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## **Reconstructing Ancient Tamil Civilization through Archaeological Evidence: Insights from the Keezhadi Excavations**

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### **Abstract**

“This study presents a detailed historical analysis of the Keezhadi excavation site, a significant archaeological site in Tamil Nadu, India. It examines the importance of the discoveries, their historical relevance, and their impact on our understanding of ancient Indian civilizations.” Sangam literature supposed is to be the talk in the realm of the research beyond the passage of time. It seems to be the basis which helps to know about the life science and the History of the ancient people. After every Age various thoughts have gained significance, in accordance with that the Sangam literature has been researched under that fact which can be clearly seen.. So far the research has taken all the compositions found in Sangam literature and the sources obtained at the keeladi excavation as primary sources. Hence the research study is designed to prove that all the customary habits depicted of the ancient people in Sangam literature, relating to life are not imaginary conceptions but they are found to be the most real witness as per the excavations of the evidences gathered at Keeladi Archaeological evidences determining the urban civilization of the life style of the ancients registered in Sangam literature are found to be collected at Keeladi. All these obtained at Keeladi are being kept for reexamination of the various factors which had been already stated. All the pots obtained at Keeladi had determined accurately the literacy period of the ancient Tamil people to be Sixth B. C. All the evidences relating to weaving occupation, confirmed that the urban civilization had greatly become advanced in Tamil Nadu in ancient days. It is under this juncture that the need arises to conduct many, research survey on the prime basis of Sangam literary works.

**Keywords:** Keeladi Excavation, Ornaments, Tube wells, Tamil Brahmi

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## Introduction

It was in Sangam literature that the life science of the ancient people's customary practices and, also about the details of Tamilagam can be gathered and known from the excavation study conducted year after year. As per this India as well states Government Department of Archaeology have undertaken the research. The result of such study had created enthusiasm among all to know about the excavation evidences which help all to establish a, strong foundation so as to compare the findings, with the writings found in Sangam literature. It is on the basis of the, statement this research study is designed to prove the details depicted in Sangam literature are to be in accordance, with the Keeladi excavation evidences so as to reveal that these evidences of Keeladi are supposed to be the living witnesses.

## Objectives

This Study to explore the ancientarchaeological site this gives the picture of ancient Tamil culture.

- ♦ To find out of the data which belong the period of ancient sangam age.
- ♦ To study the artefacts and archaeological remains of the study area.
- ♦ To explain the ancient culture is the culture of modern period.

Generally the explorations and the excavations have so far not yielded any clear proof for Neolithic habitation in the study area. Abundantevidences though are unearthed for the early sangam Age settlement along the lower valley of Vaigai. Generally the Iron Age culture is characterized on the ceramic side by a black and Red ware a very interesting variety of ceramics thatis caused by a firing technique.

## Keeladi Excavation

Keeladi excavation has become the most remarkable topic of discussion among all in recent days. Though many excavation studies

were conducted in places, like kodumanal, Arikkameidu, kaavirpoum pattinam, the bed of kaveri river, Alagan kulam, Kaanchipuram, pourntal, Aaru, Aathitcha Nallur,, the ancient Thamzhga varalaaru, the culture, their life style and literature relating to which most of the practical hypothesis which are now in Vogue, are kept again under research study is supposed to be the reason for making the Archaeological study at Keeladi.

Keeladi lies at eight kilometers from Madurai. It is situated in Sivagangai. As per the statement made by the History professors that civilisations had raised only on the river beds we are able to find how the civilization of Keeladi was also on the basis of the river Vaigai. In no way Keeladi was found to be inferior to the Indus civilization was the fact confirmed from the Archaeological evidences gathered at Keeladi. Brick construction, structures, terracotta ring wells, fallen roofing tiles, with double holes and deeply finger pressed grooves to draw rain water, antiquities like golden ornaments, broken pieces, beads of terracotta, beads of stones, the statues made of terracotta of animals and humans, the comb made of husk, mud vessels, mud tiles with Tamil letters engraved on them, the, animals bones, wheels for making pottery and the things, needed for weaving such as brass, needles, beakers made of mud and the vessel meant for dyeing the clothes are the various evidences do far obtained from the excavation conducted at Keeladi is the fact known from the datas made by the Archaeology Department, Tamil Nadu.

## Sangam literature in relation to thr Keeladi Excavation study

All the evidences collected at Keeladi show that the facts, enumerated in the Sangam literature are not imaginary conceptions for all the data got at the research study at seem minutely to prove the fact.

The following will show them.

### **The evidences relating to weaving.**

The Archaeological evidences identified at Keeladi prove how the weaving occupation was at its zenith during the Sangam period. The central government Department of Archaeology had conducted a research in the past which confirmed the fact of there being a Dyeing factory was further identified by the Fourth excavation research which brought about the confirmation of the occupation of weaving for which certain evidences were unearthed there. Spindle whorls for weaving, sharp, pointed bones to make tools, used for making designs on clothes, needles made of brass, the hanging stones of the yarn, terracotta spheres, earthen vessels for holding liquid at various capacity, prove the various stages in weaving which had remained like evidences in the Archaeological survey made at Keeladi. In Sangam literature there were references about the art of weaving. It was in Madurai there were many who had numerous occupational skills. There was also a separate group called Kammiyar who were engaged in weaving and this detail about their having followed weaving is to be noted.



### **Ounbal Nediavum maditharu virithu**

### **Kuriyavum periyavarum kammiyar kuliy**

### **Chiriyarum**

### **Naalveiru Theruvinnun kaal ura nirrara (Madurai.519:522)**

Not only the, elders but all the youngest too gathered there to adopt the occupation of weaving, which also indicated the part played by the Kammiyar in weaving. The works found in Aaruppadai showed how the kings and the philanthropist came forward to donate the clothes woven through spinning to those who were in need of them. The king called Thondaimaan, in seeing the poet Elanthiraiyan in tattered clothes, asked him to get rid of the

clothes and granted him the clothes woven. This can be known from the line, given below.

