



A Historical Overview Of Kollam

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India is looked upon as a country with enormous resources available through its length and breadth. It is advantageously located in the navigational networks of the Indian Ocean region that connect the Eastern and Western worlds. It had continually been in close contact with the great empires of the West from very ancient time. Kollam is the most historic and ancient settlement in Kerala, probably in South India.¹ The present Kollam had a glorious past for which we have to trace back to the pre historic time. Kollam district is one of the fourteen districts of the state of Kerala. Kollam remained an important trading centre situated on the coast of Indian Ocean and had brisk trade with almost all the ancient civilizations. It was one of the most important ports in the east west trade of Kerala that commanded an important place in the maritime relations for several centuries. It had its own antiquity and tradition. During those days Kollam remained an integral part of ancient Tamilakam. Thereafter it continued to flourish under the different dynasties who ruled over Kollam in different periods.

The district serves as a gateway to the backwaters in Kerala. The term Quilon is the anglicised form of the Malayalam word Kollam. There are many views regarding the derivation of the term Kollam. Kollam is renowned for its historical importance and business culture. It is also known as the “Cashew nut capital of the world”.² There are different views regarding the derivation of the name Kollam. Some writers maintain the view that the place was named after some great event which took place here giving birth, to the new era called ‘*Kollam era*’.³ The name Kollam has a long etymology bearing the marks of the places history spanning centuries. The town Kollam is also called Kurakkeni Kollam. Kollam city has a long history of political, commercial and cultural importance having found mention in several ancient traveller’s accounts with a varied colonial past under the Portuguese, the Dutch and the British. Kollam lost its independent status as a result of the aggressive measures of Marthanda Varma. A series of battles were fought against Kollam. The interventions of the Dutch and the English further complicated the destiny of Kollam.

Kollam has a rich and glorious history of its own. It commands a predominant place in the maritime transactions of the world from time immemorial. It is an established fact that Kollam was a repository of all sorts of conceivable commercial commodities. The network of water transportation enabled it to form a good trading centre.⁴ famous for trade in cotton, pepper, ginger, cardamom and other articles of merchandize. More over plenty of fish, rice, bananas, pineapple, fruits and pulses available there. Teak wood with its different varieties, ambergris (Ambar), bamboo, camphor, clove, coconut, cloth of different varieties, cotton, crystal, cassia leaves, elephants and elephant tusks, ebony, frankincense of benzoin, gold, herbs, horns, ivory, iron, jute, jewels, kut, kabab-chini, lak, lemon, musk, betel leaves, mace, misri, nutmeg, oranges, precious stones, pearls, poison, perfumes, peacock, rice, shoes of Kambayat, spear, swords, sagon, spices, tabashir, vessels of clay and willow were brought down to Kollam from the neighbourhood both by the water and land routes.⁵ But only a few articles like horses, dates, silks, fruits and wine were imported. Duties on imports and exports were charged either on the value of the articles or on the ship.

Kollam is included in the mainstream of the evolution of human settlement.⁶ Prehistoric cultures in Kerala include the Palaeolithic, Mesolithic, Neolithic and Megalithic, and their occurrences have been recorded from various places in Kollam. Physiographically, Kollam has been very important throughout history. Pleistocene period is divided into Lower Pleistocene, middle Pleistocene and upper Pleistocene and it lasted from 2 million down to 10000 B.C.⁷ The Stone Age evidences from different parts of Kerala discovered since 1974 authentically prove that the region was well inhabited since the Lower Palaeolithic and continued through middle and upper Palaeolithic, Mesolithic, Neolithic, Chalcolithic and Megalithic, and interior forest still retain primitive tribes who had inherited earlier cultures.

This is underlined by floral fossils which are nothing but floral remains. Its thickness varies from 1-2 metre at various places. Below this formation limestone which consists of molluscs and shells of marine origin is seen. Further down again the fossilised floral horizon of 4-7 metre is seen, below it again a limestone stratum is seen. This stratigraphy clearly indicates the transgression and regression of the sea in this region. This *ferricrete* does not contain any marine deposits, while limestone is found only below the fossilized floral horizon. This floral formation has formed due to the overlying deposits which was later *ferricretised* or lateralised.⁸

In this context the floral fossils have been dated by *ESR* method and a date of 1.87 million has been obtained. This directly dates the overlying formation. This is the major geomorphologic formation in our midland. Therefore, this date gives the geomorphologic history of our present land surface and it does not contain any evidence of marine erosion or deposition. The evidence of transgression is found below the floral fossil in the form of limestone. It has been dated by *ESR* method to 2.35 million.

