Kerala History and Studies Journal
Published by the Kerala History Conference
ISSN No. XXXX-XXXX

Megalithic Culture in North Kerala: Evidence from the Eranad Region

Author(s) Shana Parveen P. T.

Publication Vol. 1 / Issue 1 / 2026

Stable URL https://journal.keralahistoryconference.org/article/43

Date of Release 28.11.2026

IP Address 216.73.216.174

Downloaded 27-Nov-2026 08:51 IST

Megalithic Culture in North Kerala: Evidence from the Eranad Region

Shana Parveen P. T.
Ph.D Research Scholar
PG and Research Department of History
Farook College (Autonomous)
University of Calicut
shanaparveen4u@gmail.com

Introduction

Megalithic monuments are the most visible archaeological remains in Kerala. It was so common in other parts of the world too. The history of pre or early historic past of a society is traceable only through the study of its archaeological evidences. Megalithic monuments were received wide acceptance and generally treat this as the only source for that period of time. But the facts behind the burial practices and this megalithic culture were still spread among the peoples as a kind of mythical stories. Recently large numbers of burial monuments were traced from Kerala and it makes a position in the archaeological map of Kerala. The earliest evidence of ancient human habitation in Kerala dates to the upper Palaeolithic Age (25000 to 3000 years). Palaeolithic people could survive only in high-altitude environments.[1] As in the case of the Upper Palaeolithic period, the Mesolithic tools of Kerala have not been scientifically dated because they have not been discovered in any precisely datable stratified context.[2] Neolithic artefacts discovered from Kerala indicate that the culture had diffused from the sites of neighbouring states. Early Iron Age society can be studied only in the light of archaeological studies. Archaeological remains of the period mostly belong to the burial monuments and their content. In the case of Kerala, it is difficult to differentiate the cultural layer between the Iron Age and the early historic period. So its study is important to find out the development of human habitation in the Eranad region.

The Region of Eranad

Eranad is one of the seven *taluk* in the present Malappuram district of Kerala. It was the part of erstwhile Malabar district of colonial India under Madras presidency.[3] In the pre-colonial time, Eranad was a political unit under Zamorins of Calicut and in the early medieval time, it was one of the fourteen provincial sub division called

 IP Address: 216.73.216.174 Downloaded: 27-Nov-2026 08:51 IST

nadus of Chera of Mahodayapuram.[4] The wide distribution of Iron Age burial monuments called megaliths in Eranad has also pointed to the antecedent settlement formation of the region.[5] However historically this region has witnessed a continuous occupation from the early Iron Age to the modern times. Geomorphologically, the region of Eranad is a land mostly of hilly areas and based on the physiographic divergence it can be divided in to three district zones like the high land, mid land and low land. The major rivers of the region area Chaliyar and Kadalundi. The main subsistence form of the region was agriculture.

Megalithic Culture in Kerala

Megalithic culture is considered as representing the history approximately from 3rd century B.C to 3rd century A.D of South India. Monuments of Kerala also considered as came under the time frame of south Indian megaliths. The major archaeological remains belonging to this cultural phase are burial monuments, generally called Megaliths, which stretched a long period from the Iron Age to the early historic period.[6] Based on the available scientific dating, the Iron Age and early historic period of Kerala has been dated to around 1000 BC - 500 AD. The monuments have got importance due to the wide nature of its distribution.

The megalithic culture is the earliest known culture responsible for the introduction of the agricultural economy. The remains of megalithic sites can be attributed to the time scale permitted for the Tamil heroic poems. K. R. Srinivasan and R. Champakalakshmi have pointed out that the early Tamil anthologies are contemporaneous with the megalithic culture and a co-relation brought out between the two.[7] According to Gururaja Rao, "Iron which makes rather a sudden, but widespread appearance arrived either with this megalithic culture or closely followed it."[8] The scholars with cognitive outlook look this megalithic culture as a way to understand the concept of death, heaven, hell etc. The elaborate construction of monuments like Passage chamber tombs with single and multiple alignments, Sarcophagus etc indicates their belief in life after death. Sangam literature have mentioned about the existences of these concepts in that period.[9]

