

## Keeladi – The Center of Vaigai River bed Urban Civilization

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Archaeological excavations are a never-ending journey of searching for the ancestors of our ancestors. Modern tools began to originate from small artifacts, Wheels and artifacts discovered by the ancestors became the foundation of human development. The evolution of man can be predicated by properly classifying the identified archaeological sites. Keeladi is a quaint village located at a distance of 13 km from Madurai in the Sivagangai District and Draped in coconut grooves. This village is been allotted for excavation by the vaigai riverbad civilization. This is a large-scale excavation carried out in Tamilnadu after the adichanallur archaeological site. The settlement lies on the bank of the Vaigai River and it reflects the ancient culture of Tamils. Though this excavation had been started in the year 2015, currently in has reached the limelight. This is because of the official declaration of the findings and carbon results. Now keeladi is in the phase of the Sixth stage of excavation, under the surveillance of the Tamilnadu archaeology department.

Through the tireless excavation at keeladi archaeologist have found may particles, artifacts, and scriptures that belonged to the sangam period. The scripts found at keeladi shows a remarkable similarity with the scripts that were found in Indus civilization. The Indus valley civilization which is located in the north-western part of India is said to have resided between 5,000 BCE and 1,500 BCE. The graffiti discovers in keeladi dates back to 580 BCE and it closely resembles the Indus script. So this creates a link between Indus script and Tamil Brahmi. So far about 1000 different marks have been found and many of the marks are similar to the Indus script. So these findings give various perspectives in finding the oldest civilization. One view is that after the collapse of the Indus valley civilization, the people from there must have moved to the south and have settled here.

While there is a contrary view which says that the vaigai river civilization must have been the ancestor one, from which a part of people has migrated to the north. The

recent genetic studies on these remains from both the place report that Indus people may not have had what's known as the steppe pastoralist' DNA but they may be of Dravidian origin which is a great revelation in the history. Tamil Nadu archaeological department has another mind-blowing discovery, which have made the world look back. Through their findings, they have revealed the fact that urban civilization was thriving on the banks of the vaigai river in Tamil Nadu in 6th century BCE, around 2500 years ago. So the sangam age which we know had begun much earlier ie from 300 BC and this revelation rewrites perception of Indian history so far.

So far six carban dating samples have been sent to Beta Analytic Lab, Miami, Florida, U.S, for Accelerator Mass Apectrometry dating. In which one of the articles has been dated back to 6th century BC. Pottery specimens from keeladi sent to the Earth Science Department of pisa University, Italy, though the vellore Institute of Technology for mineral analysis, states that they were made of raw minerals found some 2500 years age. These findings clearly state that keeladi had a civilization much older and much civilized than any other Indo civilization.

It surely a moment of pride for Tamil people, as the discovery at keeladi had revealed the fact that their ancestors have attained literacy or learned the art of writing as early as the 6th century BCE. The recent scientific dates obtained for keelaadi findings pushback the date of Tamil Brahmi to another century i.e 6th century BCE. And lots of potsherds have been collected at the site which bore names like Kudhiranadhan and Aadhan written in Tamil Brahmi script.

The deeper excavation has led to the discovery of industries. Till now about 56 Tamil Brahmi inscribed potsherd, 10 spindle whorls, 20 sharply pinpointed bone tip tools used for design creations, hanging stones of the yarn, terracotta spheres, copper needle and earthen vessels to hold liquid have been recovered. This clearly attests that industries like pottery and weaving had been functioned. So far they have found much unique gaming equioment, gold Jewellery, copper vessels, and knives have been discovered. Even some parts of excavation have revealed toilets like structure. So people must have used toilets in earlier days. This shows how civilized and hygienic our ancestors were.

About 70 samples of skelton fragments of faunal remains have been sent to Deccan Collect, post Graduate and Research Institute in pune far analyeis, and species such as cow and ox, buffalo, sheep, goat, nilgai, blackbuck, wild boar and peacock were identified.

Through this, it is evident that people of keeladi civilization had indulged in agriculture and cattle breeding. And the cut marks on other animals such as the antelope, goat and wild boar suggest that they were consumed.

After these incredible findings, the Tamilnadu Archeology department had filed a proposal to expand their excavation in the nearby villages including Agaram and Manalur. According to expert's views, keeladi must have been the industrial area, Agaram has been burial ground, and Manalur must be the residential site. By excavating in all these sites, a lot more unimaginable facts can be revealed. Explore this historical city and explore Tamil civilization while your visit to Madurai, Tamilnadu Tourism offers the best Tamilnadu tour itineraries in which you can explore places like keeladi, Madurai and many historic regions.

