

# **The Disappearing Dolmens in Muniyattukunnu**

**Project submitted to the University of Calicut**

**in partial fulfilment for the award of the degree**

**of**

**Bachelor of Arts in English & History**

**By**

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**March 2021**

## **Certificate**

This is to certify that the project entitled **The Disappearing Dolmens in Muniyattukunnu** is a bonafide research work carried out by Ms. **Lakshmi NB** under my supervision and guidance in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Bachelor of Arts in English & History submitted to the University of Calicut.

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## **Declaration**

I, Lakshmi NB, hereby declare that the project entitled **The Disappearing Dolmens in Muniyattukunnu**, submitted to the University of Calicut in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the Degree of Bachelor of Arts in English & History, is a bonafide record of original research work carried out by me under the supervision and guidance of Dr. George Alex, Coordinator, Department of B.A. English & History (Double Main) Christ College (Autonomous), Irinjalakuda.

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## **Introduction**

Local history is the study of history in a geographically local context and it mainly concentrates on the local community. The study of local history is very important and relevant in today's world. It enables people to reconstruct their own history with the surviving evidences and relics of the past. Megaliths are either monuments erected in memory of the dead or erected as part of ritual and belief in life after death.

Megaliths are the predominant archaeological remains of the Iron Age that represents a formative phase in the history of India and Kerala in particular. The monuments are the earliest surviving man-made monuments. Megaliths help to reconstruct the economic life which is the basic realm to understand culture, social organization and the strategies of human existence.

The megalithic monuments are considered to be representing various beliefs related to ancestor worship, fear or respect towards the dead and belief in soul and life after death. Megaliths are therefore important structures that can provide a plenty of informations about not only the lifestyle of the people who made them but can also reveal details about their faith and beliefs. Megalithic architecture, specifically the construction of sanctuaries and tombs using enormous blocks of stone occupies an important position in the cultural experience of prehistory.

### **Megalithic culture in India**

The Indian sub continent is one of the regions having the earliest stone carving traditions. The Indus valley stone sculptures are the earliest datable specimens going back to about 3000 BC. South India abounds in Megalithic Monuments. The entire region, upto the Vidhyas, is dotted with numerous megalithic sites. They range from simple pit and urn burials to elaborate dolmens and rock cut chambers. They are

constructed in various forms and methods which can be divided into different types and sub types.

In the Indian context, megaliths stretch from dates before 3000 BC till about 900 BC, but are known to be continuing traditions in some parts of the country. The oldest megaliths in India are found in the western most part of the country in the present day Afghanistan in the upper Indus valley. Dated to about 3000 BC, they are in the form of stone circles.

### **Living megaliths**

Stone circles, menhirs, cist burials, and dolmens in the region bordering Kerala and Tamil Nadu have almost disappeared. These are the vital element of landscape and for historical reasons which commemorating pre historical cultures. It also shows the migration of ancient people, exchange of cultures, and customs. The living megalithic culture in India provides strong evidences regarding the belief system of pre historic people. “the Gond people believe in life after death, they believe that every human being has two souls: the spirit and the shadow. The life spirit goes to *bada devta* but the shadow still stays in the village after the erection of stone memorial. Gond people believe that the first and foremost duty of the shadow spirit is to watch over the moral behavior of the people and punish those who go against the tribal law,” notes a paper by S. Mendaly on the living megalithic culture of the Gonds of Nuaparha in Odisha.

The megalithic culture is a major field in history. The studies on kerala megalithic culture are still in the beginning stage in spite of the number of works carried out in the state in 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The study or research on the megalithic sites is limited to some parts of the state. The archeological department is not providing proper attention and protection for the megalithic sites in the state. As a result,

majority of the places in Kerala haven't received much care for more information about ancient people.

### **Megalithic culture in Thrissur district**

In the past century, archaeologists have found rock cut caves, cists, hat stones, urn burials, umbrella stones in Thrissur district. Excavations conducted by the Archaeological Survey of India and the State Department of Archaeology Southern circle at some of the sites have resulted in the unearthing of red and black ware pottery, bowls, sherds, bronze bowls and vases of the black and red ware with globular profile and round base. But in most of the cases proper excavation of sites are not done in a systematic manner. Different kinds of megalithic monuments were discovered from different parts of the district such as kudakallu, thoppikallu, *muniyaras* or dolmens and menhirs.

