



MALLACHANDIRAM - A UNIQUE MEGALITHIC BURIAL SITE WITH HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE

Paranthaman S.

**Ph.D. Research Scholar , Department of Ancient History and Archaeology,
University of Madras,Chepauk Campus, Chennai.**

ABSTRACT :

Iron Age in Tamil Nadu succeeds Neolithic culture, where Black-and-Red ware became the most significant pottery type. In Tamil Nadu, Megalithic culture is considered and used as synonyms for Iron Age. The word Megalith comes from two Greek words, megas meaning big and lithos meaning stone. Megalithic tombs and related monuments were constructed usually of large slabs or blocks of stone, either in their natural or roughly quarried and trimmed manner. These are the earliest monuments erected by the people for the specific purpose.



KEYWORDS : *Neolithic culture , specific purpose , Megalithic culture.*

INTRODUCTION

The Iron Age in India mainly during first millennium BCE was a period when the social transformation towards the formation of urban society and states occurred. Since the first discovery of Megalithic burials by Babington in 1823 at Malabar in north Kerala, many scholars took interest and many megalithic burial sites were discovered and excavated. The megaliths culture represents a widespread phenomena and its geographical significance and chronology varies from place to place. The present cultural site 'Mallachandiram' was first identified by Ramanujam a government high school teacher at 1971 subsequently researches were also done by the several eminent scholars. It stands as a crown among the other megalithic site in Tamil Nadu. Unfortunately it is not under the protection of any Organisation. As I am a native of Krishnagiri, to my fortune, a topic "Archaeology of Krishnagiri region" has been suggested to me by my research guide for Ph.D program. As a part of field work, I have visited several times to the site and studied the area. During my last visit, I have observed a drastic vandalism at many Dolmens. In this presentation, I would like to highlight the unique characteristic features of the site and also sincerely appeal the concerned authorities to protect and preserve the heritage gem from the treasure hunters otherwise it may disappear soon.

The region

The present study area of Mallachandiram is a village located in Soolagiri taluk, Krishnagiri District. Krishnagiri district is located between 11°12'N and 12°49'N of the latitude and between 77°27'E and 78°38'E longitude. This district is situated on the northwestern part of Tamil Nadu. The district is bounded by Vellore and Thiruvannamalai district (Tamil Nadu) in the east, Bangalore (Karnataka) in the west, Kuppam (Andhra Pradesh) in the north and Dharumapuri district (Tamil Nadu) in the south. Geographically the present study

area forms part of Tamil Nadu uplands situated at an elevation of 300 m to 1400 m above the Average Mean Sea level (AMSL) that falls under one of the terraces of Mysore plateau called Baramahal, which is characterized by the hill such as Javadi, Thierthmalai and Kalvarayans hills.

Locale of the Megaliths

Most of the sites having Megalithic burials from Krishnagiri district are found in the proximity of availability of raw material for erecting memorials. The availability of the raw material in the nearby area or in some approachable distance played a major role in selecting the graveyard. There are different types of burials noticed from this part of Tamil Nadu and they are, 1. Cairn-circle, 2. Cairn-circle with cist, 3. Dolmen, 4. Dolmenoid cist, 5. Cairn-circle with porthole cist, 6. Cairn-circle with urn, 7. Cairn circle with Sarcophagus. For constructing all these types of burials, availability of stones is the most important factor. The Megalithic people for burying their dead ones in the burial; they utilized the locally available raw material. The erection of all megalithic burials in Krishnagiri District clearly demonstrates that the stones used in burials are available within the distance of 1 or 2 kilometer (Ref.). They used boulders for the circles and slabs for orthostats for constructing chambers. Cists burials were made of both undressed and dressed slabs and capstones were generally undressed ones (Ref.). Majority of the dolmens and the associated slab were built of dressed stones only. The dolmenoid cist used big flat capstone rested on boulders or walls made of rubble.

Mallachandiram

This significant and unique Megalithic burial site Mallachandiram is located (12°38'22"N; 78°05'15"E) on the Krishnagiri - Beerpalli road at the distance of 19 km from Krishnagiri and 4 km from Samulpallam. Samulpallam lies on the Krishnagiri - Bangalore road at the distance of 15 km from west of Krishnagiri. The dolmens are locally known as *panduvurar koil* and are found on the low hillock namely *Moralparai* (local name). More than 200 dolmens have been identified on the flat surface of the hill and cover an area of 20 hectors. The height of the dolmen varied from 1 mts. to 2.50 mts. Based on the architectural features, these dolmens can be divided into four types.

