



TAMILNADU: AN OVERVIEW ON HISTORICAL ARCHAEOLOGY



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Abstract

Tamilnadu's remarkable historical sites and monuments, as well as its old literary sources and rich legacy infrastructure, have all been brought to the world's notice through research into its archaeological records. Additionally, they gave Britisher's the main justification for becoming involved directly in archaeology and for creating numerous laws to prevent the destruction of archaeological sites and monuments, which were subsequently supplemented by stricter additions of legal measures on heritage

protection. The evidence that has been made public at numerous locations around Tamil Nadu specifically refers to the current state of historical archaeology in that state. There is a significant deal of debate among scholars as to whether or not the same norms and conventions are insisted upon by researchers throughout the world when evaluating archaeological evidence or if it is dictated by political or religious ideology.

Keywords: *Historical Archaeology, ASI, Heritage Conservation, Indus, Tamil Civilization*

RESEARCH PAPER

Introduction

Tamilnadu historical archaeology is rooted in the antiquarian research conducted in the middle eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, a collaborative undertaking focused primarily on historical topics, which often involved archaeological evidence. These investigations have brought to the world's attention Tamilnadu's rich heritage infrastructure and ancient literary sources, as well as its incredible archaeological sites and monuments. Moreover, they provided Britisher's with its key rationale for direct involvement in archaeology and for forming various laws against the destruction of archaeological sites and monuments which were later added with strict additions of legal measures on heritage conservation.

As research revealed the profundity and affluent Tamilnadu past, Tamilnadu's archaeological firmaments have canonized greatly in the twentieth century. Around the middle of 19th CE, prehistory and protohistory began consuming more recognition and resources than historical archaeology, which had been the focus for most of the century. This was due to the discovery of a Palaeolithic tool by Robert Bruce Foote at Pallavaram in Chennai. As Tamilnadu pitch upon impediments such as conservation of heritage structures, expansion of tourism industry and distinctiveness in a fast transforming country which has diverse cultural resources, the pre and protohistoric discipline offering antiquities for the reconstructing the ancient history of Tamilnadu will play an increasingly important role in Tamilnadu archaeology of the twenty-first century.

An overview of the historical context

Many of the same denouements defy Tamilnadu historical archaeology as they do in other states in present scenario. It can be observed that most of the archaeological sites that are considered the rudimentary artifacts of disquisition, are in the areas where urban settlements are becoming increasingly widespread, are easily accessible, and are being used without knowing their cultural significance or significance to the region. These sites are being destroyed at a fast rate due to the surrounding development in the infrastructure. The historical research of Tamilnadu could be well documented with the help of the archives yielding the primary documents. Tamilnadu archaeologists approach historical archaeology from a broad perspective, like other archaeologists pertaining to various states. Eminent Professor D.K Chakrabarti mention's the historical archaeology as the study of that part of the archaeological record for which there exists contemporary documentary evidence. Such evidence spans most of the last 3,000 years.¹ Later eighteenth and early nineteenth century historians of Tamilnadu were unwavering on logical

explanation on the edification in the percipience of the cognoscible world. As far as Tamilnadu is concerned there needs to be a cognizable understanding on the derelict cities, heritage monuments, art, illegible inscriptions, literatures, epics, diverse cultural traditions prevailing every nook and corner of the state. Early scholars like Devaneyya Pavanar, Sathankulam Ragavan, Na.Mu. Venkatasamy Nattar, Mylai. Seeni Venkatasamy, Rajamanickam etc by mapping ancient texts and other documentary evidence onto archaeological evidence, have foraged to excogitate a historical perception of Tamils. Coupling with the above mentioned aspects, European companies documents, British and French archives, Aanandarangam Pillai ntoes, Robert, Orme's Military achievement, Mc.Kenzie manuscripts etc helps in understanding the political, social and economic conditions of Tamilnadu.