A dolmen is a megalithic structure typically formed from a large horizontal stone slab resting on two or more upright slabs. Dolmens are significant as they help to reconstruct the pre-historic civilization. These were used to commemorate the dead and the first attempt by the ancient people to organize and shape the landscape around them. Dolmens are also called as '*muniyaras*' in Kerala, in Tamil Nadu it is known by '*pandikuzhi*', '*pandarmanai*' in Karnataka, in Andhra Pradesh '*padukallu*', telengana '*rakshasa kallu*', Jharkhand '*asuranila*'

### **Muniyattukunnu and Megalithic Culture**

Muniyattukunnu of Mupliyam in Thrissur, Kerala, is a hillock famous for dolmens and it was declared as protected monument as per government affairs. The study of the local history helps us to understand about the past of the Muniyattukunnu and also the cultural conditions of the place. The monuments in Muniyattukunnu are being destroyed due to unscientific mining. Muniyattukunnu may not be including in the



main stream history of Megalithic Culture in Kerala as an important place, but it needs to be considered as an important site because quarrying destroys megalithic dolmens. According to the Archaeological department only one of the 11 dolmens is remaining now. The quarry operators encroaches the land day by day and the study about Muniyattukunnu is to know about past and present condition of this place. It is an attempt to understand the construction and the culture of the people who are on those days. The project also analyses the geography and historical importance of the Muniyattukunnu.

### **Review of Literature**

There is only limited number of authentic works about Muniyattukunnu in Kerala history. The primary source is the oral history and the available sources or literature of Muniyattukunnu is in the form of newspaper reports, souvenirs, books, interviews etc.

### **Objective of the study**

This project aims to understand the historical background of the Muniyattukunnu. The project seeks to examine the megalithic culture and tradition of the place. The project also explores the geographical condition of the place.

### **Scope**

The 'Study on Disappearing Dolmens in Muniyattukunnu' includes its all aspects of the locality .The cultural life and geographical aspects are discussed in this project. The historical aspects of people are also discussed. The scope of the project is to give an up-to-date account on the general features of Muniyattukunnu.

### **Sources**

The oral evidence is the main source for the present study among the other sources. The other sources for this study are the newspaper reports, book, articles and documents from the archaeology department. Another method used for the collection

of data is interviews with the local people and environmentalists who are working for the conservation and preservation of the place.

## **Methodology**

Historical methodology is used in this study. It is based on historical analysis of data. The work is based on the available primary and secondary sources. The technique of oral history, telephonic interview and local history has been used for this study.

## **Chapterisation**

This study is divided into five chapters including Introduction and Conclusion. The Introduction includes the aim, importance of study, the scope of the subject matter, sources and the overview of this project. The first chapter denotes the megalithic culture in Kerala. The second chapter comprises the historical and geographical background of Muniyattukunnu. And the third chapter is about the environmental issues and present condition of the place.

## **Chapter 1**

### **Megalithic culture in Kerala**

Megaliths are the monuments erected out of large blocks of stones. The term megalith is derived from Greek word “mega”, which means great and “lithos” means stone. A megalith is a large stone that has been used to construct a structure or monument, either alone or together with other stones. The megalithic culture is found all over the world. In India, the megalithic culture dates back to Iron Age (1500BC to 500BC). Megalithic lands were certainly not build on any ordinary ground those were chosen with utmost care and were significant in their lives of ancient people.

Megalith worshiping is still widespread in many parts of the world. Worship of the dead ancestors is considered as an important part in many cultures of the world.

Almost all types of megaliths are founded extensively in India. The main concentration of Megalithic monuments defining the Iron Age culture can be found in the South Indian states of Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Karnataka. There are many suggestions concerning the chronology of megalithic culture in South India.

The association of man and the stone can be traced back to the prehistoric times. The concept of death is always a mystery to the mankind. The mystery of birth, life and death to humankind was as mysterious as natural elements and hence came to be worshipped with rituals and rites. Since time in memorial each community began to follow certain methods to cremate the dead. They created many customs, rituals to come over the fear of death. It is not only the belief in the life after death is reflected in the burials, but it is also observable that the megalithic monuments are considered to be representing various beliefs related to ancestor worship, fear and respect towards the dead and belief in soul, spirit and ghost etc. Megalithic belief and practices are associated with the installation of variety of burial monuments, and it also attains the

expression of a religion. Even today, the practice of megalithic culture is still evident from different part of the world in different forms. For instance, in certain religions the cremation process and the construction of tombs and coffins also represent the ancient megalithic culture. Some of the tribal groups still practice the same methods of cremating the dead person as in the megalithic tradition. Megalithic tradition is one of the main traditions that ever existed. It is said so because megaliths are seen in every parts of the world. Megalithic culture is the outcome of human thinking and it is closely related to the society. The variation in topology, distribution and characteristics of the megaliths indicate the behavior megalithic people and their approach toward death. The dead were treated with certain rituals and customs in accordance to their community beliefs.

