

Locating the Anjunadu Valley in the Prehistory of Kerala

Dr. Suneesh K. K.

Assistant Professor on Contract, P.G. Dept. of History Pavanatma College, Murickassery
suneesh427@gmail.com

Abstract

There is little authentic knowledge about the ancient history of Idukki region. The urn burials in the high ranges that date back to the megalithic period are the sole indication of human presence over the region. The burial vaults called Pandukuzhis, the Menhir and dolmens found in the Anchunad valley in the present Deviculam taluk substantiate this argument. The rock art in the Anchunad Valley has the depictions of the material life and culture of the prehistoric and megalithic periods. These petro graphs, petro glyph and dolmens and other remains of Mesolithic and megalithic cultures of the Valley help us to reconstruct the history of the prehistoric and megalithic people. They give us an insight into the mental world of the prehistoric and megalithic people's imaginary relations, fantasies and social milieu of ideas and institutions. The Anjunadu Valley is considered as the treasure house of pre-historic and megalithic culture. The Anjunadu Valley is littered with a lot of dolmens and petrographs and petroglyph. This is the only place in Kerala where we can see petrographs and these are linked with the dolmens of the valley. These rock art sites of the valley as well as the megalithic remains of the valley give us an insight into the material milieu of subsistence of prehistoric and megalithic times. The present study is an attempt to situate Anjunad Valley in the pre-history of Kerala.

Key Words: Pandukuzhis, Menhir, Anchunad Valley, petro graphs, petro glyph

Introduction

The prehistoric cultures in Kerala consist of Palaeolithic, Mesolithic and Neolithic. During these periods, man engaged in a combination of hunting, gathering, animal husbandry and agriculture. The prehistoric period also witnessed the cave art or rock art in Kerala which are the artistic expression and material culture of the man in those days. The first rock art site in Kerala discovered by F. Fawcet, the then superintendent of police of the erstwhile Malabar at Edakkal in modern Wayanad District. Then Dr. S. Padmanabhan Thampi discovered Mesolithic cave art at Marayur in Anjunadu Valley in Idukki district of Kerala which help us to reconstruct the material life and culture of the prehistoric period.

During the period of Palaeolithic culture in Kerala, man engaged themselves in hunting-gathering for his subsistence. The first discovery of palaeolithic tools and implements from Kanhirapuzha in the Palakkad district in 1974 by P. Rajendran.ⁱ In addition to this, there are more sites discovered by him. They are Tenkara and Mukkali in Palakkad district, Kunnathubhalu, Valluvasseri, Karimpulakkal and Karalikkot in Malappuram district, Kunnoni in Kottayam district and Kuvakkad and Abhayagiri in Kollam district. The Palaeolithic implements of Kerala are mostly represented by chopper scrapper flake assemblage made of quartz.ⁱⁱ These tools were used by the Palaeolithic men for his subsistence.

During the Mesolithic culture in Kerala, man engaged in hunting and gathering and used the implements made of quartz. The mesolithic sites of Kerala includes Nirmalagiri and Madayippara in Kannur district, Walayar, Malampuzha, Podippara, Mankara, Kulappalli, Cherakkalppadi, Ayannur, Agali, Narasimokkai and Sirakkadavu in Palakkadu district, Chellur and Pandikkad in Malappuram district, Chempara and Kuppakotti in Wayanadu district, Tenmala and Odanavattom in Kollam district and Ankode and Neyyar in Trivandrum district.ⁱⁱⁱThis period also witnessed the cave art in Kerala. They include Tenmala petroglyph in Kollam district, Ankode petroglyph in Trivandrum district and the petroglyphs and petroglyph at Marayur in Anjunadu Valley.

In Neolithic period in Kerala, man used stone axes, flakes, blades and beads. Philip Lake first discovered Neolithic axes from the foot of Kanyakad hills in Kerala. Later, Logan and Fawcett had discovered a few quartz flakes, a fragment of a Neolithic celt and a couple of beads from the Wayanad area.^{iv} After that in 1989, a Neolithic Axe was discovered from Mantrothuruth in the Kallada basin in the Kollam District, by P. Rajendran, probably the first discovery of a Neolithic implement from southern Kerala.^v During this period, man invented agriculture, domesticated animals, manufactured earthen pots, fabricated cloths, and made use of fire for cooking. The Edakkal petroglyph may belong to the artistic expression of this period.^{vi}

From the above mentioned facts, it is clear that the prehistoric man engaged in a combination of hunting, gathering, animal husbandry and agriculture. Their tools and implements help us to reconstruct the material milieu of subsistence of the people of the then periods. As mentioned earlier, the prehistoric men used rock art as a medium of people's imaginary relations, magic, witchcraft and fantasies as well as social and material milieu of ideas and institutions. There are four rock art sites in Kerala. They are Edakkal and Tovari in Wayanadu district, Tenmala in Kollam district, Ankodu in Trivandrum district and Anjunadu Valley in Idukki district. These rock art represents the material life and culture of the prehistoric man.