In the midst of nineteenth century every district of Tamilnadu had Gazetteers. The Tamilnadu archives in Chennai which is casing colossal figures of handwritten manuscripts ameliorating in apprehending the recent historical events of Tamilnadu.² Veteran research was concentrated by few institutions like University of Madras, archaeological survey of India, Madras School of Orientalism etc. The making of a colonial knowledge project in southern India in the nineteenth century and its constitutive elements, the nature of interaction between the colonial official and his indigenous collaborator and nature of the knowledge produced was coevally formulated by the Madras School of Orientalism.³ Intellectual and engaged to the sphere of their research, the historians of Tamilnadu unswervingly result in the creation of the specialized scholarly discipline of archaeology. But, inevitably their interpretations of the "past" lacked a thorough comprehension of how old it might be due to the non-developed practical methods for reconstructing it from archaeological evidence, the ability to link archaeological evidence with relevant documentary evidence, and essential concepts of time, space, and culture upon which to build interpretations of the past. After Archaeological Survey of India was created in 1860, it started involving in documenting the important sites having archaeological importance and cultural significance professionally and created new policies on the conservation of historical sites and monuments. The creation of ASI lead to the involvement in the continuous field work that exposed innumerable number of archaeological sites pertaining to different cultural horizons.

Most of the research conducted by the specialized scholars has concentrated in emphasising the historical questions on the antiquity, literary traditions, linguistic background of the language, trade contact of the Tamils with the other countries etc. Early scholars wrote about linguistic aspects, trade contact of Tamils etc on the basis of the secondary sources they had obtained. In the first half

of the 20th century ASI has done bench mark works in establishing the archaeological history by the way of excavation conducted at Adhichanallur in 1904 by Alexander Rea, at Arikamedu by Mortimer Wheeler in 1945, etc. The inquests of Harappa and Mohenjodaro in 1920's by the ASI had unclogged a new perspective in the archaeological history of India and the corroboration of seals with scripts not yet deciphered, has accelerated to ferret the routes of Tamil culture in the Indus civilization with the aid of materials peeled off from various sites at Tamilnadu, which is still a debate in the scholarly avenue. The so said aspects on the Indus culture is discussed by the scholars like Paddayya as although the nature and complexity of Indus society continues to be the object of considerable discussion, the discovery ensured that Indian archaeology had a seat at the table of international inquiry into the origins of civilization.⁴ Several antiquarians and historians have contributed to the growing sentiment of the Tamil nationalism through the research on their studies and subsequent writings about them. In the mid-nineteenth century the focus of the research was on the pre and proto history of Tamilnadu. In addition to this, eminent scholars have also contributed to studies on the questions of historical interest. The interest in historical archaeological study resurfaced in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and it began to increase its function as an active participant in the creation of Tamilnadu's historical viewpoints. It is not unusual for archaeologists, historians, politicians, and the public to have ongoing discussions about who owns the past, the role of the past in history, and how the past is represented in places like heritage sites and textbooks. Achieving these objectives requires identifying what policies and priorities should be in place as the state adapts to its new environment.

Aspects to consider

As a result, Tamilnadu faces many challenges that impact its historical archaeology significantly. A key challenge to archaeological research is the impact of contemporary political agendas and fundamentalism. It is being overridden by the presence of strong professional archaeological scholars and leadership, such as Mr. M.K. Stalin, the Hon'ble Chief Minister of Tamilnadu. He has a keen interest in exposing and promoting Tamilnadu's rich and diverse culture to the outside world, following proper scientific analysis on the retrieved archaeological materials.

Indus – Tamil Civilizations

Tamil's national individuality was significantly swayed by the revelation of the Indus civilization. The outcome of the discovery of the magnanimous civilization were tremendous, when most of the Indus sites like Harappa, Mohenjodaro have departed to the new nation namely Pakistan. But later in the 1950's the Indian archaeologists has initiated captious and scientific research in the Indian

soil to perceive identically important sites as in Pakistan. Also, this research has yielded summed quantity of sites like Lothal, Kalibangan, Rupar, Alamgirpur, Dolavira, Mehrgarh etc covering area of around 5 lakh square miles, having material evidences pertaining to Indus Civilization. The whole area afford the materials like weights and measurements of same models, same script and seals, evidences for trade contact been identified from most of the materials, idiosyncrasy in religion and arts, which all steers to the deliverance there should have been a centre power centre. Before the Roman empire, there was no other civilization with single faceted ruling system like Indus. It was two times bigger than old Egypt empire.⁵ The important issues of the debate regarding the Tamil-Indus civilization pertains to the script, the “upward movement”, the relationship between the Indus civilization and the Tamil culture etc. Having a conversation on historical archaeology makes no sense since the Indus civilization does not relate to this field of study. Though scholars generally agree that the society was literate, its script doesn't appear to have been deciphered and is unlikely to be deciphered based on the imperfect data available. Many scholars have for sure believed on the basis of their linguistic research that Tamil should be the cradle of all the language being spoken throughout the world. Robert Caldwell had the opinion that all the languages would have been established having their base from the Dravidian language family.⁶ Also Father Heras, who called himself as the Dravidian of Spain correspondingly authored that Indus Civilization is nothing but appertains to Dravidians and also said the language spoken by the people was also Dravidian. He had the discretion that before 5000 thousand years ago the Indus civilization emanted in the Kaveri river basin and went on the expedition along the western India and expanded its base till the regions like Indus, Sumeria, Egypt, Mediterranean countries.⁷