Iron Age people were agro pastoralists who involved in activities such as hunting, cattle keeping and dry land agriculture. Iron Age has a long history of highland cultivation and iron smelting. The Iron Age monuments on the west coast of India can be grouped into certain types based on their construction. Megalithic monuments can be seen all over the state. Megaliths in Kerala have connection with the neighboring states such as Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. They are ‘dolmens’, ‘menhirs’, ‘kudakkal’ or umbrella stones, ‘topikkal’ or hat stones, ‘pathikkals’ means hood of a snake, ‘stone circles’ etc. Apart from the structural components discussed above there are many other findings which help us to understand unique identity and culture of the people lived at that time.

Heavy stones were used for the construction of tombs to indicate the place where the dead are kept. The megaliths of indigenous people are the true reflections of their lifestyle. These dolmens are useful in evaluating the socio-cultural background. The remnants of the megalithic age seen throughout world and they are Dolmens, Cists,

sepulchral megaliths, Urn burials, Capstones or Umbrella stones, Menhirs, Rock-cut caves, Stone alignments, pit burials etc.

Dolmen:<sup>1</sup> The stone tent erected on top of the surface of the burial place or urn burial ground is known as dolmen. One side of it will be the stone slab which can be removed.<sup>2</sup> A number of dolmens have been discovered all over Kerala in the recent decades. The high ranges of Idukki district abound in megalithic sites. At Marayur village in the Anjanad valley of Devikulam taluk may be seen an extensive site consisting of Dolmens and cists. At Kallarapattom colony in Udumbanchola taluk have been discovered a few important megalithic burial sites of the cists and menhir type. Some relics of megalithic were discovered at Pootamkara in Kunnathur taluk in 1963. In these burial sites, good number of terracotta figurines of male having beard and some of the other sex in the worshipping posture was discovered. Apart from these many tusks of elephants and pot sherds with engravings were also founded by the archaeologists and the anthropologists. Dolmens are founded in Pulimathu of Thiruvananthapuram district, Elamala and Poothangara, where we can see the dolmen above cist in Pattanamthitta district, in Kottayam dolmens are found at Kainakari, Kuruvilangadu. Idukki district and Wayannad are famous for its dolmens. In the district of Palakkad, Kongad, Manjalur, Pallassana, Vadakarapatti has dolmens. In Mulanthuruthi of Ernakulum and Mulankunnath kavu, Vadakkethara of Thrissur district have dolmens. Kuttyadi and Velur are also famous for its dolmens. In the Thrissur area of Cochin State contains Megalithic sites. They are mostly founded in the uplands and in the mountainous tracts. The average height of these dolmens is around two to three meters. The increase in height and size of theses dolmens indicate the high status or position of the dead person had in the society. The most important

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<sup>1</sup> Nair Sivasankaran, 2010 Early History of Kerala, p. 16

<sup>2</sup> Menon Sreedhara , 1967, A Survey of Kerala History, pp51-52

of the places mentioned are the Kulukollur, Kodakkal, Iringallur, Chokkur, Manjeri, Nilambur, Sultan Battery, Muppainad, Puthadi, Taliparambu etc.

Sepulchral megaliths are the type of megaliths which contain the remains of the dead and can store it in a variety of forms. They could be primary burials, in which case the dead is interned soon after his or her death and it will contain a complete skeleton with some additional material as homage to the dead and for the dead to use them in afterlife. There is another type of non-sepulchral megaliths that should probably be classified with the sepulchral ones are the Hero Stones. These are typically the engravings on it either of a warrior or of a God and are generally assumed to have been installed to mark a bygone hero or someone lost from the group while travelling. However, it is believed that some of the dolmens are also probably equivalent of memorial construct of the dead with or without a burial in it.

Rock cut caves are founded extensively in Kerala of the Megalithic order.

<sup>3</sup>These are the graves made in the laterite stone. The dead body is taken inside through a two feet hole on one side either on a bench or in an urn burial. After placing the corpse inside, the caves are covered with stone slabs. The Thrissur district is famous for its rock cut caves. Some of the famous rock cut caves is founded in Chovannur, Kandanasseri, Kakkad, Porkalam, Eyyal and Kattakambal in Thrissur district. These are characterized by general features like that of rectangular pits of varying depths with narrow openings and steps which access to the floor of the outer court. The caves have both circular and dome shaped vault. Some rock cut caves contains carvings and inscriptions along with some figures and symbols.

