



Monuments and Archaeological Sites in Krishnagiri District, Tamil Nadu: An Archaeological and Historical Study

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ABSTRACT

Krishnagiri district, situated in the north-western part of Tamil Nadu, occupies a significant position in the archaeological and historical landscape of South India. Krishnagiri has a glorious historic past revealed from epigraphical records from the temples and hero stone inscription. The region has yielded rich evidence of human occupation from prehistoric times through the early historic and medieval periods. Megalithic burials, rock shelters, hero stones, temples, inscriptions, and hill forts. Many forts were built during the Vijayanagara-nayak period. This paper attempts to study the major monuments and archaeological sites of Krishnagiri district and evaluate their historical significance within the broader context of Tamil Nadu's heritage.

INTRODUCTION

The present study area, Krishnagiri district, is situated in the northwestern parts of Tamil Nadu. Krishnagiri district has prehistoric importance. The presence of habitats of mankind during the Paleolithic, Neolithic, and Mesolithic Ages. Various rock paintings and rock carvings of the Indus Valley civilization and the Iron Age seen in this district support the historical significance of this district¹. Krishnagiri district boasts significant monuments and archaeological sites from the Neolithic and Iron



Ages. Archaeological studies play an important role in reconstructing the cultural history of any region. Krishnagiri district, forming part of the historically important Baramahal region, presents a unique combination of natural geography and cultural remains. The heart of 'Krishnagiri', 'Hosur', and 'Uthangarai' were known as 'Eyil Nadu', 'Murasu Nadu', and 'Kowoor Nadu' respectively. During the Chola period, the Krishnagiri region was called 'Nigarili Chola Mandlam' and 'Vidhugadhazhagi Nallur'. Under the 'Nulamba' rule, it was popular as 'Nulambadi' according to historical sources. Rock paintings and carvings provide additional evidence². The rocky terrain, hill ranges, and river systems provided favorable conditions for early human settlement. Archaeological explorations and accidental discoveries in the district have revealed materials belonging to different cultural phases, making Krishnagiri an important area for historical and archaeological investigation.

Prehistoric and Protohistoric Remains

Evidence from Krishnagiri district indicates human habitation from the Paleolithic period onwards. The Krishnagiri district has prehistoric importance. Stone tools such as hand axes, flakes, scrapers, and blades discovered from riverbeds and open-air sites point to early hunter-gatherer communities. The presence of extensive megalithic burial sites, particularly at places like Mallachandram, confirms the existence of settled communities during the Iron Age. Dolmens, cairn circles, stone cists, and urn burials reflect complex burial practices and belief systems. These remains provide insights into social stratification, ritual practices, and early technological advancement.

Fort

These forts had to face many attacks by the Mysore and Andhra rulers. Krishnagiri Fort becomes the first and foremost defensive place. The majestic fortress built on Krishnagiri hill by the Vijaya Nagar Emperors stands as a testimony even now. "Kundani," a place in Krishnagiri District, was once the headquarters of the Hoysala king Veera Ramanathan in the 13th Century AD. 'Jagadevarayan', the Hoysala king, made 'Jagadevi' (one of the 'Bara Mahal' forts) as his capital.³

Hero Stones and Epigraphical Evidence

Hero stones were created for those who have lost their lives in pursuit of adventure⁴. Hero stones (Viragals) constitute an important category of archaeological monuments in Krishnagiri district. The hero stone from Chinnakothur is carved with inscription marks that the person died after killing a horse in a battle at Karuvayanpalli. A stone inscription from Beemandapalli of Rajamahendra Chola (1062) displayed adjacent to the Hero Stone, informs that Seramakkan wife of a warrior who died in the battle at Koodumukki, committed Sati (Theeppanjaal). Another inscription brought from Karakkuppam of the



Vijayanagar period refers to the gift of akaram (agraharam). The inscription from Pochampalli refers to a gift made by ThavanaDandanayaka to the Thiruvanatheesvarar temple for the well-being of Hoysala King Someesvara Deva on his 13th regnal year⁵.

These stones were erected to commemorate warriors who lost their lives in cattle raids, village defense, or warfare. The sculptural panels depicting battle scenes and inscriptions in Tamil offer valuable data on local chieftains, warfare practices, and social values. Inscriptions found on hero stones and temple walls record land grants, donations, irrigation works, and administrative divisions. Epigraphical evidence helps reconstruct the political and economic history of the region during the Chola and post-Chola periods.

Neolithic Sites Survey

To identify Neolithic sites in Tamil Nadu, the Department of Archaeology, in collaboration with the Sharma Centre for Heritage Education, is conducting explorations and scientific investigations along the Eastern Ghats in the districts of Vellore, Dharmapuri, Krishnagiri, Tiruvannamalai, and Salem. Preliminary work involved collecting information about site settings, geo-coordinates, and their geographical, geological, and geomorphological contexts. Upon gathering this preliminary information, the second phase of the project was conducted in the districts of Krishnagiri, Dharmapuri, and Tiruvannamalai by a team of experts.