Such limestone formation in Kollam has been noted even 25km in land. This stratigraphical study amply proves the fact that Kerala was well above the present sea level since the last regression and was suitable for human habitation.⁹ The stone age evidences from different parts of Kerala discovered since 1974 authentically prove that this region was well inhabited since the lower Palaeolithic and continued through Middle and upper Palaeolithic. Mesolithic, Neolithic, Chalcolithic and Megalithic and the

interior forest still retain primitive tribes who had inherited earlier cultures.

As one of the most important historic settlement of Kerala, ingots are excavated from Kollam district Port, Umayanallur, Mayyanad, Sasthamcotta, Kulathupuzha and Kadakkal. These all prove that the whole district and city were human settlements since Stone Age.¹⁰ Teams of archaeologists and anthropologists have conducted visits to Kollam district and Port many times for treasure hunts and researches.¹¹ The period between 1000 BC and 500 AD is referred to as the Megalithic Culture in South India and is similar to the culture in Africa and Europe. In January 2009, the Department of Archaeology discovered a Megalithic age cist burial ground at Thazhuthala in Kollam Metropolitan Area, which had thrown lights to the past glory of Kollam district. The major discoveries were three burial chambers, black and red earthen vessels, remains of molten iron and iron weapons. This is for the first time that prehistoric cupules and Lower Paleolithic tools were discovered from below the seabed in India. These discoveries proved that Stone Age people lived in the area and had moved to the coastal areas during the glacial period in the Pleistocene and those tools were made up of quartzite rocks.

The great civilization of the past had a Kollam connection because of the international port. Kollam is included in the mainstream of the evolution of human settlement. Prehistoric and Megalithic occurrences have been recorded from various parts of Kollam. Two urn burial sites discovered at Poredam in Kollam give much insight in to the prehistoric people of ancient Kerala. Megalithic implements and wood charcoal are discovered from Tenmalai in Kollam. Remains of ancient settlement also have been unearthed from Mangadu near Kollam. The findings from Mangadu included potteries, jars, iron objects, beads, bones, charcoals, red and ball black ware pottery.¹²

The cultural equipment of the Urn burial site at Mangadu belongs without any doubt, to the megalithic order of South India, but the monument is different in many respects with the counterparts in other places. The urn burial is one of the simplest of megalithic monuments. These circles almost intersect at the center probably denoting the necessity of erecting many groups of monuments in a particular place of importance. The excavation revealed a deposit of humus varying from 10 cms to 12 cms. All the Urns were found significant findings in layer 2 include two terracotta fragmentary sprinklers of grey ware. The pit contained a small burial jar 4-A. The contents of the jar include etched carnelian beads. The most significant finding from the pit is the occurrence of iron slabs.¹³ The pottery at Mangadu can be classified into three categories ie, the huge Urns, the medium sized jars and the associated pottery, The Urns and the jars are handmade and red ware pottery. The associated grave good are of wheel made pottery and the fabric is Black-and-red and red- wares.

The site at Mangadu has also proved the earlier Dating-C.1000 BC, based on typology and scientific dating. In which case, it may be summarized that the megalithic folk originated in Kerala by c.1000 BC, slowly penetrated into other parts of peninsular India especially to adjacent Tamil Nadu and contributed many things to the megalithic culture of South India in 100 BC. The upper limit is based on the availability of the etched carnelian beads.