Cists are the caves made underground in red stones called *chengallu*. These are the closed grave at the top with stone after depositing the corpse along with the

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<sup>3</sup>Nair Sivasankaran., loc.cit

belongings of the dead as they believed in life after the death. These are founded in places in Puliyoor of Alappuzha district, Kodumannu of Pathanamthitta district and Kallar of Kottayam district. The type and size of cists varies from region to region such as slab cists and port holed cists and size approximately of four meter long and three meter wide. In many places inside the cists chambers, iron tools, pots, bowls, lids were discovered.

Urn burials are the earthen pots for keeping the remains of the dead body. The large urns contain skeletal remains and are placed inside the huge pits. It is practiced even now in some cultures and represented with some alterations. It is covered with a flat stone after burying the urn. Urn burials are found in Sreekariyam, Velliyilkadavu, and Venjaramoodu of Thiruvananthapuram district, Mangadu of Kollam district, Kallar of Kottayam district, Baisan valley of Idukki where we can see Urn burial below Menhir and Toppikal above it. Sometimes these urns are left uncovered by side walls or cap stone.

Menhirs are the single monolithic structures which are usually oriented in north south direction. Menhirs are a kind of the megalithic art. Etymologically speaking, menhir is derived from the words *maen* or *men* meaning stone and *hir* meaning long in Brittonic languages. The traces of these monolithic chambers are unknown to the major counterparts of the world. The size of the menhirs varies considerably to different regions. On the hills of Pothamala in Udumbanchola taluk on Kerala Tamil- Nadu border large number of menhirs was discovered recently. Puliyoor says that the menhirs were planted in a specific geometric pattern on a cluster of hills. Most of these structures were oriented in east-west direction. Menhirs seen in kerala are quite different and it is not seen elsewhere.

Stone alignments are the alignments of stone made around the dead body after burying it or keeping it open so as to facilitate the birds to eat it. Stone megaliths are found rarely in Kerala. In Pattanamthitta district stone alignments are recovered in Poothangara and Athirampuzha of Kottayam district.

<sup>4</sup>Pit burials are the simplest type of burial. The deceased along with funerary assemblage was placed in a pit dug out especially for this purpose and filled with earth and cairn packing. There are instances when the pit is sealed by a huge capstone. Diverse dimensions and depths may be encountered; the shapes also vary from oval to rectangular.

The aboriginals of Kerala are the builders of the megalithic culture. Hunting was the favorite occupation of the Neolithic man. The earliest inhabitants of land are represented by the Negrito strain in the aboriginal population. The Uralies, the Kadar, the Kanikkar and the Malampondarams belong to the Negrito type strain. They have curly type of hair; round shaped head, black skin colour are the features of the Negrito type. <sup>5</sup>The Proto Australoids are noted for their long heads, protruding face, broad flat nose and dark skin replaced the Negritos. In Kerala this type is represented by such hill tribes as the Kurichiyas, the Mala Arayans, the Karimpalans and the Mala vetans. They took shelter in the rocks and woods and hunted animals for food. The art of pottery was firstly developed by the Neolithic men. The megaliths were associated with the cult of the dead. Megaliths indicate the contemporary habitation knowledge of the ancient men. As the Neolithic men believed in after life, they cremated the dead along with grains, tools, weapons, ornaments, beads, utensils etc. Black ware and red ware pottery were recovered from many sites. The internments were usually done in

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<sup>4</sup> Sudkya Joanna, 2011, The megalithic iron age culture in south India- some general remarks, p. 376.

<sup>5</sup> Menon Sreedhara, 1987 Kerala History and Its Makers, p. 8.



the urns or jars in pits or in cists or rock cut caves. Among the black ware pottery hemispherical bowls, shallow bowl pots, lids were discovered.

Krishna Iyer in his work *Kerala Megaliths and Their Builders* says that South India has long been known as one of the richest megalithic areas of the world. Thousands of cists and dolmens have been recovered between 18° and 10° latitude. The south Indian megaliths are associated with a particular type of pottery tradition which is known as black and red ware. In Kerala, mainly megaliths of Toppikals that is the umbrella stones and kodakkallu which is also known as hood stones are recovered. These types are not found in any other places other than Kerala.

