

Megalithic Culture

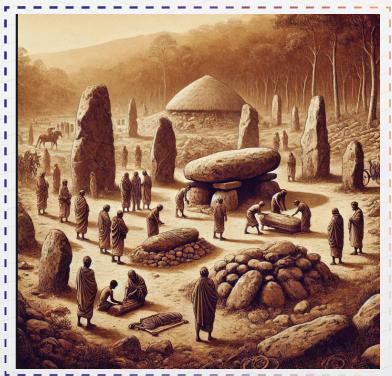
Iron Age in South India

The Iron Age in the Indian subcontinent exhibits significant regional variations, lacking a uniform cultural pattern. In North India, the Iron Age is distinguished by specific pottery types, while in South India, it is marked by distinctive burial practices known as "Megaliths."

The Iron Age in South India, termed the "Megalithic Culture," is primarily identified through diverse burial types and accompanying grave goods. Radiocarbon dating suggests that the Iron Age in South India began around 1000 B.C. and persisted until the first century B.C., with some practices continuing into the early Christian era.

MEGALITHIC:

- The word "Megalith" is derived from Greek words, "Megas" and "Lithos" meaning "big" and "stone" respectively. The Megaliths refers to elaborate style of burial practice amidst stones in graveyards away from the habitations zone.



- ◆ The excavations at these Megalithic graves provide most of the information about the Iron Age in South India.

The **earliest Megalithic burials** which yield the first iron objects were **found at Piklihal and Hallur at Brahmagiri in Karnataka**. The other important Megalithic sites discovered in South India include:

TAMIL NADU:

- ◆ **Adichanallur**, Amritamangalam, Kunnattur, Sanur, etc.

KARNATAKA:

- ◆ **Brahmagiri**, Maski, T. Narsipur, **Hallur, Hire Benakal** (dates back to the 800 BCE to 200 BCE, making it one of the oldest necropolises in India, and the largest one in South India), etc.

ANDHRA PRADESH:

- ◆ Kadambapur, Nagarjunakonda, Amaravati, etc.

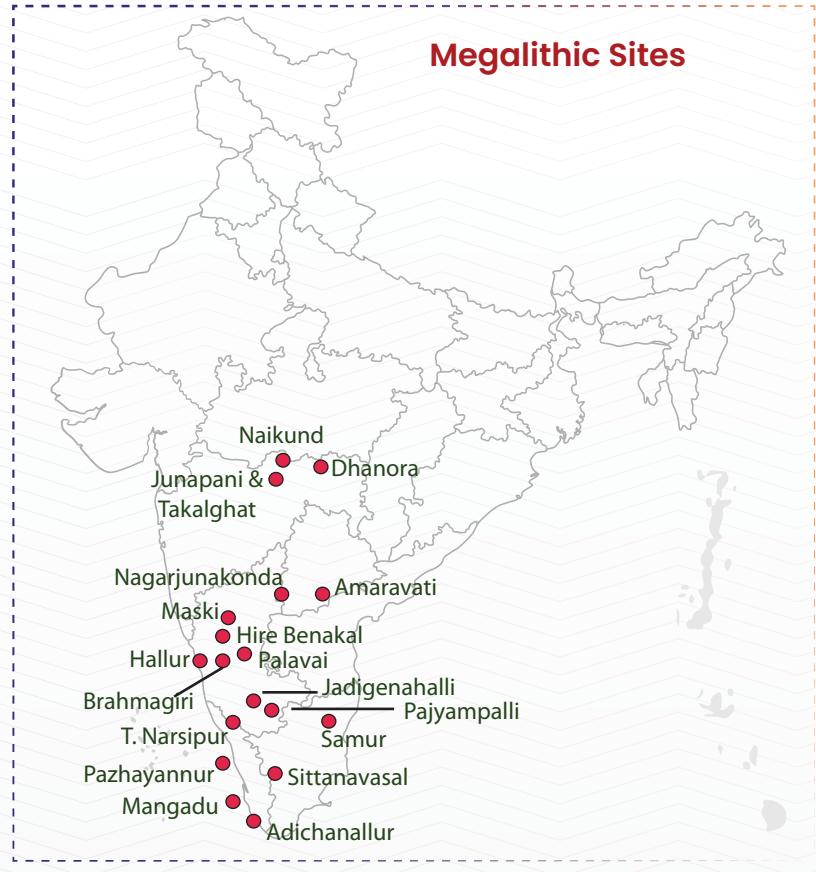
KERALA:

- ◆ Pulimattu, Tengakkal, Marayur, Cenkotta, etc.

MAHARASHTRA:

- ◆ Around Nagpur area- Junapani etc.

Though the Megaliths are found in almost all the upland areas of the peninsula, but their **concentration are maximum in eastern Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu**.



TYPES OF MEGALITHIC BURIALS:

The Megalithic burials display a **number of methods for the disposal of the death**. Some of the basic types of Megaliths found in the excavations include:

TOPIKAL CAPSTONE:

- ◆ The burial urn in a Topikal Capstone is placed in an underground pit and is then covered by a low convex circular capstone.

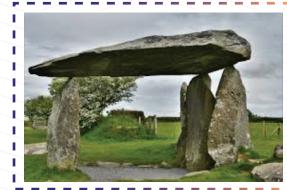


MENHIR:

- ◆ Menhir is a monolithic pillar or a single large standing stone slab planted vertically into the ground.