Type-I

This type of dolmen is built of four vertical orthostats measuring 2.00 x 1.00 x 0.15 mts. in size placed around the base slab in *swastika* pattern either in clockwise direction or anti clockwise direction. The round porthole measures 30 to 40 cm in diameter and is invariably found on the eastern orthostat. The passage is noticed in front of the porthole i.e. on the eastern side. These passages are either made of two vertical slabs placed on either side of the porthole or small triangular slabs placed in four to five courses to form a wall-like structure on either side of the porthole. The passage had a gap of 50 - 60 cms and was enclosed by another vertical slab.

The capstone rests on the vertical orthostats. The whole structure is encircled by a rectangular slab circle like a wall or stone railing. Sometimes more than one circle is observed. In this case the outer circle is lesser in height than the inner circle. The whole structure looks like a fortification wall rising from base to top. To avoid any inward or outward collapse of the vertical slabs or orthostats a rectangular brick shaped stones were placed in number of courses in the gap between the slab circles and dolmen, covering half the size of the dolmen.

Type-II

The construction of dolmen in this type is same as noted in the above but the outer circles had some variation. There are double circles made of vertical slabs. The vertical slabs of the inner circle are side 1 to 1.50 m above the height of the dolmen.

In each slab circle, slab with semicircular top and slabs with rectangular top are placed alternatively around the dolmen. The slab with semicircular top is taller than the rectangular slab. The first

one measures 3.00 x 1.50 x 0.20 m in size, whereas the second one measures 2.10 x 1.50 x 0.20 m in size.

Interestingly, the tall vertical slab with semi-circular top standing in the inner circle against the porthole of the dolmen also had another porthole. This unusual phenomenon noticed first time in Tamil Nadu. However, the slab erected in front of the porthole of the outer circle does not have a port hole. But this type is reported earlier by B.R. Branfill near Iralabanda in Palamaner Taluk of Chittoor District, Andhra Pradesh. Here, the vertical slabs alternatively flat or round topped are planted into the ground and arranged in three concentric circles around the cist. All the vertical slabs placed in three circles against the porthole had a porthole.

Type-III

In this type, the architecture of the dolmen is similar to that of the above types but the circle and the passage have some other features. In front of the porthole, there is a passage made out of small rectangular slabs placed in five to six courses on either side of the porthole almost raised upto the porthole level. This is closed with another slab on the east. The whole structure is encircled by a circle formed out of triangular stone slabs placed in six courses. This looks like a wall. The gap between this enclosing circle and the dolmen is filled with loose slabs.

Type-IV

In five cases, number of smaller dolmens (sometimes nearly 10 dolmens) erected around a comparatively bigger dolmen placed at the centre is observed. It looks like a security guard standing around an important man. Interestingly, the porthole is seen on the northern side in one of the dolmens. In another occasion, one of the dolmens placed around the main dolmen has three orthostats except on the south which may be missing. It does not have the porthole. Hence it may be presumed that the fallen or missing southern orthostat would have had the porthole. The smaller or miniature dolmens placed around the bigger face all cardinal points as the porthole indicates.

Painting on Dolmens

White painting is applied on the interior surface of the orthostat mostly on the western slab i.e. against the porthole. However, painting applied in other orthostats also available and in rare cases all the four orthostats contain paintings. It seems that the painting executed on the western orthostat first and followed in other orthostats once the western slab got exhausted. Totally nine dolmens were painted. Two human figurines depicted on the western slab of the first dolmen. The second dolmen had a human figurine with an animal at his feet. Another symbol of a vertical stroke with number of 16 small horizontal strokes ends with circular top. Third dolmen has two unidentified symbols on the southern slab. The fourth dolmen has a human in which the legs and hands are shown by three branched strokes on the western slab. The fifth dolmen having a human figurine that holding a bow and arrow above the head. Two other symbols are unidentified. The sixth dolmen has number of symbols. In the first set two human figurines are shown side by side with one plant just above them. Another set has a man holding a bow and arrow above his head. Next to this, an unidentified symbol is drawn. The third set, a human figurine, one plant and one house like structure. The fourth set having a man with an animal, a plant above the mountain or a house and a man with an animal on the western slab. In the seventh dolmen, there are three human figurines in which two are shown with raised hands. Just below this a house and two men with an animal each are depicted on the southern orthostat. The eighth dolmen has four symbols noticed on the northern orthostat. Three symbols are identical having a man riding or holding an animal with left hand holding a disc. However third man doesn't have any disc. The fourth symbol is unidentified. The ninth and last dolmen has three men are noticed on the western slab in which two are standing and the third is riding on animal by holding a disc in the raised left hand.

DISCUSSION

The geological setting of the burial site, the various techniques and methods applied in erection of the dolmens, different types within the single site, and their special characteristic features like Painting etc., are all forming uniqueness to the burial site at Mallachandiram.