These field studies encompassed both archaeological and geological/geomorphological aspects. During the field survey, Celt manufacturing sites were identified, and grinding groove sites were re-examined. Several samples were collected for further study. Currently, artefacts and rock samples are being analyzed with the assistance of the Indira Gandhi Centre for Atomic Research (IGCAR)⁶. The Neolithic age, also known as the new stone age, was a period in human history that lasted from around 10,000 BCE to 3,000 BCE. A 4,000-year-old broken hand axe in Chennanor near Uthararai. This weapon measures 6 cm long and 4cm wide. Terracotta artifacts, rust-coated painted ware, and red and black ware, also unearthed from Chennanor⁷

Megalithic Culture

Megalithic Culture in Krishnagiri. With regard to the distribution patterns of Megalithic burials, the burial monuments like cairn-circles are found on the slopes of the foothills and hillocks overlooking rivers, whereas Cairn circles with porthole cist were found mostly in the present densely forested areas, and cairn circles with urn burial were found in and around small hillocks. The dolmens and solenoid cists were located on the top of the high, rocky grounds or hills overlooking a tank or near perennial ponds. It



seems that an elevated area was always preferred for cemeteries. A major part of this district is so undulated that the megalithic people never found it difficult to select a land to meet their purpose. Unlike the other part of Tamil Nadu, the present study area has shown evidence of inflow of two different Megalithic traits, but confined to two geographical zones.

The first of the megalithic culture containing the cairn circle variety seems to have entered this region along the river Kaveri from the Mandya district in Karnataka. The second one contains the dolmen and solenoid cist variety entered via Kuppam and other passes from the Kolar district along the Pennaiyar River. The above-mentioned two traits, it seems, got mingled with indigenous urn burials. The concentration of cairn circles with port-holed cists could be observed in the Balaghat region, comprising the Hosur, Denkanikottai, Soolagiri, Barugur, and Krishangiri taluk. This is an extension of the Mysore tableland and resembles Mysore in general features. As the region had a close link with the Mysore plateau, naturally, the cultural traits also had the same impact. The distribution of Cairn circles with cist burial was concentrated north of Melagiri, Rayakottai, and west of Ankusagiri.

The location of burials was identified in river valleys like the Sanatkumaranadi (Chinnaru), Kaveri, and Pennaiyar, and in the basins of Natrapalayam, Anchetti, and Urigam. The second geographical zone, east of Ankusagiri and Markandanadi rivers and north of Kaveripattinam and Matur, facing the Kuppam and Tirupattur passes, had much concentration of dolmen sites and a few dolmenoid sites. This is the area just above the plains and almost covers the entire Krishnagiri taluk. Few cairn circles were also observed in this region, mostly confined to the southern part of this zone⁸.

Religious Monuments

Krishnagiri district contains several ancient temples that illustrate the evolution of Dravidian temple architecture. Chandra Choodeswarar Temple, Hosur, is an ancient Shaivite temple situated on a hill, reflecting early medieval religious traditions. Penneswaraar Temple represents Chola architectural excellence and bears inscriptions of Kulothunga Chola III. Varadaraja Perumal Temple, Shoolagiri, reflects contributions from Chola and Vijayanagara rulers. These temples functioned not only as religious centers but also as hubs of social, educational, and economic activities.

Types of Burials

Megalithic culture in this district was understood by its different types of burial systems. The architectural features, these burials can be broadly classified into two groups they namely cairncircle, cairncirclewithcist, and dolmens.



CairnCircle

The Builders shaped cairncircles from boulders. They added only a few stones packed. As noted above, their heigh above ground depended upon then a ture of the terra in. Diggers cut a pit first. They lowered a cist or urn 30 to 60 cm deep into the earth. A cist served as a stone box for bones or a body. An urn held ashes from a fire burial. In this case, the cairns were no traised more than 60cm and the cost is projected out to one-to-two-meters above the ground level. The diameter of the circle varied from 6 to 20m⁹.

Forts and Military Architecture

The strategic importance of Krishnagiri is evident from the presence of several hill forts. Anchettidurgam and Jagadevidurgam were part of the Baramahal fort system and played a crucial role during the rule of local chieftains, Mysore rulers, and later the British. These forts highlight the military and administrative significance of the district.

ROCK ART

The rock art in the Krishnagiri region, which is covered with many hills and mounds of the Eastern Ghats, contains several rock shelters with paintings, particularly in the taluks of Krishnagiri and Barugur, Soolagir, and Hosur. Nearly 30 rock art sites have been found in this region. The rock paintings in this area fall into two types: those identified on the ceiling of rock shelters and those on the interior part of dolmens. The rock shelter is found at Thalapalli, Oppathavadi, Oramanakunta, Myiladumparai, Mallapadi, Venkatapuramin Krishnagiri taluk, and at Mudippinayanapalli in Hosur taluk. The second type of rock art is observed at Mallachandram, Maharajakadai, Malththampatti, Kuruvinyanapalli, Oramanakunta, etc.

In this district, Rock paintings were made invariably using both white and red pigment. The site of Myiladumparai has evidence of the superimposition of white pigments over the red pigment. The most commonly used material for preparing pigment in all periods was iron oxide for red pigment and kaolin for white pigment. From the study area, the same materials could have been used to extract different colours.¹⁰

Conclusion

The monuments and archaeological sites of Krishnagiri district provide a continuous cultural sequence from prehistoric times to the medieval period. The region's archaeological wealth reflects the adaptive strategies, belief systems, political structures, and artistic traditions of its inhabitants. Systematic



documentation, conservation, and further archaeological exploration are essential to safeguard this invaluable heritage.

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