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RESEARCH ARTICLE

THE MEGALITHIC MONUMENTS OF THE NILGIRI DISTRICT

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Abstract

The term megalithic was used to describe a class of monuments in Europe consisting of huge stones which were earthen circles, Cists, Dolmens, Shrines, and Rock art. Captain Congreve – 1847 reports and Breeks excavating – 1873 in the nineteenth century the region has been of particular interest to archeologists. The megalithic monuments which dot the crests of hills in the upper reaches of the Nilgiri Mountains were thought to have been simply variants of the Nilgiri Mountains were thought to the upper reaches of the Nilgiri mountains were thought to have been simply variants of the widely dispersed Megalithic Cemeteries found through out much of South India the so called as “Pandukal” tradition.

Key words: megalithic, monuments, excavating

Introduction

The Nilgiri graves came to be seen as a Phenomenon into themselves different from the Pandakal Megalithic tradition. The cemetery complexes were viewed as extraordinary corresponding to the remarkable indigenous inhabitants of this mountain zone. Indigenous mountain peoples especially the Toda buffalo pastoralists were seen as something unique they were romanticized as holdovers from a more glorious past. They were compared to the lost tribes of Isreal to the Romans to the sumerians of

southern Iraq and remnants of the ancients buffalo herders of Neolithic South India. The assumption of the antiquity the primitiveness of the highlanders was contained in the suggestion that the well known economic and riarol symbiosis of the various highland communities.

- The agriculturalist Badagas.
- The Pastoral Todas.
- The crafts – oriented Kotas.
- The hunting Kurumbas.
- The gathering - Irulas.

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These groups were seen as being proto like in form.

The upper Nilgiri region has several megalithic grave sites. The grave types of the Nilgiri consisting of

- Cairns are a circular enclosure formed by rough stone walls or heaps or by single stones. These include a type peculiar to the Nilgiri Mountains.
- The Draw –Well type, These are Corral like structures built up to varied sized stones, or small boulders open in the centre.
- Barrows consists of a mound of earth enriched by a ditch or sometimes by one or more circles of stone.
- Cists are constructed of large stone slabs closed on every side occasionally with a 'Porthole' in one of the walls. It may or many not be surrounded by stone circle or Tumulus.
- Azarans which are simple stone circles in which relics preserved from the Toda green funeral are burnt.

Cairns, barrows and azarans are said to be the most common forms. Cists are rare one reported from Udairaya fort below Kotagiri along the eastern section of the hills. The reports generally do not offer much of differentiate the types according to grave finds. Many of these vessels are unique in Indian Circles, including Vessels resembling multiple stacked vessels.

Figurines:

Mounted and armed males wearing conical head dresses and cross belts over their chest, and women with simple skirts and bangles thpity the figurines. Males have clipped beard and moustache, males and females are characterized by hair combed upwards into a bun. Animals figurines comprise both wild and domestic animals including multiple buffalo figurines often decorated with garlands, vestments and wearing of bells around their necks other domestic animals include the horse often mounted by riders.

Terracotta Figurines:

The Human Figurines are of men and women standing or riding on horses with short beards and conical headdresses. The only clothes they were are narrow waist cloths. They have necklaces, bracelets and other ornaments, cross belts front and back and sort handled daggers. Some of the human figurines are represented with one of their hands resting on their beads like some of the early bronzes and terracottas from the Mediterranean region as mark of salutation of reverence.

The Animal Figurines are of the buffalo, cow, sheep, horse, camel, elephant, dog, leopard, peacock, sambhar and other too rudely fashioned to be identified with certainty. Many figurines of domestic animals especially buffaloes and sheep are decorated with garlands and bells on their necks. Some of the terracotta figurines are treated with a coarse terracotta or dark red wash. They are all handmade.

Objects of Iron, Copper, Bronze and Gold accompany the other small finds. These metal objects include iron swords, knives, spearheads and arrowheads. They also include iron billhooks sickles, razors, shears and beautifully constructed bronze vessels. Additional grave goods include Jewels and Beads. While the Pottery is thought to be locally produced the bronzes are believed likely to have been imported. That most of these sites were graves is evidenced by the frequent appearance of burnt bone. Several graves appear to consist of multiple interments. Toda and his two wings five kilometres west to Kotagiri to the north of the Ootacamuns to Kotagiri road. The central Plateau where multiple cist like graves are found. The megalithic cult appears also to have continued in the Moyar region intimating some degree of contemporaneity. Similarities in pottery and burial objects metal types, styles of figurines depiction of human types etc., also indicate a broad cultural homogeneity and yet there are significant variations in grave types and cemetery layouts.

Many artifacts are made of Iron. A Shearhead, Two arrowheads, and two different short swords. This artifact could have been used by farmers. A Sickles may be used for cutting grasses. Bill hooks are useful in the removal of firewood collection. Razor for cutting leather.

The articles of Iron recovered from the Nilgiri circles and barrows consists of daggers, chisels, spearheads, bill hooks and sickles, arrowheads, piles, lancepoints, bells, a small lamp, a rattle, a shearer and a socketed spade. Some are decorated with incised designs like simple lines wavy patterns, dots or chevrons. Some of the iron object possess a hard smooth surface of the colour and texture of steel. Steel is produced by introducing a higher proportion of carbon to iron which contains little or no carbon. This process of carburising was obviously for a long time purely ornamental.

By allowing the iron to remain in contact with carbon at a high temperature for a time when a certain small proportion of the carbon is absorbed by the iron, the amount depending upon the length of time the two are kept in contact being greatest at the surface and gradually lessening towards the centre. By packing the iron in charcoal and heating strongly for several days. By frequent heating and re-heating of iron in a charcoal fire. By carburising with subsequent heat quenching as proved to have been the case with certain iron weapons from Egypt examined by Sir.H.Carpenter and Dr.J.M.Robertson, ranging in date from about 1200 B.C. to about 800 B.C.

Some of the sword handles are very much smaller than those of modern swords perhaps they served an ornamental purpose. Probably they were held point downwards with the thumb resting on the pommel in the way in which the Spanish stiletto and the Indian creese are used and did not therefore require a greater space in the center of the handle than could be encircled with the two middle fingers. Ornaments of iron consisted of rings and bangles.

Draw – Well – Graves:

Above the Kilkotagiri seven Draw-Well graves circle further down the hill. These seven circles are literally covered with fragments of figurines. The

fragments are placed under stones making up the circle. Horns, Legs, Torsos, Skulls, perhaps well over a thousand cover the surface. A similar could be seen at Kalhatti where several graves had been destroyed.

Ammalle a Draw-Well site above Havvur has only rare bits and pieces of pottery near by it seems fairly certain that these sites fulfilled different functions despite similarity in form of monuments.

The stone circles at seven fort hill were called corrals by one Kota informant. This individual an inhabitant of the near by Kota community of Kilkotagiri also claimed that activities in connection with these circles were held regularly by the local Kotas.

The Megalithic life is use of Stone in forms of symbolic and functional. Stones are played a important role of the Nilgiri people. Stone tools and fire were the foundation of Modernized human civilization. Now a days Kota Pottery were participated in the summer festival. Pre historical period contributed to Nilgiri Civilization. Pre historic sites like artifacts and landscapes from the past which to understand in the present.

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