Archaeological Survey of India

The ASI is the institution with the mandate to conduct archeological expeditions in India, be they explorations or excavations. ASI carries out excavation activities in Tamilnadu through two circles - - Chennai and Trichy. A second section that is concerned with conservation of temples is located in Chennai circle, while the other section that deals with inscriptions, copying, and preservation is located in Chennai circle. Over the years since its inception, ASI has been conducting notable digs at Adhichanallur in 1904 and 2003-04, Gudiyam in 1968, Keezhadi in 2013-15, and many other places, yielding a great deal of evidence that the Tamils are ancient. Despite belonging to the Indian Administrative office cadre at the center, several well-trained and experienced archaeological professionals have been assigned to oversee the work of the circles, including Sathyamoorthy, Amarnath, Arunraj and a few others. Many reports about the excavation have been published by the ASI.

State Department of Archaeology

The department was established in 1961 to support archaeological study, including excavation, inscription copying, and preservation of ancient artefacts and monuments, among other things. The head in-charge of the position of Commissioner has been assigned to an officer from the Indian Administrative cadre. The department has done a significant number of excavations in the last 50 years that have revealed hidden cultural sequences of Tamil history. The inscriptions that have been copied and published aid in understanding the various stages of Tamil language development as well as the linguistic differences between Tamil and other languages.

Institutions

The State has a number of institutes teaching archaeology, of which the Department of Ancient History and Archaeology of University of Madras is noteworthy, as it was started in the same year as the state department. Scholars such as Champakalakshmi, Gurumoorthy, P. Shanmugam, Ekambaranathan, K.Rajan, Dayalan, Amarnath, Vasanthi and others earned positions in ASI and state departments. Also, there is a two-year diploma course in epigraphic studies offered by the State Department of Archaeology, Government of Tamilnadu. Furthermore, institutions such as Tamil University in Thanjavur, Tamilnadu Open University in Chennai, International Tamil Institute of Tamil Studies, and a few other private institutions provide courses related to archaeology, which give the public an opportunity to learn about the discipline.

Commitment to Heritage Conservation

Though Tamilnadu has established several legal measures to conserve its cultural history and artefacts, more comprehensive, practical governmental policies to preserve the legacy should be enacted to support the creation of a common feeling of stewardship of the past should be enacted. Among many components bestowed to the annihilation of archaeological sites throughout Tamilnadu are its apace sprouting population, fanning out cities, and industrial development. The cultural heritage is designated as the medium of beliefs, practices and approaches of the community on heritage pertaining to any community or religion, ethnic groups or any nations. We manipulate the artefacts to communicate the heritage of our ancestors to the future generation and to indoctrinate them, how we are associated to the past, impetus of preservation to execute them about the efficacy of our historical events, etc.⁸ As per article no: 49 in the constitution of India, it shall be the obligation of the State to protect every monument or place or object of artistic or historic interest, declared by or under law made by Parliament to be of national importance, from spoliation,

disfigurement, destruction, removal, disposal or export, as the case may be.⁹ Diversely to protect and preserve the culturally important residues and archaeological heritage the Tamilnadu government has enacted series of certain laws. One such Act is *The Tamil Nadu Ancient and Historical Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, 1966*¹⁰ was to provide for the preservation of ancient and historical monuments and archaeological sites and remains other than those of national importance, for the regulation of archaeological excavations and for the protection of sculptures, carvings and other like objects.¹¹ The monuments in Tamilnadu should be protected to prove the historical importance by showcasing the concrete evidence of structural appearance and it's aesthetic elegance which explicitly posing a great ambience to the artistic value of Tamilnadu architecture. *The Tamil Nadu Ancient and Historical Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Rules, 1971*¹² has separated the act into various chapters and clearly stated the regulation for preserving the archaeological heritage. In chapter III it clearly mentions that if any constructions or other related operations is going to carried out in the nearby or adjoining areas of protected monuments a necessary license should be issued by the State Archaeology Department. In chapter VII the rules and regulations to be followed during the mining operations are clearly stated.