Megalithic remains found throughout Kerala show the expansion not only the spread of Iron technology, but also the expansion of groups that acquired knowledge of

 IP Address: 216.73.216.174 Downloaded: 27-Nov-2026 08:51 IST

technology. The increase in population in the settlement and the availability of implements were some of the reasons for the process of the expansion.[10] Based on the material evidence and literary traditions of the Iron Age and the early historic period, we can argue that the megaliths of North Kerala represent an advanced knowledgeable multifaceted society that developed in the background of mixed crop agrarian economy and internal and external exchanges.[11]

Megaliths are the huge stones discovered in memory of ancestors which are the foremost material evidences to study the Iron Age period of peninsular India in general and Kerala in particular.[12]The burial evidences show the historical continuity of the region. There is a disparity in the consensus regarding the chronology of the megaliths of Kerala.[13] Though the Megaliths primarily enclose the burial remains and goods associated with the dead person of the Iron Age and early historic period, they are the foremost evidence for proving the early permanent human settlements in the region under discussion. They indicated the formation of an agro-pastoral society with agricultural knowledge, Iron technology and knowledge in climatic and environmental changes, mathematical skills, masonry skills and reciprocal production and exchange relations.

All megalithic monuments are not always in stone. Megalithic culture has no regional bounds as its cultural remnants are found all over the world. Etymologically the word 'Megalith' is derived from two Greek word viz, *mega* (huge or big) and *lithos* (stone) denotes 'huge stone', which is coined by Algernon Herbert.[14] Generally megalithic burials include mortal remnants of and belongings of dead persons. The available mortal remnants show that there existed two types of burial practices in the megalithic period in South India; primary and secondary burials. The first type includes an extended human skeleton in which the full body of the dead person is buried along with pottery, metal objects, semi-precious stones and stone beads. It is not discovered in Kerala so far. The second types are fractional burials in which the bone fragments probably collected from different parts of the dead body are buried along with burial goods.

There are different types of megaliths discovered in Kerala like *Kudakkallu* (umbrella stone), *Topikkallu* (hat stone), rock-cut chambers, dolminoid cist, urn burials, stone

 IP Address: 216.73.216.174 Downloaded: 27-Nov-2026 08:51 IST

circles, menhirs etc.[15]Among these rock-cut chambers, umbrella stones and cap or hat stones are unique to Kerala and mainly distributed on the northern side. The mushroom shaped megaliths of Kerala are referred as *kudakkallu* by local people.[16] Hat stones is a variant form of urn burial, while umbrella stones is diffusing model of dolmen.[17]The main peculiarities of objects discovered from megalithic sites are potteries of black and red ware.[18] It is argued that all the burial monuments of the Iron Age are not megaliths. Accordingly, the megalithic period is generally termed as the Iron Age period in later studies.[19]

An important issue relating to megaliths in Kerala is the absence of habitation sites when comparing with the number of burial monuments. Most of the archaeologists argued that the people who practiced burial were a 'nomadic community'. Kerala has gradually come to occupy a significant space in the archaeological map of India. The peculiar climate and its geographical positions had led the scholars to a state that Kerala was not apt for pre-historic habitations. But the discovery of Palaeolithic stone tools from Palakkad has placed Kerala on the pre-historic map.

Abstract of the Discovery of Megalithic sites in Kerala

The megalithic culture in India especially South India was notable from the discovery of monuments by Babington in 1823 at a group of burial monuments from Chattaparambu at Faroke, Calicut, north Kerala. It witnessed the beginning of discovery of pre-historic culture in Kerala.[20] It was published by him under the title *Pandoo Coolies of Malabar*.[21] After the publication of the report by Babington in Kerala, so many megalithic monuments were reported not only from South India, but also from eastern and northern parts of India. But after this publication, the scholars began to give attention to this type of monument.

