

Keeladi Excavation: A Historical Study

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Abstract: The site Keeladi is an archaeological importance place in Tamil Nadu. It is located 12 kilometres south east of Madurai on the south bank of river Vaigai in Tamil Nadu near the town of Sivagangai District. In order to find the ancient artifacts and unearthed materials, several times the Archaeologists made an attempt. The first attempt was made the 1974. This excavation was first started in PallisanthaiThidal. It is one Kilometer east of the town of Keeladi. Various archaeological resides were found when blowing the land around the site. The area was excavated is spread over 80 acres with a 3.5 kilometre radius. The archaeologists discovered plenty of archaeological remains at Keeladi during their different phases of excavation. Many Games objects also recovered from Keeladi excavation. Most of the objects belonged to terracotta. The symbols and Graffiti are very significant of the symbolic and codified expressions and communication of the megalithic and Iron Age people. During the excavation a huge number of graffiti sherds discovered from Keeladi. There is no doubt the antiquity of Keeladi revealed the ancient society.

Keywords: Artifacts, Excavation, Ggraffiti, Iron age, Sangam age, TamilBrahmi Scripts

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Introduction

Keeladi is a village in Tamil Nadu that is close to the town of Sivagangai District and is situated on the south bank of the Vaigai River, 12 kilometers southeast of Madurai. In the middle of the coconut grooves the location Keeladi, with the artistic deposit mound encompassing over a huge area of more than 110 acres, is located at Tirupuvanam Taluk in Sivagangai District.

Objectives

- To explore the ancient archaeological site of Keeladi and gives the clear picture of ancient Tamil Culture.
- To study the Phases of Keeladi excavation
- To analyze the artifacts and archeological remains of the study area.

Excavations in Keeladi

Keeladi excavation is a sangam period settlement.¹Archaeologists have been unearthing traces of an urban civilization on the banks of the Vaigai in Tamil Nadu that is described in gorgeous detail in the Sangam era literary canon. ²In late 1950's, a survey was undertaken by Archaeological Survey of India in the areas of Madurai, Tirumangalam, Melur and Periyagulam. ³In 1978 some archaeological artefacts discovered at Pallichandai Thidal by Mr. V. Balasubramnian who was the headmaster of a Government High School at Keeladi. In 2014, the excavation works were carried out in many places in around the area of Keeladi. ⁴The Archaeological Survey of India carried out studies along the Vaigairiver and Ramanathapuram district from 2013 to 2014.⁵

Five Phases of Keeladi Excavation

First Phase

The first Phase of the Keeladi excavation started in 2015 by the Archaeological Survey of India under the leadership of Amarnath Ramakrishnan.

Second Phase

A second phase of Keeladi excavation began on January 2, 2016. The artifacts unearthed by the archaeological team established considerable evidence that an ancient urban civilization had thrived on the banks of Vaigai.

Third Phase

In 2017, The Archaeological Survey of India began the third phase of Excavation at Keeladi in Sivaganiga District.

Fourth Phase

The Government of Tamilnadu has carried out the fourth and Fifth phase and continuing to till date. In the fourth phase of excavation at Keeladi, seventy two potsherds with Tamil-Brahmi script were discovered at the site. According to T. Udhayachandran, the artifacts found at Keeladi excavation site may point to a link between the scripts of the Indus Valley Civilization and Tamil Brahmi.

Fifth Phase

On 13th June, 2019 the Tamil Nadu Archaeological Department commenced the fifth phase exaction at the ancient site of Keeladi. It has unearthed a new find of terracotta pipes which are unique among all terracotta pipes found at other excavation sites in Tamil Nadu⁶.

Artefacts

In order to find the ancient artifacts and unearthed materials, several times the Archaeologists made an attempt. The first attempt was made the 1974. Pallisanthai Thidal is situated Northe of Manalur,

it was the initial site for this excavation, which yielded artefacts from the Keeladi excavation. The artefacts recovered unearthed from the Keeladi excavation compelled us to reconsider or re-evaluate our previously held beliefs or theories.⁷

The Tamil Nadu State Archaeology Department has submitted the artifacts retrieved from the Keeladi excavation for regressive scientific examination and for Accelerator Mass Spectrometry dating in an effort to confirm the antiquity of Tamils in the global arena.

Coins

The excavations yielded many copper coins in proper stratigraphical context.



Copper Coins

Potteries



White Painted Black and Red Ware Sherds



Sherds of Rouletted ware

Potteries are the major archaeological artifacts in reconstructing human activity in the past. The archaeologist found different types of potteries like the roulette, argentine-type ceramics brought by merchants demonstrate business connections with the Roman Empire. It is important that such products have been discovered. Besides exploration simple structures as a symbol of advanced urban civilization, the potteries found from the excavations by and bulky exhibited original character with minimal intrusion of external ceramic varieties.⁸

The wide classification of the pottery repertoire is as follows:

- Coarse red ware
- Red slipped ware
- Black and red ware
- White painted black and red ware
- Black ware
- Russet coated painted ware
- White painted red ware
- White painted red ware
- Perforated ware
- Rouletted ware

Conclusion

Keeladi is one of the most significant Archaeological sites discovered in South India. The archaeologist conducted many excavations at Keeladi and still now the excavations are going on. The excavations revealed many interesting and rare aspects of the early historic phase of Tamil Nadu. The Keeladi excavation had produced plentiful of antiquities with enough cultural traits in the form of structural activity. The archaeological site of Keeladi excavations began in 2014, continues to throw surprises with much of artifacts, including an ivory rectangular dice and a female figurine made of terracotta, being unearthed in the eight phase of the digging that is on the full swing now.

Notes

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