ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATION SITES IN TAMIL NADU - A STUDY
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Abstract
Archaeology is the study of ancient human society, by reconstructing environmental settings and cultural systems, typically from their physical remains (masonry, pottery, coins, engravings, etc). Archaeology often interacts with history to provide a broad view of the human experience. More knowledge about the great civilization is brought out with archaeological excavations in recent times. According to archaeologists, the Iron Age in South India stretched between 1,000 B.C. and 300 B.C. The Iron Age and Megalithic age were cotemporaneous in South India. The Iron Age signifies the beginning of civilization. History of ancient civilization cannot be written without archaeological evidence and the tradition. They are important to make real interpretation of the nature of any civilization. Tradition infused life on the lifeless archaeological remains. It was the British who initiated excavations in Mohenjodaro and Harappa, which gave way to exploration of the Indus valley civilization. The main goal of history was to bring out unbiased truth

Key Words: Archaeology, reconstructing, excavations, ancient civilization

Introduction
Pottery is one of the most enduring materials known to human kind. In most places it is the oldest and most widespread art. Primitive peoples the world over have fashioned pots and bowls of baked clay for their daily use. Prehistoric remains of pottery have proved of great importance in archaeology and have often supplied a means of dating and establishing an early chronology. Pottery has also been of value as historical and literary records. Since pottery is a durable, datable, identifiable and classifiable artifact, which was utilized by various cultures around the world, and it has been proven to be a boon to archaeologists. Broken pottery in archaeological sites, called shreds help to identify the resident culture and date the level by the formation, style and decoration. Potteries used in each period should be described in terms of their colour, technique of manufacture and typology. Period wise analysis of the pottery equipment should show the evolution of industry, techniques and types. The impact of pottery traditions from other cultural zones, the improvement or decline of the quality of the ceramics can be analyzed. Among the technical points to be investigated and the results analyzed are, the manufacturing techniques, the nature and preparation of clay as revealed by the pottery, section, hand or wheel made and inverted firing technique. The results of this analysis would bring out the distinguishing characteristics of each category of pottery and help in classifying the potteries on the basis of the techniques

History of Excavated Sites
Tamilnadu's history dates back to pre historic times and archaeological evidence points to this area being one of the longest continuous habitation in India. From early pre-history, Tamilnadu was the home of the four powerful Tamil kingdoms of the Chera, Chola, Pandya and Pallavas. The oldest extent literature, dated between 500 BCE (Before Christian Era) and CE (Christian Era) mentions the exploits of the kings and princess, and of the poets who extolled them. The early cholas reigned between 1st and 4th centuries CE. An unknown dynasty called kalabhras invaded and displaced the three Tamil kingdoms between the 4th and 7th centuries CE. This is referred to as the Dark Age in Tamil history. Around 580 CE, the Pallavas, great temple builders, emerged into prominence and dominated the south for another 150 years. They ruled a large portion of Tamilnadu with Kanchipuram as their base. The kongu region of Tamilnadu (Covering
the present districts of Coimbatore, Erode, Salem, Namakkal, Karur, Nilgiris and parts of Dindigul and Dharmapuri) has several archaeological sites belonging to Megalithic and early historical periods with well preserved artifacts. It was famous for its mineral wealth (notably Beryl), with traders coming from as far as the Mediterranean region to buy beads made of semi-precious stones. Archaeological excavations in these regions have yielded thousands of artifacts, especially Roman coins (in gold, silver and copper) and gold ornaments, revealing that it was an important centre for foreign trade even during the early historical period. It is of interest to note that the Kongu region has yielded nearly eighty percent of the Roman coins unearthed all over India.

❖ Ariyalur (11° 13'.N 790 08'. E)

Ariyalur is an inland district without coastal line. The district has Vellarriver in the North and Kolli dam river in the South and it has no well marked natural divisions. This site is famous for, the Kaliyaperumaal temple situated at 51cm from Ariyalur. The site is known as the Land of fossil. Craterous deposits of sea animals, believed to be 10 crores years old, have been found at the fossil areas of Ariyalur. The findings among other things included large number of broken potteries and burial urns and the fossils of a sea turtle, dinosaur egg and other plant specimens which had been buried in the earth. Each fossil of the sea-animal weighs about 40 to 50 kg and is perfect in shape.

❖ Kaniyampoondi (11° 48'.N 77° 42'. E)

It is 10 miles north-east of Palladarn, Coimbatore district. There are more than sixty dolmens in this village. The site was excavated by Archaeological Survey of India (ASI). The site is actually a burial ground covering nearly 60 acres. Two trenches were excavated by them with different layers. During excavation half angled potteries, cups, burial urns belonging to Megalithic period were found.

