

HISTORY – MODULE 3: PRE-MODERN PERIOD

MEGALITHIC CULTURE (Video Class: 9)

MEGALITHIC PERIOD - c.1000 BCE -100 BCE

Iron age in North India – Vedic period.
Iron age in South India – Megalithic period.

1000 BCE –BURIAL PRACTICES

- Megalithic people had a distinctive cultural phase, socio-religious-economic lives of the people. Traces of their life style is evident from the grave's goods. No written documents are available.
- Burial places moved out of habitation- huts located at demarcated places – megalithic sites, i.e., funerary structures.
- Megalithic markers – stones, big stones slabs (locally available stones are used), anthropomorphs.
- People who inhabited such sites – Megalithic builders.
- MEGA (large) + LITHOS (stone) - Megalithic: encircled with large piece of stones.
- Habitation: hilly areas. (Not in low plain areas)
- Doubt between scholars – the dead bodies were cremated & bones were placed in burial grounds / dead bodies were placed in megalithic burial grounds. The place was encircled with the stones.
- The Chera, Chola, Pandya – belonged to the later megalithic period.

Megalithic Monuments: Stone circles, Dolmens, Cists, Tomb stone/ Toppikkallu, Umbrella stone / Kudakallu, Menhirs, Urn burial / Nannangadi system, Rock cut chambers / Muniyara, Great Stone.

Graves contain: skeletons, pottery (red ware, black & red wares), iron objects (agricultural tools were less), tools for hunting & fighting – knife, swords, ornaments, utensils, iron artefacts (hoes & sickle), small weapons, horse trappings, etc.

Megalithic Sites: 102 sites. Tamil Nādu, Kerala, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh & in South India.

- Urn burial / Nannangadi system – Nannangadi are big clay jars containing remains of the dead- placed in a pit, covered with soil & big stone was placed over it- some places, big stones are placed above the urn burials.
- Menhirs- upright monumental stones.
- Dolmens – made of big slab / boulders: consisted of a number of large stones information.
- Thoppikkallu- capstone making pit.
- Cist burial- pits often have what is referred, encircled with stones- there will be rectangular box made of stone slabs to contain bones & grave goods. Sometimes there is a circular hole in one of the side slabs, referred to as porthole. The function of the porthole was to provide enough space to perform rituals. Initially the remains of the cremated person are placed in the rectangular cist-then rituals, sacrifices,

prayers are practiced -grave goods like ornaments, potteries, belongings are placed in the cists through the portholes.



Rock Cut Chamber



Sarcophagus



Menhirs



Great Stone



Kudakkallu



Thoppikkallu



Stone Circle



Dolmens



Cist with Portholes

FEATURES

- Megalithic tombs contained the **material remains of the head of families or chieftains.**
- Doubtful – whether the common people are buried in the tombs or just members of higher-class sections.
- **Custom – to bury boxes / pots containing food grains, vessels, ornaments and weapons in the graves along with the bones of the dead. Which shows: belief in after death.**
- The forms and styles of megalithic burials are diverse - Some had rock cut chambers, Some single standing stone / extremely large, stone markers or menhirs
- Megalithic burials **did not constitute single culture.**
- **Southern Tamil Nādu – buried skeletons of the dead in urns made of red pottery in pits- not surrounded by stone circles & small number of grave goods were placed.**
- Practise of urn burials in Tamil Nadu were different from cist burial practise of Andhra.
- Similar megalithic practices – **same dates occurred in Sri Lanka.** Which, suggests a links between south India & Sri Lanka.
- They **used same burial ground for centuries.** But the burial chambers were not used to bury people. **Single use.**
- Represent **small elite group within a ranked society.**
- **Fewer burial- children & young adults.**
- **High percentage for adult male.**

- **Romila Thapar – the megalithic culture of south India has close similarities wit the megalithic culture of the Mediterranean.**

- **R. D. Banerji- the Dravidian practised burial without cremation and followed customs similar to those regarding the treatment of the dead of ancient inhabitants of Troy and Babylonia. They placed the dead in a sarcophagus / placed the disintegrated bones in an earthen vessel. Such vessels have been found in Mesopotamia, Mediterranean Sea (Spain, Greece, France), Babylon, Iran, Baluchistan and South India.**