The Edakkal rock shelter was discovered by F.Fawcett in 1894. The Edakkal petroglyph consists of geometric and non – geometric motives, besides floral and faunal representations. Animals such as elephant, antelope, wild dog and peacock are significant depictions. Similar animal figures can be seen at Anjunadu Valley rock paintings. Tenmala rock shelter is situated in the Chentharuni hills in the eastern part of Kollam district. There are a few geometric patterns like triangle, circle and squares and flower motifs.^{vii} Similar type of flower motifs can be seen at Anjunadu valley paintings and petroglyph. The Ankodu petroglyph is situated at Neyyantinkara in Trivandrum district. The carving consists of floral geometric and Vattezhuthu types. The Tovari petroglyph is situated in Tovari hills in Wayanadu. The site is generally known among local people as 'Ezhuthupura' or house with writing. The drawings mainly consist of geometric figures like triangles, squares and circles.

In Kerala petroglyph and petroglyph site are reported only in the Anjunadu Valley in Idukki district. The rock art site was discovered for the first time by S. Padmanabhan Thampi in 1973. Later Benny Kurian, the Eco-volunteers of Alampatty Tribal Settlement and villagers of Vannanthurai discovered other sites. The discovery of the rock art sites of the valley brought a place in the prehistory of Kerala. The rock art help us to reconstruct the culture and material life of the prehistoric man in the Valley.

Observations on Geology, Ecology and Archaeology of Anjunadu Valley

The Anjunadu Valley is situated in between Anamalai Hills and Palani Hills on the eastern slope of the Western Ghats in Idukki district of Kerala state. There are many theories relating to the origin of the name 'Anjunadu' of which two are most important. One school of thought hold the view that 'Anchinan', in Tamil means one who is depressed, defeated or humiliated and 'Nadu' means country, together 'Anjunadu' the place where dwells the depressed . The other theory is that 'Anchu' in Tamil and Dravidian language means 'five' and so the valley is known as the 'Land of five places' such as Marayur, Kizhanthoor, Kanthalloor, Kararyoor and Vattavada.^{viii} It is said that, travellers from Madurai to the West Coast passed through these villeges.^{ix} As we mentioned earlier the Anchinadu valley is littered with dozens of dolmens and 19 rock art sites. Presently, the first nadu (place) i.e. Marayur is a part of Marayur Grama Panchayath. Keezhanthoor, Karayoor and Kanthalloor are part of Kanthalloor Gramapanchayath and the remaining Vattavada is situated in Vattavada Grama panchayath in Idukki district. The rock art sites are seen only in four nadus and which are divided into Marayur and Kanthalloor panchayaths.

Among the nadus, Marayur is the place in Kerala, where sandal trees grow naturally. It is located at an elevation of 1000 metres above mean sea level and at 10⁰15'N latitude and 77⁰10'E longitude.^x This is also famous for megalithic dolmens. The major portion of the Marayur composed of forests. The sandalwood Reserve Forest and Chinnar Wild Life Sanctuary are situated in the Marayur Grama Panchayath. The next Nadu is Kanthalloor and which is composed of other nadus. i.e. Kizhanthoor and Karayoor and some of the portion of Chinnar Wild Life Sanctuary are situated in the Kanthalloor Grama Panchayath. The Anjunadu Valley is littered with rock art sites and dolmens. The first exploration of the valley was conducted by Dr. S. Padmanabhan Thampi which paved way for the discovery of prehistoric rock art in central Kerala. He discovered three rock art sites and examined the dolmens of the valley.

The Petrographs and Petroglyph of the Anjunadu Valley give us an insight into the material life and culture of the prehistoric man. The dolmens also help us to reconstruct the material culture of the megalithic Anjunadu Valley. These are the only archaeological sources which help us to reconstruct the way the prehistoric and megalithic man lived, their culture, life and artistic skills. Recently, the Deccan College Post Graduate and Research Institute, Pune conducted an archaeological excavation at Anjunadu Valley in March – April 2012. Their archaeological findings include few fragmented potsherds of Black and Red Ware, Red Ware, Black Slipped Ware and Coarse Black Ware of megalithic period and microliths and chert material of Mesolithic period from the valley. These findings help us to reconstruct the material life and culture of prehistoric and megalithic period in Anjunadu Valley.^{xi} These archaeological excavations and explorations help us to reconstruct the material life and culture of prehistoric and megalithic Anjunadu Valley.

