



## Megalithic culture of Chitradurga district, Karnataka: A study

Dr. B Suresha<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Associate Professor of History Govt. Arts College (Autonomous), Chitradurga, Karnataka, India

### Abstract

The Indian Megalithic burials and Megalithic monuments generally belonging to the Iron age and are largely sepulchral in character. However, the sepulchral aspect of this tradition was not a new feature of this age, for the antiquity of burial practice in India dates back to the Mesolithic period, and marked burials began in the Neolithic.

**Keywords:** megalith, monuments, c explorations and excavations, archaeological, cultural, Karnataka

### Introduction

The Indian Megalithic burials and Megalithic monuments generally belonging to the Iron age and are largely sepulchral in character. However, the sepulchral aspect of this tradition was not a new feature of this age, for the antiquity of burial practice in India dates back to the Mesolithic period, and marked burials began in the Neolithic. Though this tradition was become very popular during the 'Iron age'. In the southern part of India it continued to survive even during the early historical and up to modern times.

A megalith is a large stone that has been used to construct a monument, either alone or together with other stones. The term 'Megalith' is derived from the Greek 'megas' which means great and 'lithos' meanings tone. So, 'megaliths' refer to the built of large stones. But the term has a restricted usage and is applied only to a particular class of monuments. In the earlier stages of research, it was used to designate only the large stone monuments. However subsequently, in India, it was applied only to all the burial and habitation sites yielding the pottery with 'black-and-red' surfaces in south India.

After the Neolithic age came the megalithic period. The monuments and antiquities of this period are different from other age culture. So, It is very difficult to say when and how development this culture. Many attempts have been made at the classification of these antiquities/monuments. Sites with megaliths occur in chronological contexts ranging from the Early Iron Age down to the modern period in different parts of Karnataka. Early studies of megaliths in Karnataka placed the megalithic tradition tentatively between 200 B, C and the first century A.D. Based on the archaeological evidences which occur in Brahmagiri (Black-and-red ware), these cultures are placed on the third century C.B.C and the first century A.D. On the basis of explorations and excavations, the date of the Megalithic culture is pushed in North Karnataka region as early as 1200 B.C. This view is supported by many scholars like K. Rajan and Others. However, the available archaeological data suggests that this period lies between 800 B.C and Early historic period.

The Megalithic cultural remains obtained from Chitradurga, Kolar, Tumkur, Bellary, Chamarajanagara, Mysore, Gadag,

Koppal, Raichure, Dharwad, Belgaum, Gulbarga and other Districts show that in this region there was overlapping of Megalithic with preceding Neolithic-Chalcolithic Phase, on one hand, and with the early historic, on the other. In the earliest phase, the Megalithic people in the region lived on the bottom of granite hills or leveled terraces on the hill sides.

Karnataka is the heartland of South India. It is one of the richest region in this regarding. There are about 1000 sites in Karnataka alone. Out of them, more than 50 sites with Megalithic association have been excavated so for leading to the recovery of an enormous body of data on the nature, architecture and contents of the burials and the various features associated with the settlements. M.H. Krishna, who was the Director of Mysore Archaeological Department show some interest on the pre-historic period and he did systematic excavations at Chandravalli, Hunugunda, Bettadapura etc. R.E.M. Wheeler, who was the director of A.S.I. also conduct scientific excavations at Raichur, Bellary, Gulbarga, Chitradurga and other districts. At Parandapalli (Kolar) exist more than one hundred stone circles, varying in diameter from 7-40 feet at the ground level. At Hunagunda found a large number of megalithic stone circles varying from 15-20 feet from the ground level. At Hirebenakal (Koppal) found more than 2000 megaliths. Among the excavated sites, Bramhagiri is prominent. Bramhagiri excavation has revealed a series of burials.

Chitradurga is one of the District in Karnataka, which situated in central part of the state. Until now, more than 25 megalithic sites were noticed here. Out of them, Ingaladahal, Kunabevu, Ganjigunte, Chandravalli, Chikkamadhure, Chippinakere, Jatingameswara, Tamatakallu, Nandana Hosuru, Nunkimale, Halekere, Hanagallu, Burudekatte, Narenalu, Konasagara and others are important. Bramhagiri is one of the most prominent Pre-Historic site, that to Megalithic period in Karnataka. It is situated in Molakalmuru Taluk of Chitradurga District. It is a granite outcrop rising same about 600 feet above the plane and measures around 500 m East-West and 100m North-South. It is well known for the large number of megalithic monuments that have been found here. A couple of minor rock edicts of Asoka dating back 250 B.C. were found here as early as 1891.

