



ISSN Print: 2394-7500
ISSN Online: 2394-5869
Impact Factor: 5.2
IJAR 2017; 3(6): 1454-1456
www.allresearchjournal.com
Received: 10-04-2017
Accepted: 11-05-2017

Ranjith Kumar Varre
Lecturer, Department of
History, Government Degree
College, Yerragondapalem,
Andhra Pradesh, India

Belief system and constructive motives of megalithic monuments

Ranjith Kumar Varre

Abstract

Megalithic culture is popular by its vibrant burial practices. The burial system of Megalithic people all over the world had its own peculiar characters. Megalithic burials of South India are very much important in understanding cultural history of South India. In South India for the first time Iron tools and implements were used by the people belongs to Megalithic period. Agricultural practices in this area were attributed to the Megalithic period which is contradicted to the Neolithic period of India. Megalithic culture of South India is always a debatable area for various reasons. The astronomical knowledge of the Megalithic people is proven by different scholars of India. Many archaeologists done their researches on cup marks, port hole, and passage way. The concept called port hole and belief system of Megalithic people is still debatable aspect. Reasons for the port hole and cup marks are not yet established. Present article tried to identify the belief system and construction motives of Megalithic monuments in South India. Construction motives of Megalithic burials are crucial to analyse the nature of Megalithic burials. The Megalithic burials are very simple to gigantic in a single site which raises the questions regarding the motive of construction. Present author will try to analyse the above mentioned aspects in the light of available sources.

Keywords: Megalithic burial- construction-beliefs-grave goods-motives of construction- ceremonies

1. Introduction

Megalithic monuments are having importance in social, religious and belief system of contemporary practices. It seems the Megalithic burials have variation in its size, structure, orientation, construction, grave goods, metal implements, and assemblage of goods in the burials. The Megalithic burials are generally divided into two broad categories 1. Polyolithic burials 2. Monolithic burials. The burial construction of Megaliths is identified each and every corner of South India.

In relation to Andhra Pradesh it is visible in many districts of Andhra Pradesh. Most of the megalithic monuments of this region have variation in construction methods. The range of megalithic burial construction from basic level to extensive burial construction methods are identified in Andhra Pradesh. Megalith monuments are always dynamic; some of the megalithic monuments are burial tombs, some of them are habitation sites, and some other are not at all related to any burial practices. Some of the megalithic sites which have a gigantic monument represent single burials and some other small monument might be a communal burial which unearths more than single burial.

Megalithic Graves and Belief system

The belief system of the Megalithic people is identified in the grave goods of the burials. Animal bones of domestic animals are unearthed in the excavations which have wide variety of bones like sheep, goat, cattle and wild wolf in many megalithic burials. The bones of animals found in the burials might be buried for providing food to the buried. Animism was identified even in the terracotta figurines of animals which were decorated with garlands and ornaments.

The evidences for the megalithic belief system could be drawn from the grave goods of the megalithic burials. Based on the grave goods of Megalithic culture it can be said that they believed life after death. Megalithic burial practices and construction styles shows their belief system.

Correspondence Author;
Ranjith Kumar Varre
Lecturer, Department of
History, Government Degree
College, Yerragondapalem,
Andhra Pradesh, India

Some of the Megalithic burials are having transepted passage way, some of them are having port-hole, and some of the burials are constructed in an aligned manner which represents the belief system of Megalithic people.



Source: Skeletal remains evidences from Palamukula Village, Telangana (DC Tuesday, Dec 20, 2022)

Port holes are identified at Brahmagiri ^[1], Iralabanda ^[2], Chagaturu ^[3], Uppalapadu ^[4], Peddamarrur ^[5], Pandavarbande ^[6], Timmalapatti ^[7], Togarapalli ^[8] etc. Probably passage ways, open top, Port-hole, and burial chambers are prepared as part of this belief system of Megalithic people. But the exact reason for the arrangement of Port-hole, burial chambers and passage way is not yet concluded by the scholars. According to Rao K P it is assumed that the megalithic people believed in spirits, ghosts and in post-death life Hence, port holes are arranged by having belief on Ghosts or spirits ^[9].



Megalithic Port-hole (A megalith in Karnataka. Image Source: megalithic.co.uk)

¹ R.E.M. Wheeler, "Brahmagiri and Chandravalli 1947: Megalithic and Other Cultures in the Chitaldrug District, Mysore State" *Ancient India*, No. 4, 1948, 187-199.

² B.R. Brandii. "Old Slab-stone Monuments in Madras and Maisur", *Indian Antiquary*, X, 1991. P.97.

³ *Indian Archaeology 1977-78: A Review*, p. 11.

⁴ *Ibid*, p.12.

⁵ *Ibid*, p.13.

⁶ B. Narasimhaiah : *Neolithic and Megalithic Cultures in Tamil Nadu*, Delhi. 1980. P. 130.

⁷ *Ibid*, p.131.

⁸ *Ibid*, p.131.

⁹ K P Rao, *Megalithic Port-hole : A Techno-Cultural Study*, Proceedings of the Indian History Congress, 1996, Vol. 57 (1996), pp. 964-969

Megalithic monuments and Communal structures

Involvement of huge grave goods, extensive construction methods, and multi burial practices shows the construction of Megalithic burials is mostly a communal programme. The size and shape of the monuments are seen as an expression of the prosperity and prestige of the group which built them. This principle partially contradicts that of individual prosperity. It can be viewed that there is a strong dependence of the individual on the group, where by prestige is generated about belonging to a certain group. It is clearly indicated that the nature of Megalithic burials is a communal construction basis. The monuments are so gigantic in some areas and some other are having rich grave goods. The construction of gigantic monuments and rich grave goods suggests the communal nature of the monuments.