Babington was followed by William Logan and he discovered a solitary megalithic tomb called *kudakkallu* at Manjeri and also excavated a rock cut chamber at Kannur.[22] Under him other sites were brought to light in this area. It was followed by Colonel Congreve, F. B. Evans and C. A. Innes. Later V. D. Krishnaswami and Y. D. Sharma was made intensive survey of megaliths in Kerala and it gave information about the features of these monuments. Later K. J. John made excavation at Kannur district.[23] Further excavation was conducted by K. J. John at Trissur district led to the discovery

 IP Address: 216.73.216.174 Downloaded: 27-Nov-2026 08:51 IST

more details about the megalithic culture in Kerala. In northern Kerala major excavation was made at Naduvil Poyil and Ummichi Poyil in Kasarkode district. The Pattanam excavation was active exploration conducted by different archaeologist. The publication of *Lists of Antiquarian Remains in the Presidency of Madras*[24] by Robert Sewell provided a comprehensive list of megalithic sites of Malabar. Robert Sewell and William Logan also mentioned Bharathappuzha River Basin as a centre of Megalithic monuments. T. S. Ayyangar, R.V. Joshi, Chandrasekhara Menon and Govinda Menon etc. are the prominent persons who work in the field of Palakkad. Later large number of megalithic sites are explored in different parts of the district. Many of these sites are discovered accidently or through private construction works and other activities.

Studies about Megalithic Culture in Kerala

Many sources discuss the Megalithic practices in South India. Apart from archaeologists and historians some persons who are interested are involved in this field of study. Some published and unpublished archaeological reports, Newspaper reports, Books, Journals, articles, Gazetteers and papers are also found helpful. The British officials and historians like Robert Sewell and William Logan wrote about megalithic remains. *List of Antiquarian Remains in the Presidency of Madras*[25] in 1882 by Robert Sewell has given a detailed report of the archaeological monuments of Madras.

Kerala Megalithic and their Builders[26] by L. A. Krishna Iyer (1967), was one of the earliest books which deal with Kerala Megaliths in general. It has mentioned different types of burial monuments in general and discussed the geography of that area. *The Cultural History of Kerala* by Rajan Gurukkal and Raghava Varier (1999)[27] which gives elaborate information regarding the socio-economic formations of the Iron-Age society in Kerala. This is the only work that paid serious attention to the formation of material culture in Kerala during the early historic period. K. J. John's articles like *Early Man in Kerala* (1973) and *The Megalithic Culture of Kerala* (1985) made some valuable contributions to the field of megaliths in Kerala.

Gururaja Rao's work *The Megalithic Culture of South India*[28] (1972) was another work mentioned about the burial monuments in south India as a whole and make some

 IP Address: 216.73.216.174 Downloaded: 27-Nov-2026 08:51 IST

comparisons. *Megalithic Culture of South India*[29] by U. S. Moorti (1994) was another work. It was more scientific in nature, but did not mention Kerala in a specific way. He gives some typological classifications to this monument. *South Indian Megalithic Burials: The Pandookal Complex*[30] by L .S. Leshnik (1974) was notable. This book is considered as a basic reference for the studies related to Burial culture and megalithic monuments. The work also gives a comprehensive explanation to the burial culture. The edited work by V. Selvakumar titles as *The Megalithic Culture of South India*[31] gives a good picture of the archaeological studies which were undertaken in South India as a whole. The articles just deal with the issues related to megalithic culture from various dimensions. All the above mentioned works discussed about the megaliths of Kerala.

Megalithic Distribution of Eranad

Megalithic remains discovered from different parts of Kerala and it show the expansion of agriculture in the region. The available distribution pattern of the Megaliths has shown the presence of human involvement in different landscapes including the highland, slopes, midland areas and coastal zones as well. . The wide distribution of Iron Age burial monuments in Eranad has also pointed to the antecedent settlement formation of the region. However, historically this region has witnessed a continuous occupation from the early Iron Age to the modern times. Many of the villages of Eranad have yielded different varieties of megalithic burial monuments. These burials are seen in the midland laterite region and also some of them in high lands. The remains of megalithic people are rarely discovered from coastal areas.

