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Antiquity of Tiruchirappalli

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Abstract

This article examines the Antiquity of Tiruchirappalli by studying its geological features, prehistoric settlements, archaeological discoveries, and historical development. It explains how the Cauvery River basin supported early human habitation and provided favourable conditions for settlement and agriculture. The study discusses evidence from the Paleolithic, Neolithic, and Megalithic periods, including stone tools, burial structures, and other archaeological remains. It also highlights important archaeological sites such as Alagarai, Tirukkampuliyur, Uraiyur, Karur, and Gangaikonda Cholapuram. The discovery of ancient coins, pottery, and Tamil-Brahmi inscriptions provides evidence of trade, literacy, and cultural development. Overall, the article presents Tiruchirappalli as a historically significant region with a long record of human settlement, economic activity, and cultural heritage.

Keywords

Antiquity of Tiruchirappalli, Prehistoric Settlements, Cauvery River, Paleolithic Age, Neolithic Age, Megalithic Culture, Archaeological Excavations, Uraiyur, Ancient Trade, Tamil-Brahmi Inscriptions.

1. Introduction

To analyse the Antiquity of Tiruchirappalli, one has to study thoroughly the Geological Factors which shaped the destiny of Tiruchirappalli. The present Geographical Features, perhaps may give some scope to the study of pre-history. Though hereditary and environmental factors to a large extent shaped the life of the people in the pre-historic and historic periods, it was not so in the geological age. The geological changes that take place over the millions of years had completely changed the earth surface. The geologist say that about two third of the rocks of the South India constitute the Archaeon era.

Of the Geology of Tiruchirappalli little was known before the geological survey of India's work in 1857. The greater part of the area is occupied by metamorphic rocks. These were five types such as Cuddalore Sand Stones, the Ariyalore groups, the Trichinopoly group, the Uttatur group, the Uttattur plant beds, plant remains and other fossils. As stated, towards the end of the Archaeon era, the whole of South India had become one solid mass, subject only to sub-aerial denudation. In this way, the exponents of the Lemurian Continent theory claimed that India and Africa was connected by an isthmus to which the name Lemuria has been given. A lot of geological evidences are adduced by the exponent of this theory. The commencement of the tertiary epoch witnessed a stupendous outburst of a volcanic energy. Hence the solid mass of Rock gave way to the formation of rivers and natural soil.

The year of the pre-history of India is from 500000 B.C. to 5000 BC. The old stone age was from 1500,000

BC to 500,000 BC. The remote sensing study has brought out information that the river Cauvery has flown during the present place before 27,00,230 years. The remote sensing study did not co-relate the study of the pre-history historians. Whatever may be the fact, Tiruchirappalli was the basin of the Cauvery river from the pre-historic days. With regard to the first appearance of man, geologist differs. Few conclude that South India was the home land of man. Paleolithic man lived in the rock caves. Most of the South Indian caves were known from sixth century BC onwards. Not only caves of old stone age are found, in some places arte facts were also found. The tools of the old stone age men were in quartzi. In Tiruchirappalli also Paleolithic implements were found. It shows that Paleolithic men inhabited in Tiruchirappalli region. A recent discovery by the State Archaeological Department, revealed the existence of man in Tiruchirappalli between the old stone and new stone age. Thiru. Abdul Masjid, of the Department discovered tools in the mount at the micro wave station near the Tiruchirappalli Railway junction. According to him, the tools belonged to 3000 B.C.

Robert Bruce Foote discovered two palaeolithic and neolithic tools from the district before 1878. The Choppers Found, Bruce Foote says, “Point out a choice of colours and distinct progress in craftmanship. They show how humanity was flourishing in those portions of South India under conditions highly favourable to primitive life. The proximity of rivers to the rock highly suitable for the old weapons and implements, no doubts was helping man much to be the dreaded hunter of animal life.” The following were the tools used by man in the old stone age.