A Universal Panorama

As far as archaeology is concerned, it's research activities in Tamilnadu dates back to the mid eighteen century which has been carried out by the British scholars like Robert Bruce Foote, William King, Alexander Rea, K.V. Soundararajan, Narasimaiah, etc. In the beginning the research was conducted with the funding from the British government. After independence the focus shifted to the other institutions and individuals who are more keenly interested in the exposing the hidden historical treasure of Tamils. In the best examples may be mentioned to the excavations carried out at Arikamedu by the Pennsylvania University under the leadership of Vimala Begley in association with University of Madras. A cultural exchange on sea voyage between India and China has been proposed in the Nov 2019 meeting between PM, India and President, China at Mahabalipuram. MEA and ASI should initiate this activity under Project Mausam.¹³ In order for international collaboration in Tamilnadu archaeology to proliferate, there must be enduring research coalition which integrate the efforts of scholars of Tamilnadu in full partnership with international teams which provide skills, technology, or context that is lacking in Tamilnadu itself. Tamil scholars must remain the primary initiators of the information regarding Tamilnadu's past (and the past of every country) as the uncos belongs to everyone.

What lies ahead?

Historical archaeology is materializing as a significant research emphasis again in Tamilnadu archaeology after decades when prehistory and protohistory dominated. However, the boundaries of its pertinent arena have ballooned out significantly since the antiquarians of two centuries ago were enthralled with mythical cities, palaces, and dynastic histories. According to prevailing research, the amplitude of vantage point of the past must reflect this view, which should speak to Tamils alike without discreteness, enmity, or discourteous. Only then can archaeologists anticipate the general public to exhaustively conceive their cultural bequest, the aptness of archaeology, and why archaeology may value their support.

Historical Evidence Prolongs Besides Texts

Tamilnadu history has its sources from various factors like stone tools of different cultural horizons, rock painting, inscriptions, metal implements, coins, manuscripts, copperplates, architecture and iconography, etc. Historiographical archaeology has often been referred to as the "handmaiden" of history in no small part because it has readily accepted that this is the best role archaeology can play in history construction. Considering the wide range of possible sources of valid and reliable primary evidence is a worthwhile endeavour. Many non-literary sources like copper plates, palm leaf manuscripts, government documents, autobiographies, narratives, amalnac, Ballads, folk songs, stories, parish records etc ultimately has the research value in relatively to the unexplored records of every corner of the state. The underwater archaeological expedition carried out in the state particularly at Poompuhar (Kaveripoompattinam) and Mamallapuram yielded valuable historical archaeological evidences. The marine archaeological explorations on Tamil Nadu coast have brought to light the submerged structural evidence at Poompuhar and Mahabalipuram. The traditions mentioning the submergence of these port towns have been partially confirmed with the evidence from underwater. These structures may have been submerged due to coastal erosion followed by shoreline changes. As evident from Mahabalipuram excavations, these sites might have been submerged due to large coastal flooding.¹⁴ The important sources the researchers should acquire is the preparation of historical cartography and the digital image of Tamilnadu with high resolution which helps in uncloaking the historical archaeology of the state to a great extent. In the late 1990's it was hard to acquire the aerial imagery with sophisticated technological components as they were expensive and with lack of picture precision with accurate resolution aspects. But the advancement in the technological arena has led to the implication of recent scientific technologies like drone, lidar, GPR, remote sensing technologies with high resolution multi spectral and hyper

spectral imaging techniques makes the view of the history of Tamilnadu much visible and with more accuracy.

Evidence Procedures

Predominantly, historically based archaeology is not appreciated by historians, or even by many archaeologists, in part because its results spasmodically, only to perceive what we believed we already knew, and partly because such results are often strenuous to transliterate because the evidence is so weak that no conventional explanation is available. It is the gentility of the corroboration that bolster up a simplification, analysis, or claim that determines the credibility of an explanation, interpretation, or claim in historical archaeology. Many historians everywhere take a skeptical view of archaeological interpretations because they often appear to be based on little more than conjecture and personal bias.¹⁵ A change in this view is attainable only once historical archaeologists have authenticated their research's credibility and dependability as a standard practice. The procedures of evidences particularly mention the situations of the historical archaeology in Tamilnadu in present situation. Whether the same standards and conventions insisted upon each other by the scholars across the globe in assessing archaeological evidence or is it determined by political or religious ideologies? Tamilnadu historical archaeology's future will heavily depend on the answer.

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