This discovery was made by B.L. Rice. These rock edicts indicated that the locality was termed as Isila and denoted the southernmost extent of the Mouryan Empire. Dr. M.H. Krishna was conducted exploration scientifically here in 1940. During 1942 A.D. a pit was systematically excavated right from the surface to the virgin soil. Around 3,000 antiquities were found during the excavation. And several strata of a long occupied site were noted. This was continued by R.E.M. Wheeler in collaboration with the Archaeological Department of Mysore state, in 1947 on behalf of Archaeological Survey of India. Their work was given a further inputs in 1956 by M. Sheshadri and Amalananda Ghosh in 1965 and 1978.

The Bramhagiri megalithic site extends over an area of 500m east-west by 100 m north-south, with settlement remains on the outcrop slopes and mortuary remains in the form of four to five clusters of megalithics on the plains below. Ten megaliths were excavated, these were stone circles with internal subterranean stone-lined rectangular burial chambers or stone circles containing burial pits. Grave goods include ceramics, iron implements, beads, and spindle whorls. No complete houses were excavated; some post holes and pits were identified. A reservoir or water tank is located on the eastern edge of the site.

Wheeler defined three chronological phases on the basis of stratigraphic dating and changes in artifact forms. In the first phase (Neolithic), polished stone axes made of dolerite were found. The other tools include parallel sided blades and micro liths. Metal came in to prominent use during the second (Iron Age) period, and the third period (Early Historic period) is obviously much more advanced and contains painted potteries, dishes, pots, cups etc. No absolute dates are available from the site. Diagnostic artifacts of the Iron Age include black ware, and red ware, and russet-coated painted ware. Post firing graffiti are common on ceramics, especially in mortuary contexts. Iron and copper artifacts and ornaments of shell, jasper, steatite, gold and carnelian were also recovered.

### **The megaliths**

A variety of burials were noticed here. Totally, the ten megalithic structures excavated at Bramhagiri in 1947 fall in to two categories.

- A. Cist-circles, these were normally surrounded by a built or monolithic circle-Common feature of these cists was the close association of three small cists built alongside the main cist and structurally later than it. Each of these small cists contained a few pots, but only one of them were found some small fragments of human bone, apparently of an adult. These were normally 5-7 feet long, about 6 feet high, and 2-4 inches thick.
- B. Pit-circles, these were built or monolithic circles enclosing unlined pits- The megalithic cemetery at Bramhagiri, even in its present despoiled condition, contains upwards of 300 cist-tombs. The over alldiameter of these pit-circles ranges from 20 feet to 31 feet and is thus larger than that of the cist-circles.

The two categories occur in the same areas and their contents represent the same culture.

Two alternative possibilities suggest themselves on the

evidence available-

- These pit-circles may have been specialized tombs for a particular and restricted social grade.
- They were macerating pits, in which human bodies were exposed on a bier, resembling a modern charpoy, a little less than 2 feet high, with the four corner-posts set on floor-slabs.

### **Pottery**

A general survey of the pottery from the burials at Bramhagiri reveals the cultural unity of the two classes of monuments. The black-and-red technique and the polished surface, normal characteristics of megalithic pottery in Karnataka, are common. Pots, funnel shaped lids, bowls, cups on stand, the big mouthed jars with pointed bases etc, are found.

### **Iron objects**

Number of Iron objects were found in the megalithic cists and pit circles. Daggers or knives, blades, chisels, sickles, lances, sword, a barbed arrow head, a thin dish like object, spears and etc., are found.

Other objects: Fragments of shell bangles, Fragments of shell finger rings, fragmentary bangles of black glass, light green translucent glass, bangle of vitrified clay, tiny white beads, gold beads, copper bangles and terracotta beads. In addition to terracotta figurines, number of discs which are made mostly from potsherds are also found.