V.R.Ramachandra Dikshitar in his famous work, *Pre-Historic South India,* (1951), gave a list of tools used by them. There were ten types of tools such as:

1. Axes in different types - pointed oval, oval, square, edged, and oblique edged
2. Spear in narrow and broad based
3. Tools and implements for digging with pebble buffs
4. Circular implements used for hurling stones
5. Choppers with pointed edge
6. Knives-long narrow flanks with parallel sharp edges
7. Scrapers
8. Abundant cones
9. Hammer stones
10. Strike lights

All these tools had no handles.

On studying the above tools, Archaeologist evolved four cultures, 1) Hand axes of different types, 2) Flake industries, 3) Slendar blades, 4) Microlithic industries. These cultures show the different stages of development in developing to different technologies. The advancement of thought process and to the use of these tools where ever needed marked the mile stones in the cultural advancement of the paleolithic man. These tools proved the statement that necessity is the mother of inventions.

The paleolithic man was nomads. He wandered from place to place in search of food and security. Since he had faced severe challenges from nature and scarcity of food in a place, he moved from one place to another. When he moved out, he used to carry the most important tools with him. The less important tools he would have left the place where he stayed previously. His wants are limited and food were fruits, roots and nuts. He did not have cultivation practice. He began to stay in a particular place over a longer period,

only towards the end of paleolithic age. He was afraid of wild animals and always lived in groups. His habitations were rock caves, may be tall rock and its projection part. Such tall rock caves were beyond the reach of the wild animals. The rock in the Fort of Tiruchirappalli is one site of the ancient man. It is attested from the fact that most of the Jain beds of the sixth century BC, situated in the hilly regions of rock. Hunting was his occupation. Whenever death occurs, the body was caste away and became exposed to both wild birds and beasts. Paleolithic man was naked. Sometimes he used the skin of animals and bark for covering his body. These types of dress later became the sacred dress of the Sannyasis.

The Neolithic age immediately followed the old stone age. Neolithic establishments were rare in the South of Cauvery. He used black wares. Among the artefacts, there were twelve types of cells. Scholars have proved that there is world unity of the neolithic culture. The types of arrow head resembling those of France and sting stones in Tinnevelly resembling those in Switzerland, showed the length of the neolithic culture.

Hunting was the primary occupation. He exchanged the hunting objects for solving his needs. It was the beginning stage of the Neolithic age. As his intellect developed, the sharpness of the tools changed. Polished and sharped varieties of stone tools came into being. In this period, he started rearing of flocks and herds of cattle. The tendency to domesticate animals grew with the progress of man who was merely a hunter to begin with. Pastoral life made him settled in fertile place. Private property made him to stay in a particular place. The need for protection made him to live in groups. This was the way the joint family system developed. He was also aware of agriculture and ploughed the land with stone.

From the above facts, one can come to a conclusion that human life was there in Tiruchirappalli region long before the known history of the Tamil started. P.T.Srinivasa Iyengar of the view that Dravidians came from outside through north western and eastern mountain passes. They settled at Cauvery and Vaigai basins. This view quite contradicted the existence of man in South India in the pre-historic period. When we analyse the old stone and new stone ages of the South, man originally stayed in South India. Hence there is no point in saying that the original settlers came from outside.

Another important feature of the neolithic age was the use of microlithics. The microlithic culture in South India was from 10000 to 4000 BC, to Sankalia. But according to Gurumurthy the microlithic culture was from 4000 to 1800 BC. In this period, found the tools belonged to the microlithic period at the micro-wave station near Tiruchirappalli Junction. Hence microlithic culture had also been prevailed in Tiruchirappalli. But Thiru. Abdul Masjid placed this between the old stone and the new stone age.

The Iron age culture succeeded the neolithic culture in South India. The Iron age culture is very often called, ‘Megalithic culture’ and recently it is also termed as ‘Hather culutre by the archaeologist Gupta’. The term *‘megalithic’* is the combinations of the Greek words, *‘Megas’* means large and *‘Lithos’* means stone. These structures of rudimentary character are built of large, rough stones. They were funerary, or religious in character. The megalithic age in South India belonged to 1050 BC to 300 AD. The megaliths are usually found on the slopes of hills or place or high ground with irrigation tank and arable land nearby. The earliest Tamil literature like Tolkappiyam, Ahananuru and Purananuru mentioned the megalithic type of burials. The following are the main categories of megalithic monuments:

1) Dolmenoid cist with or without port-holes, 2) Stone circle with pit burial, 3) Cairn circle, 4) Hoodstone. 5) Menhir, 6) Barrow or earthern mount with stone appendage.

