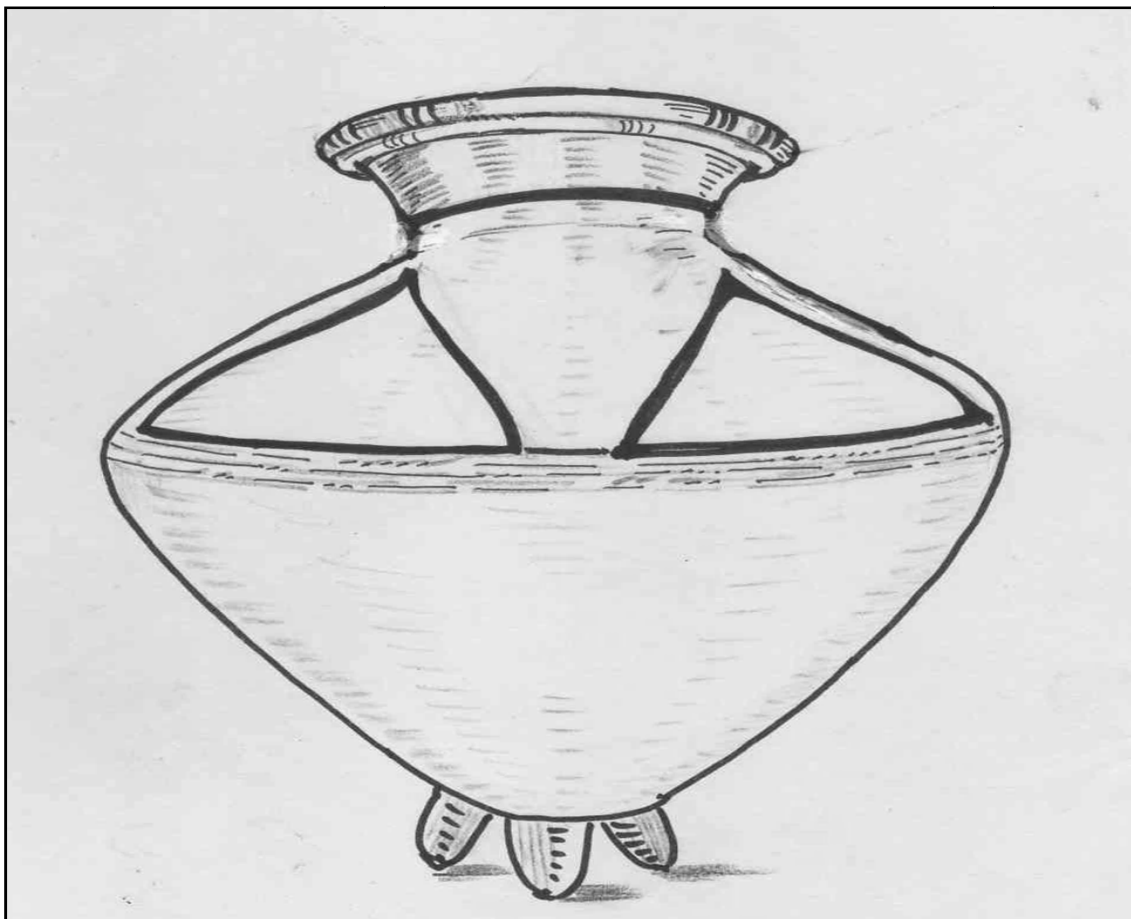


Figure 6: Sketch of geometrical painting on the three legged jar from Kodiyeri, Kannur District



Figure 7: Iron Implements within the laterite dome, Kodiyeri, Kannur District



Figure 8: Redware and Black polished pottery within the Urn from Perumundasseri, Kozhikode District



Figure 9: Iron dagger and chopper within the Urn from Perumundasseri, Kozhikode District

New Archaeological Finds from North Kerala

A significant Urn-burial jar along with bowls and a metal artefact have been recently found at the courtyard of the Mangalassery Govindan at Vellakkunnu near Panoor in Kannur District. The Urn having a ceramic lid was found at a depth of 50 cm depth and the big jar measures 90 cm in height and the diameter measures 77 cm at the middle (Fig.11.). The one notable peculiarity of this burial monument is the presence of a globular copper oblique bronze artefact inside the jar which perhaps may have been an object perceived to be sacred by the Megalithic people. The metal artefact has seven Antenna like projections, the top and morphology of the object testifies that it was a product of an advanced technology. It is for the first time that such an object has been found in Kerala in the Megalithic context (fig. 12.). Six terracotta hooks were found inside the rim region of the Urn. Similar evidences were earlier reported from the Urn-burial site at Adittanallur in Tamil Nadu (Aiyappan 2007).



Figure 10: Eagle head like figurines within the Urn from Perumundasseri, Kozhikode District



Figure 11: Urn burial jar (Nannangadi) from Vellakkunnu, Kannur District



Figure 12: A Globular metal artifact within the Urn,Vellakkunnu ,Kannur District

Conclusion

The discoveries of Palaeolithic to Megalithic evidences established the pre and proto-historic habitation of North Kerala. These evidences clearly revealed that the various population groups settled in North Kerala with suitable environmental set up.

Acknowledgements

The work was undertaken with the scholarly guidance of Dr.P.Rajendran, former UGC Research Scientist and Archaeologist and with the in depth inspiration of Dr. K. K. Muhammad, Archaeological Survey of India.

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