William Logan[32] was the first to report about megaliths in the region of Eranad. He discovered a solitary megalithic tomb called *kudakkallu* at Manjeri and many other sites were brought to light in this area. Subsequently, many other sites were noticed and discovered by Robert Sewell. It was followed by Colonel Congreve, F. B. Evans and C. A. Innes etc. The important types of megalithic remains in Eranad are *kudakkallu*, *topikkallu*, rock-cut chambers and urn burials etc. Other types like slab cists, stone circles, multiple hood stones and dolminoid cists can be seen in this region, but their distribution is very rare. Rock-cut caves are yielded varieties of Iron

 IP Address: 216.73.216.174 Downloaded: 27-Nov-2026 08:51 IST

objects like arrowheads and spears showing their involvement in agriculture. Large number of megalithic sites are have been discovered in the Eranad.[33]

Important Megalithic Sites of Eranad[34]

Sl. No	Site Name	Type of Megalith
1	Abdurahman Nagar	*Kudakkallu*
2	Amarambalam	Slab cists and stone circles
3	Anakkayam	Rock Cut Chamber
4	Areakode	*Kudakkallu* & Urn Burialds
5	Aruvakkad	Urn Burial
6	Asankunnu	Rock Cut Chamber
7	Athavanad	Rock Cut Chamber
8	Charaye	Slab cist & Menhir
9	Cherukaav	Stone Circle
10	Cherukav	Multiple hood stone & Cairn Circles
11	Chokkad	Urn Burial
12	Edakkad	*Thoppikkallu* & *Kudakkallu*
13	Edappal	Dolmen
14	Edavanna	Dilapidated Slab cist & Urn Burial
15	Elamkur	Dolmenoid cists
16	Elankure	Slab cist
17	Faroke	Rock Cut Chamber & Cap stone, Urn Burial
18	Irumpuzhi	Rock Cut Chamber & Dolmen
19	Iruvetty	*Kudakkallu*
20	Kaattumoochi	Rock Cut Chamber
21	Kallarakunnu	Rock Cut Chamber
22	Kandalapatta Paliya Paramb	Urn Burial
23	Kannamangalam	Dolmen & Menhir
24	Karad	Dolmen & Menhir & *Toppikkallu*
25	Karakot	Dolmen & Menhir
26	Karippur	Rock Cut Chamber
27	Karthola	Urn Burial
28	Karulayi	Stone Circles & Dilapidated Cist Burial
29	Karunnayimala	Rock Cut Chamber
30	Kattuparuthi	*Kudakkallu*, Menhirs & Stone Circles
31	Kavannur	*Kudakkallu*
32	Kerakunnu	Dolmen & Menhir
33	Kodakal	Rock Cut Chamber
34	Koduvayur	*Kudakkallu* & Urn Burial
35	Kolamangalam	Urn Burial
36	Kolappuram	*Kudakkallu*
37	Kuttilangadi	Rock Cut Chamber
38	Mailuthth	*Thoppikkallu* & *Kudakkallu*

 IP Address: 216.73.216.174 Downloaded: 27-Nov-2026 08:51 IST

39	Malappuram	Rock Cut Chamber
40	Manjeri	Rock Cut Chamber
41	Mavandiyur	Urn Burial & *Kudakkallu*
42	Melmuri	Rock Cut Chamber
43	Mundakkal	Rock Cut Chamber
44	Munniyurkunn	Rock Cut Chamber
45	Muthukad	Urn Burial
46	Nagalasseri	*Kudakkallu*
47	Nannabra	*Kudakkallu* & Rock Cut Chamber
48	Nilambur	Urn Burial
49	Niramaruthur	*Kudakkallu*
50	Ozhur	*Kudakkallu*

From these lists, we can understand that the geographical divisions of each region may depend upon the typology of the monuments. For example, the types of monuments in coastal, middle and high ranges were in different nature. The types like dolmens were usually made with granite stones which were plenty on high ranges. Similarly, cists were distributed in huge numbers in middle ranges and urns and others were found in coastal regions. But, small changes can be seen in some areas. It also indicates that the burial monuments were the actual representation of human involvement in this area. This might have happened due to the geographical significance of this area. From this table, we can also understand that geography and environment have played a crucial role in the construction of various monuments in Kerala.