Technological skills and the rising intelligence of the ancient man helped them to create megaliths which gave significant informations on their architectural skills and their past. From the different types of menhirs and dolmens in different sizes and shapes shows the creative ability of our ancestors to keep the track of dead and the universe.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Geography and historical importance of Muniyattukunnu**

Kerala has been through the ages as an integral part of Indian subcontinent. Kerala history is the history of composite culture and traditions. Kerala has unique physical and geographical features. Kerala lies between 8° 18' and 12° 48' North latitude and between 74° 52' and 77° 24' East longitude. Kerala has an area of 38,863 sq. km. The neighboring states of Kerala are Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh.

### **Muniyattukunnu and geographical peculiarities**

The geographical position of Kerala has its own uniqueness and its landscape has its own beauty. The evolution of the language and culture of Kerala has also been influenced by contacts with Tamil and Kannada regions. The southern dialect of Malayalam shows traces of Tamil influences and the northern dialect of Malayalam shows the Kannada influence.

The central region of Kerala is Thrissur district which is the cultural capital of the state is rich in history and tradition. The Thrissur district has plenty of pre historic antiquities that indicate the existence of Neolithic culture and it is noted for its megalithic monuments. Thrissur district have significant role in reconstruction of the pre historic times.

The mountains and hills play an important role in the history. They are significant in safeguarding the territorial integrity and political freedom of the land. Muniyattukunnu is a small place in Mupliyam village of Kodakara block in Thrissur district. It belongs to the Central Kerala Division. It is located 23km towards South from District Head quarters. Muniyattukunnu is surrounded by Irinjalakuda Block towards the west, Chalakudy Block towards South, Vellangallur Block towards west

and Cherpu Block towards west. Irinjalakuda, Chalakudy, Ashtamichira, Guruvayoor are the nearby cities to Muniyattukunnu. It is located in the north east corner of the Mupliyam village.

Muniyattukunnu is a predominately rocky area which forms part of the Kodasherry Reserved Forest in survey number 436 of Mupliyam village, notified during 1909. It is famous for the dolmens and hillocks. The place is famous for its scenic beauty. The place is also noted for its paddy fields, rivers, bamboo forest etc. The word Muniyattukunnu was derived from a historical tradition. In Malayalam, 'muni' means sage and 'kunnu' means hill. Some people believe that Muniyattukunnu was the meditating place of the ancient saints, earlier saints chooses highlands and hills for meditating purposes and thus they named it as Muniyattukunnu. The place is particularly noted for its megalithic monuments. Infact many people fail to understand the real history of Muniyattukunnu and the megalithic culture existed long before.

There are plenty of varieties of plants and trees in Muniyattukunnu. Medicinal plants constitute an important component of plant resource spectrum of Muniyattukunnu. Recent analysis shows that over 150 species of plants that are indigenous in Kerala are used in the Indian system of medicine like Ayurveda and Sidha. About 60% of plants are valuable resource for treating many diseases. Medicinal plants like *danthapla* (*wrightia tinctoria*), *adalodakam* (*adathoda beddomei*), and *kurunthotti* (*sida rhombifolia*) which are the tradition medicines in Ayurveda can be seen in Muniyattukunnu.

### **Wildlife and Climate of Muniyattukunnu**

Muniyattukunnu is a natural zone with plethora of greenery and temperate climate and source of water which provide the perfect habitat for the growth of

wildlife. The hills and mountains are the homeland for several species of flora and fauna. Leopards, peacocks, wild rabbits, pigs, elephants, snakes and other reptiles are seen in the place. Many rare and endangered species were found in Muniyattukunnu. Hills and mountains also serve for the tourism purposes.

The main occupation of people living in this place is farming, rubber tapping, small scale business etc. The crops like paddy, plantain, rubber, ginger, coconut and other vegetables are cultivated. The climatic condition of the place is a humid tropical wet climate and in the months of March to May it is dry climate. Summer is followed by the south west monsoons from June to September. The retreating monsoon starts in the month of October and November. The morning temperatures are usually cool and breezy, daytime temperatures are around 32 ° C to 36 °C. The climate in Muniyattukunnu is characterized by mild winters and hot dry summers. Temperature in winters (November to January) may go down to 20 °C and in summers it may go up to 36.6 degree Celsius. The plains generally warm but the higher altitudes are cool.