Megalithic evidences were found from Valyapadam, a place in Sasthamcotta in Kollam district. About two feet below the ground level, two square shaped rock layers each having a size of about 85 cm were found. Along with these rusted iron pieces, spheres and swords were also found. In between these rock layers, two big pots of about 90 cm height and diameter were found by the archaeologists. The pots that were found have fewer diameters at the bottom portion. Fingerprints were seen around these pots. Evidences show that the pots were only partially baked. Many small red and black ware potteries were also excavated and the point is that these pots are fully baked.¹⁴

Chanthanathoppu is a place located 13 kilometers east from the Kollam seashore. Excavations done in this site proved that the place was once covered by sea. Fossil remains of crabs and oysters were digging out from pits having a depth of 11 meter. These remains were found below, which was formed out of the deterioration of granite. All these proved that these remains are about one lakh years old.⁵¹Fossil remains dugged out from this location, which was thirteen kilo meter away from the seashore and thirty meter above the sea level proves that the place was covered by sea a thousand years before.¹⁵ Organic remains which are only found under the sea were excavated from this place. The digged out place contained black hard clay, granite, quicklime and black soil at the bottom part. The quicklime deposit was rich with the remains of oysters and below that it was covered by black soil.

Excavations done in Kallada, proves that Neolithic man inhabited the place. Adding to the evidences, a thousand-year-old axe, made up of rock was found from the site. From BC 4500 TO BC 3500 Neolithic culture existed in India.¹⁶ The highlighting feature of this culture was that man started to settle in one place and started practicing agriculture and animal husbandry. They started to make implements made up of metals and also mud potteries. The rock axe excavated was made up of a layer of granite. It was about five-inch high and three inch wide. The rock axe excavated was very much similar to the modern day axe.

A mud pot was found while digging a well in a place called Karimpallur in Piravanthur, a place in Kollam district. Evidences show that this pottery belonged to the Megalithic period. Megalithic culture existed about three thousand years ago. The main feature of Megalithic period was that people was buried along with the things they used. The objects except the iron axe were found inside the big pot. The big pot was found placed, about three meters below the ground level. The pot was covered by a specially made rock layer. The pot was 87.5 cm high and had a diameter of 190 cm. From the middle part of the pot to bottom part, it was in the shape of a cone. There was a hole at the bottom part of the pot. Inside the pot at the bottom part, soil along with plates, cups and small potteries were found. The big pot was made up of red soil, which was both red and black in color.¹⁷ The objects excavated from the site were almost two thousand to three thousand years old. This was a major finding for the reconstruction of megalithic culture in Kerala. These Evidences proved that the man of Stone age choose very apt location for their livelihood. The place close to the cave is now a marshy land. According to Dr. P Rajendran the marshy land was earlier a pond, after analyzing the place. The Microlithic remains obtained from Tenmalai is now about 5210 years old.¹⁸

Poredam is a place in Chadayamangalam in the Kollam district. In 1989 below the red soil, potteries, iron implements and bones of an infant were unearthed. After the chemical fluorine treatment, it was proved that these all belonged to the Chalcolithic culture. After the chemical treatment, it was proved that Chalcolithic culture of Poredam was about 3500 years old. In Kerala Chalcolithic culture existed between Neolithic and Megalithic period.⁵⁶ Arippa is a place near Madathara in the district of Kollam. The skull was unearthed during the mining process in the cist burials. The skull was found inside a pottery, mined from the cist burial. Along with the skull there were remains of copper-gold ornaments and also stone implements inside the pot.¹⁹The ancient culture unveiled from the cist burials in Arippa was about two thousand years' old. About twenty kilo meter east to Arippa, five thousand years old human habitations were found.²⁰

The study on the archaeological sites in Kollam proved the district was an ancient human settlement since Stone Age. The series of excavations done in Kollam made the place a major landmark for the reconstruction of the cultural history of ancient Kerala. The study on the historical antecedents of Kollam made us realize the importance of Kollam in the ancient times a splendid collection of historical monuments and a vast array of archaeological sites. The maritime intercourses connected Kollam to the international networks of trade and commerce. But the beneficiaries of these prosperities were the European powers. The rivalry of the European powers along with the competition of local rulers caused for the destruction of Kollam port. Thus the town was degraded into a small port city and lost its status as an emporium of foreign trade. The maritime contacts succeeded to transform the life of the people who hailed from the different strata of the region. It molded the destiny of Kollam through the centuries, which facilitated the economic and commercial prosperity of it as an emporium of international trading centre.

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