❖ Melchittamur (12° 40'.N 79° 55'. E)

The site Melchittamur is situated 17 km west of Tindivanam and 10 km east of Gingee-Tindivanam highways in Villupuram district. The site was excavated by Department of Ancient History and Archaeology, University of Madras, Chennai during 2006-2007. Chittamur has been a Jain centre since 10th century AD. The excavations yielded cultural remains like potsherds of different varieties, terracotta objects, stone objects and metal objects. Bone remains of cattle were also noticed. The burial in this site belong to Megalithic period. The antiquity of Chittamur can be traced only from the Pallava period though there are a number of Brahmi inscriptions dated to 4th and 5th century AD in and around Melchittamur.

❖ Perur (10° 58'.N 76° 54'. E)

Perur, a historical town in Coimbatore district is situated 6 km west of Coimbatore on the Coimbatore-Siruvarri road. Perur, mentioned in Sangam literature, is one of the old kongu sites with continuous habitation. Its location on the ancient highway along the bank of the Noyaariver was a strategic one as far as foreign trade was concerned. It was a potential archaeological site. The site was excavated by State Department of Archaeology, Chennai. Several artifacts,have been reportedly unearthed by the local village folk at Perur. During excavation, a number of potsherds, antiquities of wire beads made of glass quartz, shell and coral and terracotta objects like ear lobes, human figurines and lamps were found. This site belongs to Pt century BCE to 314 century ACE (After Christian Era).

❖ Salamankuppam (12° 361.N 800 11'. E)

This place is about 1.5 km north of the famous shore temple of Mahabalipuram and 150 m from the sea. The site was excavated by Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), branch office, Chennai. Mahapalipuram is a wonder shore piece of marvel of Pallava art and architecture. It was once a flourishing seaport with a brisk trade with countries in south-east Asia and the Mediterranean in the Pallava dynasty. Mahapalipuram is a natural heritage of a fine seacoast together with abundant...
man-made historical and archaeological monuments.6 Excavations at this site revealed multiple cultural settlements with clear-cut working levels and associated sedimentary horizons. The remains of a brick temple, dating back to the late Tamil Sangam period 1st century BC to 2nd century AD have been discovered recently”. Several artifacts have been unearthed from the ruins of the temple. The temple is about 2000 years old. Artifacts found at the site include broken hard portion with a bangle of a sharcco lamps, beads, roofing tiles made of terracotta figurine, hop-scotches and different varieties of potteries.

❖ SankariDurg (11° 27’.N 770 53’. E)

SankariDurg is a village which is 48 km from Salem district and seven miles from Tiruchengode. In Tiruchengode inscriptions, SankariDurg is referred to as Kannatturdurgam in konguAilasviraChadamandalam The correct spelling of the name should be SankagiriDurgam and the hill is so called because of its resemblance to the sacred conch shell derives its name from the massive hill which overshadows it on the west.7 It was the headquarters of a tasildar under Tippu Sultan. It contains a temple dedicated to Someshwara at the height of 2,345 above sea level and nearly 1,500 above the plain. This is one of the konguregion of Tamilnadu. The site was excavated by Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), Salem. During the excavation, a number of potsherds, bricks, human skeleton and burial urns belonging to 1782-1789 ACE were found.

❖ Tandikkudi(10° 18’.N 77° 38’. E)

Tandikkudi is located in Dindigul district, Kodaikanaltaluk at 47 km northeast of Marudhariver. This place has a number of archaeological evidences. This site was identified and excavated by the Department of Epigraphy and Archaeology, Tamil University, Thanjavur. During excavation two burials belonging to Iron Age were found. In addition to it cups, pots, weapons, black and red wares and beads made of Pavalam were also found. These beads were found only in Gujarat. So there may be trade link between Tandikkudi and Gujarat .

❖ Tittagudi (11° 23’.N 790 06’. E)

Caddalore is a district in Tamilnadu which is one of the most important archaeological place. Tittagudi is located at about 741cm to the west of caddalore. Thitta means Thittu or mud mount. Kudi means people who lived in that place, hence the name This site was excavated by the Department of Epigraphy and Archaeology, Tamil University, Thanjavur–ur. During excavation a number of broken pottery pieces, ruined Siva and Perumal temple have been found. The destruction of a town by a seismic event took place over many years and the evidence for several phases of damage has been found in this site .

