

**Book Review**  
**The Archaeology of Burials: Examples from the Indian Subcontinent**  
**(2020)**

Edited by Rajesh, S.V. et.al.

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**Abdul Adil Paray\***

Department of AIHC and Archaeology,

Indira Gandhi National Tribal University, Amarkantak, MP.

*\*Corresponding Author*

*Email: aadil.hist15@gmail.com*

This book is a two-volume publication of forty-four research papers authored by 68 scholars, edited by Dr Rajesh S.V., Dr Abhayan GS, and Dr Ajit Kumar, and Ms Ehsan of the Department of Archaeology, University of Kerala Thiruvananthapuram. Both volumes of the book are arranged topically, covering various dimensions related to the archaeology of Burials in the Indian subcontinent. The book is beautifully illustrated with site maps, photographs of the excavations, pictures, and drawings of material culture reported from various explorations and excavations.

The primary objective of this impressive undertaking was to review the progress made in the archaeology of the Indian subcontinent with particular reference to burial practices. The research articles in the book focus not only on the Megalithic Burial practices but also discuss vivid areas related to burial practices such as the representation of death and burials in rock art, Harappan burials, burials displayed in museums, burial practices in North-western frontiers of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in Pakistan, Hero stones and Sati stones from Gujrat, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu, Burial customs of

Meitei society in Manipur, and Bene Israeli cemetery from Maharashtra and perception of death in Kashi. This first volume of the book is a compilation of 22 research articles authored by 42 scholars in which some articles have been reviewed here.

The first chapter of the first volume of the book titled 'Change in the Mortuary Practices from the Urban Indus Period to the Post-Urban Indus period in the Ghaggar Basin with a Focus on the Ceramic Evidence from Farmana (Seman – 6 and Bedwa – 2)', is authored by Akinori Uesugi and Vivek Dangi. Based on the ceramic evidence retrieved from the excavation of the Farmana cemetery (Seman-6 and Bedwa-2), this article examines the chronological changes in mortuary practices from the Urban Indus period to the Post-urban Indus period. In light of the material culture, the paper highlights that the mortuary system, including practices and ideology, was becoming complex and unified or established in the process of the urban developments from the Pre-urban Indus period to the Urban Indus period. Especially the formation of a cemetery outside the urban centre must have been connected with the developments

of the dense and compact way of living space inside the city, entailing changes in the mortuary practices and ideology.

V. Selvakumar, in his research article titled, 'Megalithic Architecture of South India: A Few Observations', discusses the concept of Megalithic architecture, the complex nature and typology of megalithic architecture, components of Megalithic architecture and the death beliefs and social relationships concerning contemporary megalithic burial practices. The author argues that even though the megalithic burials across south India exhibit uniformity in terms of the burials and grave goods, there is no uniformity of cultures across the region of South India and the megalithic burials reflect just superficial similarity. He also rejects the diffusionist theory and opines that the megalithic culture is the native culture of south India.

'The Iron Age Culture of Kerala and Beginning of Farming Practices', authored by Jenee Peter writes that the focus has shifted from classification, chronology, origin and authorship of megalithic burials in the 19th and 20th centuries to material culture and social transformation, human interaction with environment and level of technology in 21st century. Therefore, the author has tried to trace the beginning of the cultivation of crops in Kerala and finds that during the Late Iron Age, Kerala was thickly forested except in the marshy, waterlogged lowlands. Agriculture began in the lowlands during the late Holocene (2000 B.P./100 BCE onwards), and wet rice cultivation began in the wetland plains in a rain-forest ecosystem.

Kumbhodaran S, Rajesh S.V., and Abayan G.S. record a preliminary survey conducted in Nellanad village of Nedumagadu taluk to understand the present scenario of

megalithic monuments in Thiruvananthapuram district and the explorations yielded eight new megalithic sites. The report includes the details of the newly discovered megalithic sites, the surface finds, and the megaliths. In this survey report, the authors have emphasized for the extensive and intensive explorations followed by excavation in the future to understand the Megalithic culture in the region. The paper's title is 'A Preliminary Survey of the Iron Age Burials in Thiruvananthapuram District, Kerala with special reference to Nellanad Village.

The paper by Sheena V.R, Dineesh Krishnan and Abu Joseph, 'Megalithic Remains in the Periyar Valley of Kerala: A Report of the Explorations in 2016-17', is based on the archaeological explorations by the faculty of the Department of Archaeology, University of Kerala. In this brief report, the authors have emphasized the significance and the archaeological potential of the Periyar valley of Kerala for studying megalithic remains. The megalithic relics reported by the explorers include various types of megalithic burials and associated material culture with them.

Shakirullah, an eminent archaeologist from Pakistan, has discussed the diverse burial systems and practices in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa region of Pakistan, from the Buddhist period to the present. He has detailed the evolution of burial practices concerning the different forms and shapes practised by different races, from the 3rd Millennium BCE to the modern period. The title of his research paper is 'Burial Practices in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan'.

V.N. Prabhakar has presented a survey of the burial practices in the Late/Post-Urban Harappan phase during the second and first

Millennium BCE. The analysis of the burial practices highlights that during the formative phases of the Harappan civilization, burial practices were flexed inhumations, and secondary burial customs were also there. Extended inhumations dominated as the most preferred mode of Burial during the Harappan phase. Another mode of burial dispensation is post-cremation urns, and some sites exhibit multiple modes of disposal of the dead, including pot burials. Thus, the Harappan phase exhibits a wide variety of disposal of the dead, with the utterly dominating style of extended inhumations in the supine position, some within well-constructed cenotaphs of mud-bricks or wood. The broad burial types during the late/post-urban Harappan phase are extended inhumations in the supine position, inhumations in the flexed position, either turned towards left or right and post-cremation pot-burials.

In the research article 'Living Megalithic Tradition Amongst the Munda Community of Jharkhand,' Himanshu Shekhar records the ethnoarchaeological study of the heritage of Megalithic burials that continues as the living traditions and is followed by the present tribal and ethnic communities in various parts of the country. In Jharkhand, many tribal communities still practice Megalithism. This paper concerns the Megalithic tradition followed by the Munda community of Jharkhand. The present work is a case study of the Living Megalithic Traditions among the Munda community of a particular village in the Ranchi District of Jharkhand, which lies in the Chhotanagpur Plateau. It is an impressive study of the burial practices of the community in comparison to their traditional society, the other Munda communities in the region, and

other contemporary tribal groups within a region.

Overall, all editors undertook an onerous task and presented a welcome addition for all those interested in understanding various emerging perspectives in the archaeology of Megalithic culture and burial practices. The book is well produced, and the editors, authors, and publisher deserve the heartiest congratulations.