Conclusion

When we observed the megalithic distribution of Eranad, it was found that monuments like dolmens, dolminoid cists, cists etc. were on the hills and tablelands. But the later developed monuments such as urns were sometimes found to be located near the places, which are suitable for cultivation. It can be exhibited as evidence of the gradual movement of people from hills to tablelands. In another sense, it shows the possibility of mountain cultivation preceding wetland agriculture. Most of the burial monuments are found in the slopes of hills and rest of them is in river valleys or in places where water sources are found. In short, the pre-historic culture that existed in Eranad was similar to the megalithic culture which existed in other parts of Kerala. The scientific gives a better understanding of the pre-historic

 IP Address: 216.73.216.174 Downloaded: 27-Nov-2026 08:51 IST

culture of north Kerala. The excavated sites of Kerala are very few in numbers and we have so many sites are found to be explored by various agencies. The excavation of the monuments revealed typology found in Kerala was similar with other parts of South India. The differences in typology probably indicate the growth of social stratification. The typological varieties showed the depth of human efforts behind the production of such a monument.

End Notes

1. Rajan Gurukkal and Raghava Varrier, *History of Kerala Prehistoric to Present*, Orient Blackswan, Telegana, 2020 (2018), pp. 30-31.
2. *Ibid*., p, 34.
3. William Logan, *Malabar Manual*, Vol. 1, Asian Educational Service, Madras, 2010 (1887).
4. M. G. S. Narayanan, *Perumals of Kerala Brahmin Oligarchy and Ritual Monarchy Political and Social Conditions of Kerala Under the Chera Perumals of Makotai (C AD 800 – AD 1124)*, Cosmo Books, Thrissur, 2013 (1996), pp. 90-105. He listed fourteen *natus*: Kolathunatu, Purakilanatu, Kurumporainatu, Ramavalantu, Eralanatu, Valluvanatu Netumporayurnatu, Netunkalainatu, Kalkarainatu, Vempalanatu, Kilamalainatu, Munnninatu, Nanrulainatu and Venatu.
5. V.P. Devadas, *Archaeology of Eranad*, Unpublished Ph.D Thesis, Department of History, University of Calicut, 1993.
6. Rajan Gurukkal and Raghava Varrier, *Kerala Charitram*, Vallathol Vidyapeetham, Sukapuram, Edappal, 2011 (1991), p. 128.
7. K.R. Srinivasan, 'Megalithic Burials and Urn Fields of South India in the Light of Tamil Literature and Tradition', in *Ancient India*, Archaeological Survey of India, New Delhi, 1952, pp. 9-16.
8. Gururaja Rao, *Megalithic Culture in South India*, University of Mysore, Prasaranga, 1972, p. 267.
9. V. Selvakumar, 'Cognitive Aspects of the Iron Age- Early Historic Cultures of South India', National Seminar on Indian Megaliths, Archaeological and Ethnographic Sources, November 2005, pp. 23-45.
10. Rajan Gurukkal and Raghava Varrier, *Op. cit*., p. 64.
11. K.P. Rajesh, 'Megaliths of North Kerala: Formation of Technologically Advanced Agro-Pastoral Iron Age and Early Historic Society,' in *Heritage: Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies in Archeology*, 5 (2017), Department of Archaeology, Thiruvananthapuram, 2017, p. 486.
12. Velayudhan Panikkasseri, *Kerala Charitrathinte Ullarakalilekk*, Current Books, Kottayam, 2003, p. 9.
13. K.P. Rajendran, *Unrevealing the Past-Archeology of Kerala and Adjacent Regions in South India*, Heritage Publications, New Delhi, 2018, p. 7.
14. Algernon Herbert, He was a British antiquarian. In his work *Cyclops Christianus; an Argument to Disapprove the Supposed Antiquity of Stone Henge and Other Megalithic Erections in England and Britain*, mentioned about this. It was published in 1849 by Kessinger Publishing, United States (1849), 2010.
15. K.R. Srinivasan, 'The Megalithic Burials and Urn-Fields of South Indian in the Light of Tamil Literature and Tradition', in *Ancient India*, Archaeological Survey of India, New Delhi, 1952.
16. K.P. Rajesh, 'Megaliths and the Iron Age Culture of Kerala: A Note on Archeological Explorations in Kannur District', in V V Haridas And Haskerali (eds.), *Multi-Cultures of South India- New Perception on History and Society*, Karnataka State Open University, Mysore, 2015, p. 113.
17. Velayudhan Panikkasseri, *Op. cit*, p. 12.
18. Pachanan Mitra, *Pre-Historic India- Its Place in the World Culture*, Isha Books, New Delhi, 2010, p. 146.