❖ Adichanallur

Adichanallur is an archaeological siter in Thoothukudi District in Tamil Nadu. The town has been the site of a number of very important archaeological finds. Korkai the capital of the EalyPandyan Kingdom is located about 15km from Adichanallur. In 2004, a number of skeletons dating from around 1800 BCE were found buried in earthenware urns. Later, a three-tier burial system was discovered in which earlier generations were buried in urns at 10 feet depth. 

❖ Keeladi

Keeladi is a small village near Silaiman on the border between Madurai andSivagangai districts in Tamil Nadu. An archaeological Survey of India excavation in Keeladi revealed a Sangam Era settlement dated to the 2nd Century BCE by radio carbon dating.

❖ Thiruverkadu (13o 06’.N 80o 12’. E)

Thiruverkadu literally means a forest of holy herbs and roots is a western suburb of Chennai, Tamil Nadu. It comes under Thiruvallur district administration. This site is famous for its Devi Karumariamman Temple. Nearby towns include Poonamallee, Avadi, Ambattur and Koyambedu. There is also a Shiva Temple in Thiruverkadu, where Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvathi are seen
in their wedding pose inside the sanctum sanctorum. This site was excavated by the Department of Ancient History and Archaeology, University of Madras, Chennai.

❖ **Kaveripakkam (12o54'.N 79o27'. E)**

Kaveripakkam is a town located on the northern banks of the Palar river in Vellore District of Tamil Nadu. This town also known as Kaveri, is 10 km east of Walajapet and 30 km from Kanchipuram. Kaveripakkam is a tourist spot known for a lake built by King Nandivarman III of Pallava dynasty. This place was called 'Kavithapakkam' during the reign of the Pallavas. Recent excavations have unearthed 16th century artifacts such as pottery materials and burnt clay products. These artifacts are now displayed at Government Museum in Vellore. This site was excavated by Department of Anthropology, Government Museum, Vellore.

❖ **Panchapandavarmalai (12o54'.N 79o20'. E)**

Arungundram (also spelled Arunkundram) is a village in Tamil Nadu between Arcot and Kannamangalam. The village is surrounded by hillocks and paddy fields, and is about 8 km from Arcot in Vellore district. During the rule of Pallava dynasty (400 - 800 AD), Arungundram was a place of busy activities. Jain Monks and Nuns lived in the hillocks near Arungundram. Thiruppanmalai, in the outskirts of the village, had a dormitory of Jain Nuns. There are seven cave temples in the hills, belonging to NandivarmaPallava period (740 AD). The hillock and the caves are now known as "Panchapandavarmalai" in Tamil. There is also a cavern at top of the hill with a spring. Sculped figures of the famous monk Naganandhi and a Jain Yakshi are seen near the spring. It is also believed that there existed 108 Siva temples in and around Arungundram village and the hills. Even now one can see remnants of Siva temples and lingams scattered all around the paddy fields of Arungundram. This site was excavated by Department of Anthropology, Government Museum, Vellore.

❖ **Udagamandalam (11° 24'.N 76° 42'.E)**

Udagamandalam or Ooty or Blue Mountains is also the name given to a range of mountains spread across the states of Tamilnadu as well as Karnataka and Kerala. The Nilgiri Hills are part of a larger mountain chain known as the Western Ghats. The highest point is the mountain of Doddabetta, with a height of 2,623 m. Ancient pottery belonging to the early Iron age ie.,Megalithic period have been discovered around this town. This site was excavated by Department of Anthropology, Government Museum, Egmore, Chennai. Udhagamandalam, originally occupied by the Todas, the area came under the rule of the East India Company at the end of the 18th century. Today, the town's economy is based on tourism and agriculture, along with manufacture of medicines and photographic film (HPF). Nilgiris in general was ruled by Ganga kings and later by Hoysala kings, particularly Vishnuvardhana who captured Wynad and Nilgiri area during the 11th century (Francis 1908). Tippu Sultan was the first to extend his border by constructing a hideout cave like structure. The Archaeological potteries excavated recently in Tamilnadu from six different locations were analyzed using Micro – Raman Spectra . It proves that this study has been conducted on a number of samples to both provide cross checks on the sample mineralogy derived from infrared spectroscopy and to provide an independent determination of sample mineralogy. Apart from these sites, several other sites are also found in Tamil Nadu. It explains the early men’s culture and the life styles.10

**Conclusion:**

Tamil Nadu had distinct cultural sequences. The Non availability of exclusive Neolithic phase in Southern India is yet to be understood with further intensive explorations and controlled excavations. Recently three such Tamil-Brahmi inscribed potsherds were recovered from the megalithic sites. Thus the limited explorations and selective excavations conducted in the region
provided a broad picture on the emergence of various cultural traits and their transformation through the years.

References
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