SITE

- **A circular tomb big stones slabs using built up to the place of burial – Tamil Nādu, Kerala, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh**
- **Tamil Nādu: Adichanallur, Amritamangalam, Kunnattur, Sanur, Vasudevanallur, Tenkasi, Korkai, Kayal, Kalugumalai, Perumalmalai, Pudukkotai, Tirukkampuliyar & Odugattur.**
- **Kerala: Pulimattu, Tengakkal, Muthukar, Peria kanal, Machad, Pazhayannur, Mangadu.**
- **Karnataka: Brahmagiri, Piklihal, Maski, Hanamsagar, Terdal-halingali, T. Narsipur & Hallur.**
- **Andhra Pradesh: Kadambapur, Nagarjunakonda, Yelleswaram, Gallapalli, Tadapatri, Mirapuram & Amaravati.**
- **Hallur – radio carbon dating – c. 1000 BCE.**
- **Kumarnahalli- thermoluminescence dating – c.1300 -1200 BCE.**

SOCIO CULTURAL ASPECT

- They did **not practice advanced agriculture**.
 - Cultivated **millet/ragi, rice, cereals (barley, corn) & pulses**.
 - **Domesticated – cattle, sheep, goat**.
 - **Settlements are in the vicinity of fertile land**.
 - **Copper & bronze artifacts – utensils, bowls, bangles**.
 - **Silver & gold ornaments**.
 - **More number of iron objects were excavated. Iron artefacts – utensils, weapons (arrowhead, sword, knives, spearhead), carpentry tools (axes, chisels, adzes) & agricultural implements (sickle, hoes, coulters- vertical blade fixed in front of a ploughshare)**
 - **Indicate the metals widespread use in everyday life**.
 - **The metal was relatively pure with very small traces of other elements**.
 - **Practiced agriculture, hunting, fishing, animal husbandry**.
 - **Evidence of well-developed craft traditions - pottery, bead making**
 - **Suggest sedentary living /settled life**.
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- **Paiyampalli, Karnataka** - There is **melting of iron**.
 - **Kudatini, Bellary district** – well preserved **Sarcophagus burial**.
 - **Kodumanal, Erode district, Tamil Nadu** – new features: **cist contained a deer buried in an urn along with carnelian beads, sword, axes**.
 - **Karnataka, Paiyampalli** - **Charred grains of horse gram, green gram, possibly ragi**.
 - **Karnataka, Coorg & Khapa** – **rice husk**.
 - **Tamil Nādu, Hallur** – **charred grains of ragi**.
 - **Tamil Nādu, Kunnatur** – **rice grains found at a tomb**.
 - **Kerala, Machad** – **granite grinding stone was found in a cist**.

PAINTINGS

- **Information from paintings help to reconstruct megalithic period**.
- **Paintings give insight into the lives & experiences of megalithic monuments. Hunting was their main occupation. Domesticated animals: cow, sheep, dog, horse. Cattle were important**.
- **Paintings are found inside the rock cut chambers**.
- **Megalithic sites – fighting scenes, cattle raids, hunting scenes**.
- **Kerala, Marayur, Attala** – **hunting scenes**.
- **Tamil Nadu, Tirupattur, Mellapadi** – **rock shelters chamber contained painting made with white kaolin / white clay; one scene: 2 horses riders fighting each other with poles; a human figure with raised arms holding a stick / weapon**.
- **Karnataka, Paiyampalli** – **fight scenes, dancing figure, horse raiders, flora, birds, sun motifs**.
- **Karnataka, Hire Benkal** – **hunting scenes, peacocks, antelopes, people dancing in groups**.
- **Tamil Nadu** – **fish hook**.

ANTHROPOMORPHS

- [Stone resembling human figure.](#)
- Embedded in ground by digging out the earth- given additional support by stone packing on both sides at grounded level- looks like human sitting figure – have heads, shoulders, curved arms.
- Excavated from 15 sites – Karnataka (Kumati in Bellary), Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh (Midimalla in Chittoor & Kaperlaguru), Kerala (Ambala Vayal).
- Eguvakantala Cheruvu, Chittoor – 3 Anthropomorphic figures.
- Northern Andhra Pradesh, Tottigutta & Dongatogu - Anthropomorphic figures with head & no arms.
- Tamil Nadu, Mottur – huge Anthropomorphic figure.
- Tamil Nadu, Udayarnattam at Villupuram - Anthropomorphic figures associated with chamber tombs & dolmens.



Tamil Nadu, Mottur