 IP Address: 216.73.216.174 Downloaded: 27-Nov-2026 08:51 IST

19. Bridget and Alchin Reymond, *The Birth of Indian Civilization- India and Pakistan Before 500 MC*, Penguin Books, New Delhi, 1968.
20. S.B. Darsana, 'Megalithic Burials of Iron Age - Early Historic Kerala: An overview', in *Man and Environment* XXXV (2), 2010, p. 99.
21. J. Babington, 'Description of the Pandoo Coollies in Malabar', in *Transactions of the Literary Society of Bombay*, 1823, pp. 324-330.
22. William Logan, *Op. cit*.
23. K. P. Rajesh, *Op. cit*, pp. 112-120.
24. Robert Sewell, *Lists the Antiquarian Remains in the Presidency of Madras*, Vol.1, Indological Book House, New Delhi, 1882.
25. *Ibid*.
26. L.A. Krishna Iyer, *Kerala Megalithic and Their Builders*, University of Madras, Madras, 1967.
27. Rajan Gurukkal and Raghava Varier, *The Cultural History of Kerala*, Department of Cultural Publications, Government of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram, 1999.
28. Gururaja Rao, *The Megalithic Culture of South India*, University of Mysore, Prasaranga, 1972.
29. U.S. Moorti, *Megalithic Culture of South India*, Ganga Kaveri Publishing House, Varanasi, 1994.
30. L.S. Leshnik, *South Indian Megalithic Burials: The Pandookal Complex*, Steiner, Wiesbaden, 1974.
31. V. Selvakumar (ed.), *The Megalithic Culture of South India*, Indian Archaeological Society, New Delhi, 2015.
32. William Logan, *Op. cit*.
33. Field visit conducted in different megalithic sites on 15/1/2022, 25/1/2022, 28/1/2022 & 2/2/2022, 20/4/2022, 31/4/2022, 14/4/2023, 25/6/2023, 29/7/2023.
34. V.P, Devadas *Op. cit*, pp. 53-83; Sujatha K. S, *Formation of Material Culture in the Bharathapuzha Basin During the Pre-historic and Early Historic Period-A Study of Megalithic Burials*, Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, Department of History, University of Calicut, 2019; C. A. Innes, *Malabar District Gazetteers*, Government of Kerala, Trivandrum, 1977, pp. 438-449; William Logan, *Op. cit*., pp. 309-311; J. Babington, 'Description of the Pandoo Coollies in Malabar', in *Transactions of the Literary Society of Bombay*, 1823, pp. 324-330; A. Aiyappan, 'Rock-cut Cave-tombs of Feroke, South Malabar', *in Quarterly Journal of the Mythic Society*, Vol. XXII, reproduced in M.R. Manmathan (ed.), *Archaeology in Kerala Past and Present*, Feroke College, Calicut, 2007, pp. 12-29; *Grama Panjayath Vikasana Rekha*.

IP Address: 216.73.216.174 Downloaded: 27-Nov-2026 08:51 IST