7) Rock-cut cave or tomb, 8) Urn burials with stone circles. According to T.V.Mahalingam, the megalithic culture continued in Tiruchirappalli upto 4th and 5th century AD.

The impact of this culture in the Tiruchirappalli district is attested by the discovery of megalithic

monuments in the taluks of Perambalur, Musiri, Kulitalai and Karur. In Tiruchirappalli archaeologists discovered Transeptedcists and Dolmenoid cists. A cist is a box-shaped burial structure made of stone slabs set on edge. It is generally sunk below ground level. Manamangalam eight km from Karur to the west of Karur-Pugalur road, Kilketampatti, 20 km from Karur on the Karur-Dindigul road and Perumalpalayam, 60 km from Tiruchirappalli on the Chennai-Tiruchirappalli trunk road are the famous sites for the transepted and Dolomenoid cists. Stone circles have been noticed in the villages of Perumalpalayam, Padalur, Naramangalam and Senganam all in Chennai-Tiruchirappalli trunk road. A stone circle is one in which huge unkewn boulders are kept in one or more circles above the ground. If the stone-circle encloses a heap or rubble, it is classified as a 'cairn-circle'. Sometimes the cairn circle has capstone. This is called cairn-circle with capstone.

More than fifty cairn circles in a field and a few urn burials in Chinnamettukkali and Kattupputtur in Musiri taluk were discovered. At Kottaimedu in Kulitalai Taluk urn burrials have been found out. An urn is a huge burrial pot with the skeletal remains. It is burried under the ground. It may contain some grave goods like pottery and iron objects. The prevalent of the Megalithic culture in Tiruchirappalli region indicated the historicity of the area. Pudukottai, an adjacent district of Tiruchirappalli is famous for Megalithic burial sites. Still today, they are preserved by the Archaeological Survey of India in Sittanavasal.

2. Archaeological Excavations

The antiquity of Tiruchirappalli is revealed from the Archaeological excavations conducted by T.V.Mahalingam, of the Madras University in 1962-63 and Dr. K.V.Raman, Uraiyur in 1965 and 1969. A lot of new facts have been broughtforth to peep into the early local History of Tiruchirappalli. These excavations had thrown some welcome light on the many aspects of the material culture of the area. These sites also yielded inscribed sheds into Tamil-Brahmi letters which have created new interest in the study of potsherd inscriptions of South India. On the whole five ancient sites in Tiruchirappalli district have been excavated:

1) Alagarai 2) Tirukkam-puliyur 3) Uraiyur 4) Karur 5) Gangaikonda Cholapuram.

Alagari, on the bank of Cauvery river in the Musiri taluk was taken for excavation by Professor T.V. Mahalingam in 1961-62. The cultural deposits of the mound was from 2 to 6 meters divisible into three periods. These three periods were from 1000 BC to 1500 AD. Alagari proved to be continuously inhabited by the people more than 2500 years. We can not attribute reason why this place had been depopulated and abandoned for inhabitation. Tirukkampuliyur, in the Musiri taluk, had been excavated by Professor T.V.Mahalingam during 1962-63. It revealed three cultural deposits from 300 BC to 1500 AD. The images of mother Goddess and infant Krishna show their popularity of the cults at the folk level.

Uraiyur

It was a famous city during early centuries of Christian era. We have lot of references about Uraiyur in foreign notices of Ptolemy and Periplus of the Erythrean sea. It was mentioned as Argaru, as the centre of trade. Among the Sangam works the Ahananuru and Kuruntogai throw a flood of light on the topography of Uraiyur. Kuruntogai mentioned that it was a chief river port. The Tamil literary works, mentioned that Uraiyur was the cradle of famous poets such as Enichcherimudamosiyar, Ilampon Vaniganar, Kaduvai Sattanar, Salliyan Kumaranar, Sirukandanar, Maruthuvan Damodanar, Mudukannan Sattan and Mudukuttanar. All the above poets bear the name of the city, Uraiyur as prefix to their names.

