

# ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATION IN THOOTHUKUDI DISTRICT OF TAMIL NADU

**Dr. J. Barnabas Jacob**

Assistant Professor of History

St. John's College

Palayamkottai, Tirunelveli – 627002

(Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tirunelveli, Tamil Nadu – 627012)

## Abstract

The late sangam age or microlithic age succeeded the middle stone age. An important feature of this culture was the extensive use of microlithics. In Tamil Nadu, large number of sites has been reported in the region around Tirunelveli, Madurai, Tuticorin and Ramanathapuram districts. Microlithic tools were first reported by Bruce Foote in this area. Two stages of Teri industry are noticed one early and the other later, which can be distinguished on typological analysis. The Adichanallur's excavation revealed the habitational layers of the megalithic age. Adichanallur is famous for urn-burial site, located on the bank of river Tamiraparani in Thoothukudi District. This site was excavated by Alexander Rea in (1899-1906). The same site was excavated by Archaeological survey of India in the year 2004-05 and exposed more than 150 urns. The series of motif show a tall majestic looking woman, a swathe of standing paddy next to her, a crane, a deer, a crocodile and a lizard. Iron tools and implements helped in the advancement of agriculture which in turn leads to the development of civilization. This article focused only three sites like Adichanallur, Korkai and Sivagalai.

## Key words

Tamiraparani river, Meynnapuram, Sawyerpuram, Adichanallur, Korkai, Sivagalai, Urn burial.

## Introduction

In Tamil Nadu, a large number of sites has been reported in the region around Tirunelveli, Madurai, Tuticorin and Ramanathapuram districts. Many major sites of this culture are found to the South and North of Tamiraparani river. Microlithic tools were first reported by Bruce Foote in this area. Aiyappan wrote about some of the tools found in Sawyerpuram (Tuticorin district).

## Tool Types

The low-lying lagoons are being filled with sand and sand dunes due to wind. Afterwards due to climatic change intensive weathering occurred. This cemented the sand dunes and turned them Reddish. As they are associated with fossil red and sand dunes are locally called as Teris.

Two stages of Teri industry are noticed, one early and the other later, which can be distinguished on typological analysis. Meynnapuram collection was the earliest collection.

- i) An industry represented by flake and core tools, these tools are highly stained.
- ii) Besides the former, blades, geometric tools are collected. These are slightly stained.

The common tool types are Blades, Scrapers, Discoids, Points Lunates and Chopping tools. All the tools show varying degrees of retouch, pressure flaking and usages marks. The industry has been tentatively dated to 4000 BCE on typological basis and also on the study of the sand dunes. The materials used for manufacturing tools are quarts. However crystal and chalcedony are also used occasionally.

## Adichanallur

Adichanallur is famous for urn-burial site, located on the bank of river Tamiraparani in Thoothukudi District. This site was excavated by Alexander Rea in (1899-1906) M. Louis Lapicque of Paris University (1903-04) and Anderson (1914).

After a long time this site was excavated by Archaeological survey of India in the year 2004-05 and exposed more than 150 urns and located a habitation site near the burial site. An important findings is shared with beautiful appliqué design outside.

The series of motifs show a tall majestic looking woman, a swathe of standing paddy next to her, a crane, a deer, a crocodile and a lizard. These motifs resemble pre historic paintings found in Central Tamil Nadu and some interlink with each other. Inside the urns copper bangles, human skeleton, gava pots, paddy and husk were found. Outside the urns ritual pots Iron dragger, spearhead, Iron implements and Neolithic cells were noticed. The excavation revealed the method of burning urns in three system. Earliest generation buried the dead in urns at a depth of 10 feet by cutting a rocky area. The next two groups buried the dead above in two tiers. The urns have garland like decoration in the neck portion of the urns. A habitation site was also located nearby the burial site. The excavation revealed the potter's kiln with ash, charcoal and broken pots. Artifacts like Iron knife, carnelian beads, terracotta beads and bone implements were also collected from this site. The data of the site is fixed preliminarily by Thermo luminescence dating from 1500 BCE to 500 BCE.

### **Korkai**

Korkai is a small village in Srivaikuntam Taluk of Thoothukudi district. It is situated at a distance of 3kms to the north of the river Tamiraparani. The sea originally had receded about 6kms to the east. The river Tamiraparani skirted this town in ancient days. The site is referred to in Tamil Sangam literature and has attracted the notices of the classical geographers as an important port of pearl fishery. In the excavation, a structure with nine courses of bricks in six rows was unearthed at the depth of 75cms from surface level. Below the structure three large sized rings placed one over the other and as soakage were found. The inscribed, potsherds bearing Tamil Brahmi letters assignable to 300 BCE to 200 BCE were also found. Charcoal samples were assigned to 785 BCE by the Tata institute of fundamental research, Mumbai.

### **Importance of Korkai**

Korkai, a capital and important port of early pandya lies at a distance of three north of river Tamiraparani (latitude of 8 38'20" N and longitude of 78 03' 34" E). The Tamil Sangam and the classical geographers of western countries have left copious references to this port. Excavation at Korkai has revealed consecutive periods of occupation of three main periods. The Excavation yielded potsherds with graffiti marks, inscribed shreds datable to 3<sup>rd</sup> Century BCE. Besides this terracotta figurine unearthed from the trench 5. (KRK-5) at 1.83 mts depth invaluable to the prevalence of Fertility cult in this region. The recovered antiquity is the hip portion of a female, representing fertility cult. The Pelvic region is wide and hip is narrow i.e. slender. The measurement of terracotta figurine is 79 x 68mm. It may be datable to 6<sup>th</sup> century C.E.

In ancient times, Korkai was a well known centre of pearl fishery. It is mentioned of often in the Sangam literature and in classical western literature. Ptolemy refers to the place as Koilkhai and says that it was an emporium. The Periplus says that the Pandyan kingdom extended from Comari towards the north, including Korkai.

A 2000 year old, 'Vanni' tree is in korkai. The findings of megalithic burial urns at Korkai indicates that it was fairly well populated. The carbon dating of the artifacts in the area indicates an age of 785 B.C.

Palaco-Channels traced from Satellite imagery scenes all around Korkai indicate that the Tamiraparani river has shifted its course progressively east and south and earlier it has mixed with sea near Thoothukudi.

### **Excavation at Sivagalai**

The Tamil Nadu State Department of Archaeology (TNSDA) commenced its excavation at the megalithic site in Sivagalai, Thoothukudi district. Due to Covid – 19 the excavation has been postponed. The government has sanctioned Rs.31 Lakh for the excavation work in Sivagalai.

The excavation began on a 10 x 10 square metre area. M. Prabhakaran has been appointed as the Director of Sivagalai Excavation. In search of human settlements, State Archaeological department has started at Adichanallur and Sivagalai. However, the officials are yet to find remnants of houses in both the sites. The Director J. Baskar said that they are excavating a private land suspected to be pre-historic human settlement. Many antiquities, kitchen utilities, metal weapons and potsherds throw light into the presence of a human settlement have been identified. Over 20 urns of various sizes and hundreds of ancient materials, small clay dishes, bangles, bones and large pots have been unearthed in both of the archeological sites.

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