Based on the available data, it is known that there are around more than 1000 megalithic sites of different types found in all most all the districts in Tamil Nadu but the **present site stands as a unique one by its special characteristic features** which is not found elsewhere in Tamil Nadu. Unfortunately, this unique nature of site is under danger by the treasure hunters. The villagers in search of treasures, such as gold or other precious objects, dig up the burials and when they found nothing inside the dolmens, they stop and leave the place. In this way a large number of dolmens are being destroyed. Unless it is protected by the State or Central archaeology departments and creating the awareness to the public about the importance of this cultural site, the destruction caused by the treasure hunters may lead to disappearance the **unique cultural heritage gem very soon**.

NOTES AND REFERENCE

1. Aiyappan, A., 1945 The Megalithic Culture of Southern India, *Proceedings of the Indian Science Congress Association*, vol.XXX11, part II, pp.175-180.
2. Banerjee, N.R., 1965 *The Iron Age in India*, Munshiram Manoharlal, Delhi.
3. Branfill, B.R., 1880 Rude Megalithic Monuments in North Arcot, *Journal of Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal*, vol.49, pp. 8-10.
4. Childe, V., Gordon, 1947 Megaliths, *Ancient India*, no.4, pp.4-13.
5. Gururaja Rao, B.K., 1972 *The Megalithic Culture in South India*, Prasaranga, University of Mysore, Mysore.
6. Krishnaswami, V.D. 1947 Megalithic Types of South India, *Ancient India*, No.5 pp: 35-45
7. Maurice Phillips, 1873 Tumuli in the Salem District, *Indian Antiquary*, II, PP: 223-28
8. Moorti, U.S., 1994 *Megalithic Culture of South India, A Socio-Economic Perspective*, Ganga Kaveri Publication, Varanasi.
9. Narasimhaiah, B. 1980 *Neolithic and Megalithic culture in Tamil Nadu*, Delhi
10. Raghunatha Rao, B., and Sasisekaran B., 1997 Guttur, An Iron Age Industrial Centre in Dharmapuri District. *Indian Journal of History of Science*, vol.32, no.4, pp. 347-359.
11. Rajan, K. 1991 Archaeology of Dharumapuri District, *Man and Environment*, 26 (1), pp: 37-52
12. Rajan, K. 1992a Iron Age Culture of North Arcot Region, *Puratattava* 22, pp: 35-47
13. Rajan, K. 2004 Excavations at Mayiladumparai, *Man and Environment*, 29 (2), pp: 74-89
14. Pulney Andy Senji, P., 1985 Tamil Nadu District Gazetteers Dharumapuri district

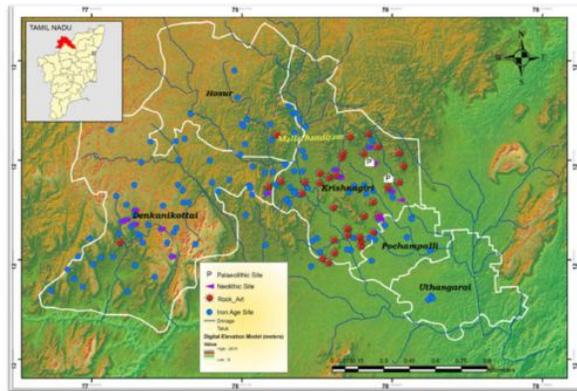


Fig: 1 Map showing location of Mallachandiram and other archaeological sites in Krishnagiri district



Fig: 2 Double slab circle with porthole dolmen, Mallachandiram, district Krishnagiri



Fig: 3 Double slab circle dolmen, Mallachandiram, district Krishnagiri



Fig: 4 Double porthole dolmen, Mallachandiram, district Krishnagiri



Fig: 5 Cairn circle with dolmen, Mallachandiram, district Krishnagiri



Fig: 6 Disturbed dolmen with slab circle, Mallachandiram, district Krishnagiri



Fig: 7 Disturbed cairn: circle with dolmen, Mallachandiram, district Krishnagiri



Fig: 8 Disturbed dolmen, Mallachandiram, district Krishnagiri



Fig: 9 Rock Art on the North and East orthostats, Mallachandiram, district Krishnagiri



Fig: 10 Human riding on the animals scene on the northern slab of the Dolmen, Mallachandiram, district Krishnagiri



Fig: 10 Human, animals and plants on the northern slab of the Dolmen, Mallachandiram, district Krishnagiri



Fig: 10 Human riding on the animals scene on the northern slab of the Dolmen, Mallachandiram, district Krishnagiri



Paranthaman S.

Ph.D. Research Scholar , Department of Ancient History and Archaeology,
University of Madras,Chepauk Campus, Chennai.