### **Water Resources**

The main water resource of Muniyattukunnu is the Kurumali River which is the tributary of the Karuvannur River. It originates from the Pumalai hills in Chimmony Wildlife Sanctuary and the Mupliyam River joins the Chimmony River, forming the Kurumali River. There are many springs and streams flowing through the hills. Rainwater is stored inside the springs and water is used in the summer seasons. Muniyattukunnu is the epicenter of the ecological balance of the region. It significantly influences the mood of winter, rainy, and summer seasons. Along with the fields, the hills also play an important role in retaining the ground water table. The springs on Muniyattukunnu supply water to the surrounding ponds, wells, streams and

rivers. The hills has got so many springs because it keeps a good portion of the annual rainfall in its secret chambers.

### **Dolmens of Muniyattukunnu**

Muniyattukunnu is historically significant as they were the homes to dolmens of megalithic traditions. Muniyattukunnu is spread over 400 acres in ten wards of Mupliyam village. Dolmens were stoned as a mysterious sub question in Muniyattukunnu. It is a place with traces of primitive human settlements and it is the part of Western Ghats. The protection of Muniyattukunnu hill is the protection of the Western Ghats. Therefore the rocks and streams in Muniyattukunnu are of great ecological importance.

Muniyattukunnu is one of the rarest Stone Age monuments in Kerala. All these monuments in the hill are on the verge of destruction. There were three layers of dolmens across the area which is approximately around hundred meters away to each set of dolmens. There are two dolmens in the second layer which are about five hundred meters away from the dolmen in the first layer. There were eleven dolmens in Muniyattukunnu with an area of about fifty acres, out of these only two is remaining. Everything else is completely or partially destroyed. There is a distance of three to five feet between each of the dolmens. The dolmens in Muniyattukunnu are also known as *meshakallu*.

The dolmens in Muniyattukunnu are similar to the megalithic structures of Marayur in the Idukki district. The dolmens of Marayur and Muniyattukunnu are pre historic stone structures which belong to the Iron Age. These are built above the ground level, particularly on hilly areas by huge stone slabs that are vertically laid and covered with one single stone on the top. These places are similar in many ways; the scenic beauty, the dolmens which are similar in size and shape, diversity of flora and

fauna etc. Muniyattukunnu should be protected and it has become a necessity for the existence of the area.

The history of Muniyattukunnu still remains unexplored. It may not be vast and close to Indus valley civilization but it is so close Mupliyam River civilization. The dolmens found on Muniyattukunnu and Parunthu Para are the symbols of that civilization. Vanchipara in the place in the valley of the hill which is believed that the dead bodied were bathed in Vanchipara and then dead bodies are taken to cremate in this place. People also believe that there was a temple, which is known as Ambalathadam near the Muniyattukunnu. The remains of the ancient temple in the temple grounds by the river such as manikinar were discovered.

It is believed that the AdiCheras reached Kodungallur via Parambikulam, Nelliampathi, Chimmini, Muniyattukunnu, and Kodakara. The above evidence supports the logic of Narayana Menon's statement that the name Muniyattukunnu must have been associated with Muniyaras or Dolmens. It is not known if the hill had any other name before that. These dolmens are one of the great relics mentioned in Sangam literature. It is estimated to be 2000 to 4000 years old. These are the tombs of the heroes or tribal elders of that time. The rooms in the muniyaras have three feet wide and six feet long. It is made of the granite layers. The front portion of the dolmen is left open. The materials inside the dolmens were lost over time. According to Professor Narayana Menon, the megalithic man had used several tools which were made up of iron. The technological know- how and the skill that the ancient man used is unknown hitherto to the modern man. There are records on the protection of these monuments by the Archaeological Survey of India in 1937.

The Archaeological Survey of India and the College of Agriculture and Forestry, University of Kerala has presented objective evidences on the historical significance

of Muniyattukunnu. In addition to that, the State Archaeological department now attests that the dolmens belong to the Stone Age. The students and the experts of the College of Agriculture and Forestry, University of Kerala conducted Rapid Environmental Appraisal provides informations about the animal and plant diversity of Muniyattukunnu. People should have historical sense and sense of justice to preserve the megalithic monuments of Muniyattukunnu as the place is the cornerstone of the environment. It has cultural as well as historical significance. All must have a sense of responsibility to conserve these monuments.