Tevaram hymns mentioned that Tirumukkichchuram, otherwise called Tiruchirappalli was a centre of Saivism. Two of the Nayanmar were born at Uraiyur and of the twelve Alvars, Tiruppan Alvar was born at Uraiyur. Koli, Urandai, Kolimanagar, and Varanan are the names known from the Sangam literature. Kukkudapuri and Viluvanam are the name known from traditions. The Chalukyan records refer to this city as Uragapura. Caldwell gave the etymological meaning of Uraiyur as Urai reside, Ur - village or town. The present Uraiyur is situated on an extensive elevated ground which cover the material remains of the ancient people. Archaeological exploration indicated that the site extended well over an area about 2 km east-west and 3.5 km north-west. The site had been continuously occupied till the late medieval times. Even after that some parts of Uraiyur had been continuously occupied. The ancient city of Uraiyur would have been covered an area of 2 square kilometers. The site has revealed two broad cultural periods viz. Period-I and II. The artefacts indicated the habitation of the place from 3rd century BC onwards.

Karur, another centre of trade activities, in Tiruchirappalli, was the hoards of Greek and Roman coins. The Roman coins found on the river Amaravathi bed revealed the commercial link between Tamil Nadu and the European countries. The bronze dye found there depicts the portrait of a Roman emperer. The Roman coin commanded much respect in the southern states and possibly the dye was used for producing local imitation. Mostly the coins belonged to Angustus, Tiberius, Claudius and Marcus Auralis were found at Karur. One copper coin belonging to Thrace was found from the Amaravathi river bed. It was a copper coin weighing to 1 gm. Another copper coin of Thessaly was also found in the same place. Besides,

R. Krishnamoorthy had found out copper coins belonging to Crete and Rodhes. Besides these coins, he found out coins of Seleucid, Philista, Judaea, Parthia etc. A gold coil of Antonus plus was found. It belonged to the 2nd century AD. The other copper coins ranging from 3rd century BC to the 2nd century AD.

Gangaikondacholapuram, situated on the truck road leading to Jeyakondacholapuram, a Chola capital in the 11th and 12th century AD was excavated by Dr.R.Nagaswamy the Director of State Archaeological Survey in 1980 and 1984. It was the centre of cultural activity in the medieval period. Since Gangaikonda Cholapuram, gained prominence in the Chola period, the political importance of this metropolis will be discussed under the political history.

Barring Gangaikondacholarpuram, all other places mentioned, throw fled of light regarding the antiquity of Tiruchirappalli. The excavations proved that these places were thickly populated. Perhaps these centres would have been connected by highways for the purpose of trade. Parantaka I, in his inscription referred to a Highway on the banks of Cauvery from Tiruchirappalli to Karur. Hence the discovery of coins of different types on Kaveripatinam, Uraiyur and Karur on this highway confirmed the brisk trade between India and the Roman world. The potsheds, bore the Brahmi inscriptions. It showed the literary spirit of the people and their capacity to write. The black and red ware unearthed from all these regions revealed an uniformity in settlement pattern, starting from 3rd century BC. The inference drawn from these excavations that the settlers cleared the jungle; and form settlements on the river banks and also practise agriculture by irrigation. The considerable number of beads and a good amount of bangle pieces of various materials bearing evidence to the presence of small scale industries. The potteries produced in large quantities also suffix to the above mentioned point. Hence the ancient people of Tiruchirappalli cherised a highly material life as we see in the Sangam literature.

3. Conclusion

In conclusion, Tiruchirappalli is a historically significant region with a rich heritage dating back to prehistoric times. Geological studies and archaeological discoveries provide evidence of early human settlements in the Cauvery River basin. Stone tools, megalithic burial structures, ancient pottery, coins, and Tamil-Brahmi inscriptions reveal the development of human life, agriculture, trade, and culture in the region. Important historical sites such as Uraiyur, Karur, and Alagarai highlight the region's contribution to ancient Tamil civilization and its commercial connections with foreign countries. Thus, the antiquity of Tiruchirappalli demonstrates its importance as a centre of early human settlement, cultural development, and historical heritage in South India.

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