Chronological Issues

All the scholars have divergent opinions regarding the rock art. According to La Roi Gurhan, "there is yet no method to date rock pictures directly".^{xii} This argument is true in the case of the chronology of Indian rock paintings in general and Anjunadu Valley in particular. Yasodhar Mathpal on the opinion that the rock art of the Anjunadu Valley may belong to pre-Neolithic or late mesolithic to megalithic period. Dr. S.Padmanabhan Thampi, who firstly

examined the valley, is on the opinion that the paintings ranging from Mesolithic – Neolithic to the early historic periods.^{xiii} He added that the elephant rider at Attala belongs to early historic and bulls at Attala, Ezhuthuguha, Kovilkadavu may belongs to Mesolithic period.^{xiv}

K.J. John is of the opinion that the Iron Age megalithic builders were the authors of the rock paintings of the Anjunadu Valley and he added that the aesthetic senses of the megalithic builders of Kerala are reflected in the rock art of the Anjunadu Valley and other sites of the Kerala.^{xv} Dr. Rajan Gurukkal recently studied about the rock art of Anjanad Valley and he observed that, these paintings may be pre historic, but belong to different cultures from the Mesolithic to the Iron Age. The red ochre linear Sambar Deer at Madathala may be of Mesolithic period.^{xvi} He added that, the depictions at Ezhuthuguha or Koodakkadu or Pathippara have been assumed to be of the time span of the Mesolithic –Neolithic –Iron Age sequence. He observed that morphologically and stylistically, the bull figures at Ezhuthuguha resemble the bulls in the Neolithic and Iron Age petrographs of south India and Sri Lanka.

From the above opinions, it is understood that we cannot fix the exact chronology of the rock paintings of the Anjunadu Valley. So we may assume that the rock paintings of the valley belong to prehistoric and megalithic periods.

Petrographs and Petroglyph of Anjunadu Valley

There are 18 Petrographs and one Petroglyph discovered from Anjunad Valley. These rock art sites belong to prehistoric and megalithic period. Among the rock art sites, three of which are discovered by Dr. S. Padmanabhan Thampi. They are Attala Petrograph, Ezhuthuguha petrograph and Chambakkadu petrograph. White, crimson and burnt sienna are used to depict the pictures at Ezhuthuguha cave. Lime white or white kaolin is used to depict figures at Attala cave. All the images and figures at Chambakkadu are in white kaolin colour. These three sites have close linkage with dolmens of the valley.

Eight petrographs and one petroglyph are discovered by Benny Kurian. They are Puravayalkudi petrograph, Chinnavendru petrograph, Vedanala petrograph, Nelthinassittu petrograph, Mandayottimala petrograph, Malassappetty petrograph, Alapatty petrograph, Athiyodakkottuvaya petrograph and Athiyoda petroglyph. All the figures in the Puravayalkudi petrograph are in white kaolin. All the figures in Chinnavendru are in Red ochre. Red ochre and white kaolin are used in Vedanala petrograph. Red ochre is used to depict the figures at Nelthinassittu petrograph. All the depictions at Mandayottimala are in red ochre colour. White kaolin colour is used at Malasapetty petrograph. All the paintings are depicted on the walls of Alapatty rock shelter are in white kaolin colour. White kaolin colour is used to depict figures at Athiyokkottuvaya petrograph. The only petroglyph, which discovered from Athiyoda in Anjunadu Valley, is Athiyoda petroglyph. These rock art sites have close linkage with megalithic sites.

There is no clear cut idea about who discovered the Kovilkadavu petrograph and which is linked with dozens of dolmens. Five rock art sites are discovered by Eco-Volunteers of the Alampatty Tribal Settlement. They are Padavettipara petrograph, Vaimala petrograph, Madathala Caves, Jellimala Caves and Alampatty Odavayakkal petrograph. All the paintings in Padavettipara are depicted in red ochre, but the paintings are lost due to weather and climatic changes. The colour used in Vaimala petrograph is red ochre. Red ochre is used in the two rock shelters of Madathala Caves. Red ochre and white kaolin are

used in the Jellimala Caves. White kaolin is used in all the depictions of Alampetty Odavaykkal petrograph. These rock art sites too have close linkage with Dolmens of Anjunad Valley.

Conclusion

Rock art traditions of great diversity in motif range, technique and style provide an incredibly rich array of visual information about the lives, technology, belief and preoccupation of the people of prehistoric and megalithic period. The Anjunadu Valley is littered with 19 rock art sites and dolmens which give us an insight into the life and culture of prehistoric and megalithic period. The petrographs, petroglyph and dolmens of the Anjunadu Valley give us visual information of the material milieu of subsistence and culture of prehistoric and megalithic cultures. The Anjunadu Valley is linked with prehistoric culture because there are evidences in the form of petrographs and petroglyph in the Valley, which are visual sources for the reconstruction the history of prehistoric life and culture of man in the Anjunadu Valley. The study shows a megalithic link between the Anjunadu Valley with Palani and Anamalai Hills, and the three sites are geographically, archaeologically and culturally linked with each other. The same type of evidences can be seen at Tamil Nadu, Northern Karnataka, and Andhra Pradesh. Hence it can be assumed that Anjunad valley and the region of Idukki occupies a unique place in the prehistory of Kerala.

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