### **A Comparison between Megaliths in Marayur and Muniyattukunnu**

Marayur (10° 16' 30.6" N; 77° 09' 36.8" E) is located in the north eastern parts of Devikulam taluk of Idukki district. Marayur is situated 45km north east of Munnar and 40 km from the famous town Udumelpet in Tamil Nadu. The place is famous for its rock shelter painting and dolmens. It is belonged to the Iron Age period. These dolmens were burial chambers made of four stones placed on edge and covered by a fifth stone. They were made up of both laterite and granite slabs. Near the dolmens there is a Siva temple (Tenkasinathan Temple) at Kovil kadavu on the banks of the river Pamba. The height of these dolmens is approximately 70 cm to 90 cm and 140 cm to 170 cm. Pottery and other artifacts were discovered from the place.

Muniyattukunnu (10.41°N; 76.35°E) is famous for its dolmens. These dolmens are made up of granite stones. The dolmens of Muniyattukunnu have a height of 140 cm to 160 cm which is nearly 4 feet. The remains of temple and the place Ambalathadam was discovered. The Mupliyam River is flowing near to the dolmens. It is said that inscriptions and other artifacts were found but it is lost in due time.

Both the megalithic structures are situated on the top of hills and the places are rich in flora and fauna. These places had temple remains and rivers flowing nearby the

structures indicate the tradition and custom of bathing the dead bodies. The size and structure of these dolmens are around the same.

In the present stage of the studies on Muniyattukunnu and Marayur, these are useful and clues that need to be pursued. Hopefully, the investigations are likely to shed welcome light on the pre historic period of the places. The importance must be given to the place Muniyattukunnu and more studies and excavations should be conducted to get more information on the early period and their society.



## **Chapter 3**

### **Environment and Muniyattukunnu**

The environment is the complex of physical, chemical, and biotic factors that act upon an organism or an ecological community which ultimately determine its form of survival. The environment of the early man was dominated by natural factors such as vegetation, soil, climate and other animals. Modern man has increasingly surrounded himself with an environment of his own design and continues to construct and destruct according to his needs.

A wide range of environmental problems has emerged and those problems include global warming, deforestation, depletion of natural resources, and acidification of the surface waters and extinction of species. In the past decades environmental concerns has reached a peak as popular opinion and people began to realize the extent of human impact on natural system.

Birth and death are the two most bewildering and important events in a man's life. Stone was a symbolic expression of the inner spirit and ancient man began to cremate the dead bodies using the stone also began to search for the customs and rituals for conquering the fear of death. The megaliths are the most important archaeological findings of the ancient period of kerala history. The megalithic monuments are the medium of communication to the dead ancestors. The monuments erected in different shapes and types were indented to commemorate or honor the dead. The major characteristic of man in Paleolithic and Neolithic period is the respect for the dead which suggest the intrusion of a perfected tradition and custom for cremating the dead.

Megalithism is prevailing in certain tribal group as a living institution among Kerala's pre- Dravidian tribes. Among the archaeological remains, the bewildering varieties of megalithic burial complexes both in number and nature have fascinated people from various walks of life. Scholars have tried to determine the antiquity of the megalithic monuments on the basis of available evidence. Dating of these monuments is a major problem.

Quarrying operations are a major threat to the environment because it adversely alters the pre-existing ecosystems. It leads to a series of serious environmental-geological problems to the socio economic development. There are some advantages and disadvantages to the process of quarrying.

### **Advantages of Quarries**

Quarrying creates job opportunities in areas where there are limited opportunities. The demand for the products of quarrying is high for building stone and cement. It contributes to the economic welfare of the locality. Transportation facilities are needed for transportation of the products of quarrying. Thus many remote areas benefit from improved transportation and communication facility.

### **Disadvantages of Quarries**

The process of quarrying destroys the natural landscape of the area. The ecosystem and the wildlife are destroyed. The chemicals used for quarrying purpose make the animals and vegetation vulnerable. It creates pollution and congestion on the narrow country roads. Many people living in the nearby areas suffer from chronic lung diseases and the workers are also affected by the dust and they are prone to harmful respiratory diseases. Another major problem faced by the people is the noise

pollution. The impacts of noise are highly dependent on the sound source, topography, land use and climatic conditions. Quarrying causes the depletion in the water resources such as the sea, rivers, and lagoons. It reduces the water quality and ground water storage. It is related to the dewatering in the area and decline of the water table.

The Muniyattukunnu is famous for megalithic dolmens in a letter written by curator, State Archaeology department on 01-01-1997 to the district collector, Thrissur and a copy marked to DFO Chalakudy. The curator has informed that there are eleven dolmens in the place which are declared protected monument as per government proceedings dated on 13-10-1937 r.dis. 1894/2/1112 development department and in accordance with Cochin Government ancient monument preservation regulation Act IX of 110. Muniyattukunnu is also threatened by the activities of quarrying.