Among the habitation sites noticed during exploration, keeladi strikes importance due to its vast area and proximity to the celebrated historic town of Madurai, the capital of pandyas of sangam period. Keeladi is the only intact habitation site as on date available near Madurai having ample scope for large scale scientific excavation. There is no space available to conduct excavation to know the cultural sequence of Madurai city due to rapid urban growth. Many of the habitation sites in the Vaigai river valley face threat of being destroyed due to rapid agricultural expansion and urbanization. Keeladi has potent archaeological wealth to provide crucial evidences to understand the cultural transformation of iron age to early historic period and further developments that took place in subsequent periods in vaigai river vally. The excavation at keeladi is likely to provide evidences to understand the cultural development of ancient Madurai and it will also help to understand chronological events/ sequence of southern Tamil Nadu in particular Tamil Heritage Foundation.

Keeladi (09o 51' 40" N, E 078o 11' 70" E) lies about 12 kms southeast of Madurai on the ancient highway (modern NH 49) leading to Ramesvaram via Tiruppuvanam. Strategically it located on the south bank of river Vaikai and is surrounded by various historical places. Vaigai is one among the sacred rivers and the major life line for southern Tamil Nadu. The actual site is located south east of present keeladi village and west of Manalurlake (kanmay).

During 13th century AD the whole area thrived as a Brahmin settlement well versed in four Vedas called kuntidevi chaturvedimangalam, named after pandyan queen.

The present kondagai is the corrupt form of the above. The inscription is the nearby siva temple mentions that it was located in the territorial unit of 'Velurkulakkizh'. The name keeladi is derived for its location lying to the east of 'kudevichaturvedimangalam'.

The Ayyanar temple near siva temple contain many stone images datable to c.12. 13th century the cultural continuity of the site is evinced by the finding of a stone slab inscription near the urn burial complex datable to 1545 CE. The impressive habitation mound at keeladi is called as 'pallichandaithidal' or 'Mettupunjai' is located 1 km to the south east of present keeladi village. The mound is spread in an area of about 110 acres with circumference of 4.5 km. The mound raising of about 2.88 meters from the present ground level. In this area three localities namely 1&2 with extension of 2 were subjected to excavation during the first season. A total number of 43 quadrants were opened in the season 2014-15. A total number of 59 quadrants were opened in the season 2015-16.

In locality 1 the cultural deposit measured up to 2.80 meters with six layers. In locality 2 the cultural deposit measured up to 4.50 meters with six layers. In locality 2 (extension) the cultural deposit measured up to 3.70 meters with six layers. Fine variety of black and red ware found at the lowest level. Based on the archaeological evidence found at the keeladi site tentatively dated from 3rd century B.C.E to 10th century C.E. Excavation revealed impressive structural activities of early historic period. The structures comprise of brick walls, rectangular chamber, brick floor corridor and tanks. The size of the bricks measures L36x B 24 x T 7 cms & L 34 x B 23 x T 6 cms (locality 2), L 33 x B 21 x T 5 cms (Locality 1) comparable with other early historic sites in Tamil Nadu. The presence of large number of handmade grooved tiles suggests the existence of tiled roof above the structure. Two types of ring wells were found in locality 2. The ring wells in lower most level were decorated and each ring measured 48 cms in height. The ring well in upper level were plain and each measured 23 cms in height. Total number of antiquities – 1800Nos. Semiprecious stone beads – Carnelian, Agate, & Chalcedony.

Quartz and pearl beads – Glass beads – 800 Nos (various colours). Copper coins – square & round. Terracotta objects- Figurines, beads, gamesmen, spindle, spindle whorl, disc, wheel. Bone Stylus or points. Metal objects- Iron spearheads & copper antimony rods. Ivory dice. Shell bangles Tamil. Stone Heritage Foundation Quern & Pestles. 32 Tamil-Brahmi inscribed potsherds were found. The names of the individual

include 'Thisan', 'uthiran', 'iyanan', and 'sutama'. The Tamil- Brahmi inscribed potsherds are datable to 2nd century B.C to 1 century C.E. Nearly 350 were found. The symbols include Fish, boat, swastika, sun, arrow, etc. The Ceramic assemblages include black and red ware, white painted black and red ware, black ware, red ware and Russet coated painted ware (Andhra or Satavahana ware). The Roman potteries found at the site are Arretine and Rouletted ware and shows the commercial trade link.

Kondagai is associated burial complex of this as indicated by presence by of urn burials. Further excavations in the burial area shall more details about its association with habitation.

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