Young researchers like, Dr. Virupakshi Pujarahally, Dr. S.Y. Somashekhar and Dr. S. Thippeswamy, Dr. S.G. Ramadasa Reddy and others were worked on this regarding. Dr. S.Y. Somashekhar and Dr. S. Thippeswamy have recently discovered the remains of Neolithic culture, along with Megalithic culture at Neranaluru and Dodda Marodi villages near by Chitradurga. Two habitation sites with three burials of Megalithic period are found. Black-and-red potteries, bowls, basins, jars and other antiquities which are belonging to megalithic period are found here. It is very interesting to note that they are found in adjacent places. The social aspects connected with the relics have also been furnished. Dr. Virupakshi Pujarahally recently discovered the remains of Megalithic culture along with neolithic culture at Konasagara region of Molakalmur taluk. Red collared potsherds, black collared potsherds, red-and-black wares, painted potsherds, neck pieces of potteries, some iron objects along with iron smelting objects were found here. Dr. S.G. Ramadasa Reddy also noticed remains of megalithic culture at Haratikote of Hiriyurtaluk. Red-and-black wares, painted potsherds, shells, pieces of bangles, neck pieces of potteries, some iron objects along with iron smelting objects, beads, were found here.

### **Culture: sequence in Chitradurga District**

The sequence of culture revealed by these new Explorations, Bramhagiri and other Excavations were as follows, from bottom to top-

1. Stone Axe culture: Early first millennium B.C to the beginning of the second century B.C.
2. Megalithic culture: After 200 C.B.C to the middle of the first century A.D

3. Andraculture: About the middle of the first century A.D to the third century.

### **Megalithic culture**

The megalithic culture of Chitradurga District was intrusive and first introduced iron-working to the locality, was well supplied with tools and weapons. Iron sickles, knives, swords, spears, arrow heads and wedges were included in the cultural equipment. The pottery is distinctive in shape and fabric. It is turned on a slow wheel, polished and is characteristically black inside and black and red outside, with the black confined to the upper part of the vessel and resulting from inverted firing. No stone walls were found in association with this culture. Occasional post-holes indicate a continuance of timber-construction, at least for ordinary domestic buildings.

### **Conclusion**

The Megalithic period represent the more important stage of cultural development during the period from 1000 C.B.C and first century A.D. It is witnessed the full-fledged growth of metal technologies. The megalithic communities gradually came under the influence of the Mauryan influence that lead to the spread of literacy in this region and the conquest emergence of historical period. These people lived in villages consisting of a sizeable population. Though they had a bias for the urban life. They lived probably consisted of huts with reed roofs, supported on wooden posts as indicated by the presence of postholes. According to some scholar's, the megaliths were built for thee lite or the ruling class and that the very idea of burying the dead along with burial goods indicates a strong belief in life after death and possible rebirth among megalith people, and living had to provide them with their necessities. The grave goods represented the affection and respect of the living for their dead. This type of burial practice is continued in to Historical period.

### **References**

1. Agarwal DP. The Archaeology of India, London, 1982.
2. Allchin B. A study of some palaeolithic Artifacts from South India Current Science, Bangalore, 1952, 268-271.
3. Ansari ZD. Excavations at Sanganakallu, Deccan Nagaraja Rao M.S. College, Poona, Pune, 1969, 1964-65.
4. Chopra PN. India Pre-historic and proto historic period, Publications Division Ministry of Information and Broadcasting Govt. of India, New Delhi, 1981.
5. Deo SB. Problem of South Indian Megaliths, Kannada, Research Institute, Karnataka University, Dharwad, 1973.
6. Foot RB. The Foot Collection of Indian pre-historic and proto historic Antiquities, Notes on their ages and Distribution, Govt. Museum, Chennai, 1916.
7. Gorden Childe. The Microlithic Industries of India. New Delhi, 1938.
8. Gururaja Rao BK. Megalithic Culture in South India, Prasaranga, University of Mysore, Mysore, 1971.
9. Joshi RV. Pleistocene Studies in the Malaprabha Basin, Karnataka University Publications, Dharwad, 1955.
10. Kamath Suryanath U. Karnataka State Gazetteer, Part I and II. Bangalore, 1982.

11. Krishna MH. Excavation at Chandravalli, M.A.R Directorate of Archaeological & Museums in Karnataka, Mysore, 1929-1931.
12. Reba Ray. Ancient Settlement Patterns of Eastern India. (Pre-Historic India). Pearl Publication, Calcutta, 1987.
13. Sankalia HD. Studies in the pre-history of Karnataka. Subbarao B. and Josji RV, 1951.
14. Subbaiah KK. Archaeology of Coorg with special reference to megaliths, Geetha Book House, Mysore, 1978.
15. Satyan BN. Chitradurga District Gazetteer, Mysore Gazetteer, Bangalore, 1967.