During 1960s and 1970s most of these areas were encroached by the people for cultivation purpose. Based on the direction by the honorable Supreme Court, to regularize all the encroachments prior to 01-01-1997, a joint verification was conducted by both the Revenue Department and the Forest Department. A list of such encroachments along with extend of land was prepared for the purpose of issuing pattaya to those who encroached prior to 1-1-1997. The total extend of land including the rocky portions was handed over to the revenue department for conducting survey and issuing pattaya as per Kerala Land Assignment (regulation of occupation of Forest Lands prior to 01-01-1997). According to the special rules 1993, after issuing pattaya to the land holders the remaining portions which are rocky type are considered as unproductive and documented as Forest puramboke and are not returned to Forest Department. The area which is handed over to the Revenue Department for which

pattayas were issued and which was documented as Forest *puramboke* is not yet reserved and till now the status of such land is not reserve forest. According to the government laws, *puramboke* lands can be used for only small scale business and building houses. But the place faces the threat of quarrying.

Muniyattukunnu hill is being destroyed by those who do not know the historical significance and they are not only destroying our history but also the future. Several serious environment impacts related to quarrying activities on and near the river, such as vibrations, land degradation, land subsidence, landslides, water pollution, occupational noise pollution, and air pollution. It will lead to the health related problems and loss of biodiversity. Quarrying destroys the landscape which can lead to downstream movement of the soil that causes soil erosion.

Quarrying operations in Muniyattukunnu is adversely affecting the existing eco system. The place called pannithadam does not exist today. It has been covered with mud. This will lead to the loss of soil fertile top soil, degradation of forests, and depletion of ground water level. It deteriorates the biodiversity and public health. Humans in the name of development exploit the environment to fill the greedy pockets. Conquering the nature and wrestling with nature are not only way for developments. Man is only a part of earth and has no right to destroy it. Human activities are responsible for the depletion of natural resources. Eco system should be given great importance and of immense value to the mankind in the present and future. These are being degraded at an alarming rate by human interference.

Quarries often negatively impact those who live nearby and workers as well. They are prone to health risks such as respiratory diseases, skin diseases, dust allergies, safety issues due to poor visibility. The quarries usually runoff the

chemicals pollutants into water bodies, farmlands, or any other natural resources nearby the area which cause harmful environmental impacts.

The people in all spheres of governance that is from the gram sabhas must unite for the protection of Muniyattukunnu. The hill is all about ancient culture and nature. The people should protect the place for the future generations. Residents of Muniyattukunnu suffer from lung diseases and are concerned about the silica acid in the quarries which is used for blasting and leaking into streams and Mupliyam River.

## **Conclusion**

This is the study about The Disappearing Dolmens in Muniyattukunnu. It is a very significant place which is both historically and culturally important in the history of Thrissur. The project also discusses the subject with the natives of the place and many ideas were formulated by conducting interviews which helped for the construction of this study. Many books, reports, articles were referred for the purpose of the study.

The chapters will help to understand about the megalithic culture existed in this place and the need for conserving it. There is an important factor that can see through the project that many organizations like Sahitya Parishit and various organizations had conducted many awareness programs for the preservation of the place. The condition of the Muniyattukunnu had improved a lot. The quarrying in the area were stopped to a great extent also became more aware of the historical importance.

The activities done by the quarry lobbies had many adverse effects on the place. The biodiversity and the environment were affected badly. Government authorities began to take measures against the quarrying lobbies. Even though many of the people in the village are unaware of the historical importance and its major contributions to the ancient history.

The megalithic monuments of Muniyattukunnu bear eloquent witness to the historic and cultural heritage which constitutes a heritage of incalculable value. It must be our privilege to guard and hand over to the future generations.

This is the study of local history of Muniyattukunnu of the Mupliyam village which is near to my home village. This project covered almost of the historical aspects, events and knowledge about the village.

These monuments should be protected and the illegal quarrying should be stopped forever. The owners of the quarry must be summoned to produce all available documents to know the legality of the mines working nearby. A direction has to be issued to the Mines and Geological Department to cancel the License of the ongoing quarries if there is any violation of mining norms. A joint survey has to be conducted by Revenue and Forest department to know the extent of land to which *Pattas* are issued and the extent for which *pattas* are not issued. More scientific studies should be conducted by the Archaeological Survey of India.

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