At some of the occasions the Megalithic monuments in a specific region also shows a greater difference which might have taken place due to the competition among the megalithic groups in monumental construction ^[10]. According to some of the scholars the Megalithic monuments are defiantly showing a strong competitive element ^[11]. The megalithic monuments are not having a uniform construction method and specific systematic constructions. It can be said that the megalithic people might have a specific reason in construction of various styles of monuments in a single site also. It might be a class difference or social difference or cultural difference.

The Megalithic monumental construction methods clearly pronounce that there might be a class hierarchy in the social system. The visibility of the richness in the grave goods also shows the class hierarchy in the society. Different kind of Megalithic monuments in different styles were represented in a single site can substitute this argument. A site called Iralabanda in Chittoor district of Andhra Pradesh which has more than 500 Megalithic monuments in a single site has different varieties of monuments. The site Iralabanda represented with simple cist burials, cist with stone slab circles, flat stone slab circles in for rows around dolmenoid cist, around 15 meters height stone slabs and swastika patterned cists in a single site clearly explains the class distinction or some other distinction in the megalithic culture. This type of variation in the Megalithic burial sites is not only identified at Iralabanda it is identified in many other sites also. Based on the representative elements at some of the monuments in a group, it can be said that the representative megalithic monuments might have special position in the society.

Megalithic culture and Technology

The grave goods of megalithic burials explain the technological greatness of the megalithic people. There are some of the megalithic sites which might to be the production sites of various metals such as gold, iron, silver, and copper, etc. Recovering of smelting furnaces, availability of iron ore pieces, iron slag, copper slag and traces of copper, gold mines near to the Megalithic sites is suggesting professional smiths are there in Megalithic society.

¹⁰ Maria Wunderlich, *Megalithic Monuments and Social Structure Comparative studies on recent and Funnel Beaker Societies*, 2019, Sidestone Press, Leiden, p.21.

¹¹ Gebauer 2014, 108.

Many excavation reports of Megalithic monuments recorded various metal implements which indicates the utilization of metal and non metal implements like iron axes, sickles, ploughshares, hoes, spades, etc. Megalithic sites Adichannallur and Nilgiri region yielded evidences of bronze objects which is an exception in these sites. The availability of bronze suggests the availability of copper and an alloy tin or arsenic. The megalithic people gain the dexterity in producing the pure iron objects which was identified in some of the iron objects. A site called Jonnavada has the evidences of pure iron bell which is made up off with 99 percent purified iron. The skill of the megalithic people could be identified in the making of various domestic and agricultural tools like axes, chisels, wedges, adzes, anvil, and borers etc.

Megalithic grave goods and Economy

Megalithic material culture provides various clues to know the social and economic life of the people. In the light of evidences recovered in the excavations it can be said that megalithic people were very advanced in technology. They were the first people who used iron in South India. They also practiced tank irrigation as part of their agricultural activities. They were the first cultural group who cultivated paddy for the first time in South India. Most of the megalithic sites are having the evidences of Black and Red ware pottery.

Evidences of beads making is found at a Megalithic site called Muhurjari. Large variety of beads was recovered in the megalithic excavations. Beads made up off Agate, Carnelian, Faience, Serpentine, Shell, Steatite, Amethyst and Terracotta was recovered in the excavations. Terracotta discs, figurines, gamesman, miniature pots found from graves attest their use as toys for entertainment. Thus, it can be said that the megalithic people practiced many other craft industries apart from highly specialized agro-pastoral economy.

Conclusion

The Megalithic culture is indeed having a great cultural heritage. The material culture of megalithic people is always providing solutions to various components of the contemporary society. Though there is huge sources are available some of the aspects of Megalithic culture could not be understood in authentic manner. Port-hole, Cup marks, Passage way and religious system of the Megalithic culture are still need answers with substantiates evidences. It means more excavation data is necessary to draw conclusions on the study of belief system and social structure of Megalithic people.

References

1. Indian Archaeology- A Review- 1977-78.
2. A. Sundara, The Early Chamber Tombs of South India, Delhi. 1975.
3. Gururaja Rao BK. The Megalithic Culture in South India, Mysore. 1972, p. 200.
4. Narasimhaiah B. Neolithic and Megalithic Cultures in Tamil Nadu, Delhi. 1980. P. 130.
5. Brandii BR. Old Slab-stone Monuments in Madras and Maisur, Indian Antiquary 1991. P.97.
6. Rao KP. Megalithic Port-hole: A Techno-Cultural Study, Proceedings of the Indian History Congress, 1996;57:964-969.
7. Rao KP. Deccan Megaliths. Delhi. 1988.
8. Manjula Poyil. Megalithism and Tribal Ritualism: A Passage through the Kurumbas of Attapadi, Advances in Historical Studies (online). 2013;2(2):54-56.
9. Manjula Poyil. Farewell Ritual and Transmigrating Souls: Secondary Funeral of the Atapadi Kurumbas, Anthropologist. 2009;11(1):31-38.
10. Maria Wunderlich, Megalithic Monuments and Social Structure Comparative studies on recent and Funnel Beaker Societies, Sidestone Press, Leiden, 2019, 21.
11. Wheeler REM. Brahmagiri and Chandravalli 1947: Megalithic and Other Cultures in the Chitaldrug District, Mysore State, Ancient India. 1948;4:187-199.
12. Deo SB. Mahurjhari Excavation Nagpur. 1970-72.
13. Walhouse MJ. Archaeological Notes. Indian Antiquary. 1874;3:278.