DOLMEN:

- ◆ Dolmen usually consists of three or more upright stones supporting a large flat horizontal capstone.


STONE CIRCLE PIT BURIAL:

- ◆ The funerary remains are buried in a pit which is then marked by the stone circle in which stones are arranged in a standing position in a circle or ellipse shape.


STONE CIRCLE CIST BURIAL:

- ◆ It is an underground chamber tomb composed of two or four vertical slabs of stone topped by a horizontal capstone.


CAIRN STONE CIRCLE:

- ◆ It represents a heap of large stones piled on top and surrounded by a stone circle.


SARCOPHAGHUS:

- ◆ A sarcophagus burial involves terracotta trough which contains the funerary remains.



The Megalithic burial reflects **different types of funerary practices such as extended, fractional, post-excarnate and post-cremation burials.**

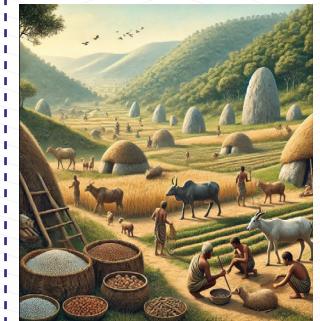
Background of Megalithic Culture

- ◆ **Origins:** Megalithic burials in South India show similarities with **Central Asian and Iranian** burial practices, suggesting possible introduction by **Indo-European immigrants**.
- ◆ **Local Adaptations:** Some burial features likely evolved as **indigenous innovations** by **Neolithic-Chalcolithic communities of the Deccan**.
- ◆ **Cultural Fusion:** Megalithic burials reflect a **blend of foreign influences and local traditions**.



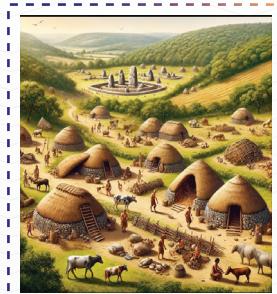
Subsistence Pattern

- ♦ **Limited Agriculture:** Due to short-term settlements and residence on hill slopes, cultivable land was scarce.
- ♦ **Fewer Agricultural Tools:** More weapons than farming implements indicate less emphasis on agriculture.
- ♦ **Crops Cultivated:** Included paddy, millets, pulses, and ragi.
- ♦ **Other Economic Activities:** Engaged in hunting, fishing, and animal husbandry.
- ♦ **Domesticated Animals:** Cattle, sheep, goats, dogs, pigs, and horses.



Settlement Pattern

- ♦ **Limited Evidence:** Settlements near megalithic sites show **thin debris of occupation**.
- ♦ **Nomadic Lifestyle:** Sparse settlements suggest that the Megalithic people likely lived in one area for **short periods** and were **nomadic**.



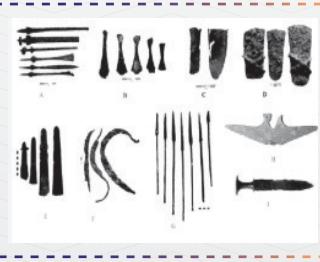
Pottery Used in Megalithic Culture

- ♦ **Types of Pottery:** Included **Black and Red Ware (BRW)**, **Red Ware**, and **Burnished Black Ware**.
- ♦ **However the Black and Red Ware (BRW) was the most prevalent** pottery used by them.
- ♦ The Black and Red Ware pottery is a **wheel turned pottery** and the prominent shapes found were **shallow tray bowls and deep bowls**.



Other Objects Found in Megalithic Sites

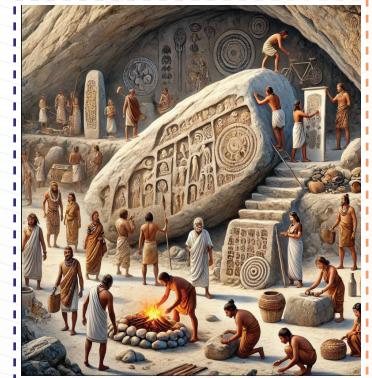
- ♦ **Iron Objects:** Found in large numbers, including **arrowheads, axes, spearheads, hoes, sickles, knives, daggers, and swords**.
- ♦ **Copper & Bronze Artifacts:** Includes **bells and tridents**, the latter later associated with **Lord Shiva**.
- ♦ **Beads & Ornaments:** Evidence of **semi-precious stone beads and gold objects** suggests the presence of **specialized crafts**.



Importance of Megaliths

Megaliths provide valuable insights into the beliefs and social organization of the communities that built them. Key aspects include:

- ◆ **Shift in Social Organization:** Unlike Neolithic-Chalcolithic communities that buried their dead within habitation areas, **Megalithic burials were placed away from settlements, indicating a societal shift.**
- ◆ **Ritualistic Significance:** The presence of **elaborate grave goods suggests** these sites played a role in rituals and community life.
- ◆ **Social Stratification:** The variety of burial items indicates the presence of specialized professional groups **like smiths and warriors.**
- ◆ **Community Effort:** The construction of massive structures implies **collective participation rather than individual work.**
- ◆ **Rock Paintings:** Some sites, like **Paiyampalli in Tamil Nadu**, feature rock **paintings depicting scenes of daily life, warfare, and rituals**, providing a glimpse into Megalithic culture.



Interestingly, Megalithic traditions continue today among tribes such as the **Gadabas, Gonds, Kurumbas, Marias, Mundas, Garos, Khasis, Nagas, and Karbis**, making "Megalithism" a living tradition in India.



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