### **Paasi Ann'a chitharvai neeki**

### **Aavi anna avirnuur kalinganm (Peru 468:69)**

This evidence shows how on the, ancient days custom of spinning clothes by means of thread was in Vogue. Then in Chirupaanaaruppadai to the practice of donating garments to the poor poets was mentioned. (Chiru\_235:236). It was on this basis that the news of the identification of weaving occupation undertaken by all is found to be in line with the evidences mentioned here and there in Sangam literature is to be noted.

### **Ornaments**

Women wearing the, costly gold ornaments, copper articles, beads of gems, more than 4000 gem stones, beads, terracotta gems, bangles made of conch, golden bangles, ivory bangles, gems made of stones are the artefacts obtained at keeladi. The report made by the members of Tamil Nadu Department of Archaeology has brought to the notice of all that the, society of keeladi was capable of making ornaments of various kinds very skillfully with artistic ability.



It was in the literary works of Sangam period the evidences of the, artefacts can be seen. Here, and there. The ivory bangles are made by sawing the ivory and, so they are called ivory bangles. In Madurai kanchi the details, about those who were engaged in making ivory bangles, were mentioned.

### **Koudupoul kadainarum Thirumeini kuyininarum (Madurai511)**

The people who would buy the things imported from other countries, from the, sea gems, pearls and gold and then sell them used to live in the, street of business men at Madurai which details might be seen in Madurai kan-

chi.

**Neeravum piravum**

**Palveru Thirumeni muthamoudu poun-koundu**

**Chirantha Theaethu panniyam pakar-tharum Madurai (504-506)**

As per the statement a big street for merchants was found at Madurai and so it was likely to have the urban culture and civilization and the ancient people who had the custom of buying and using very costly ornaments all these details were gathered from the research study. The rich ladies living at the Madurai city used to see the scenery of festivals standing at the Nilaa Maadam with too much of joy and they were very delighted to wear very gorgeous ornaments and looked very beautiful to the bystanders too had been pictorially described in Madurai Kanchi. (Madurai 444:452).and the details about ladies wearing jewels with beautiful flower works in their bangles too were explained. It was from this description that the modern facilities for manufacturing and the artistic skill required for giving very amazing touches to all these jewels fitted with the design of flowers being carved in gold were found to be, available in the Sangam Age. This was how the Archaeological research conducted at keeladi confirmed the fact that all the ancient people might have lived in an urban society luxuriously with all infra structure facilities.

It was at Keeladi various beads were unearthed the stone beads around 600 had been unearthed at Keeladi was what had been reported by the Archaeology researchers. The same details about the beads had been described in the Paripadalkal in the Sangam literature. The same conception about the beads being fitted with the design of flowers carved in gold had been confirmed by the references seen in many literary works of Sangam period. In Sangam period the ancient people had made use of the stone beads to make many ornaments. In all these poems such as

**Palveiru Thirumani (Madurai, 505)**

**Thirumani kuyinarum (Madurai 511)**

**Slangu kathir Mikumani '(pathi 58:17)**

**Elangu kathir Thirumani (pathi 76:14)**

The descriptions about the different kinds of beads were mentioned.

### **Tube Wells.**

In continuation with the Keeladi excavation study in the fourth stage 5820 very rare artifact's had been unearthed. In order to confirm the fact that all the famous places, all over Tamil Nadu



had been trading urban cities with other countries through sea route and became very famous in those times too. All these details had been registered in the form of verses in Sangam literature. Hence It was necessary to know that it was on the basis that the evidences obtained at keeladi seem to be a, The terracotta tube wells were also found to be one, among them. . The terracotta tubes were used to make the tube wells and so they are called tube wells. Mostly on the regions of the, sea shore and on the banks of the, rivers and in all the places where sand should not slide down the tubes would be used. All details about the setting up of tube wells were also realistically portrayed in Sangam literature.

### **Pural panri pal kouli**

**Urai kinarru pouranj cheri (o.pa (.75:76)**

These lines indicate how in the, region where the tube wells were erected, the hen and pigs were also reared there by those people. In addition to this we come to know the reason for fulfilling the need for water and food, the ancient people, had dug tube wells and had reared the hens too. The use of the tube wells was meant for drinking purpose and for other domestic purposes too which was felt by the



ancients and so this practice of setting up such wells was still in Vogue. The details, about the wells being dug in the ancient period can be known in all the instances referred in Sangam literature.

**Thotpathan amaitha surunkai Aada-varkalai**

**Pouri purapoa nuuri, vinai padarnthu**

**Kalluruthu eariya val uvarp paduvil**  
**(Agam.79: 1-3).**

These words point out how men worked strenuously hard to break and ignite fire in the rocks and dig wells to bring the resource of water. The way in which the, ancient people obtained the, supply of water by digging wells which had been mentioned in Sangam literature was confirmed by the tube, wells, the result of the Archaeological evidence unearthed at Keeladi. Excavation study .

#### **The Bones Of Animals, And Birds**

From the excavation research conducted at Keeladi the bones of bulls, ox, goat, deer, forest pig and peacock and also that of birds were evacuated. It was from this, account that the urban civilization of Keeladi had attained widespread progress in the field of agriculture was brought to the notice of all. Aeriru Thazhuvuthal was supposed to be one of the ancient practices at times of marriage. The male guy who was capable of taming the bull had the right to marry the girl of his choice was called Aeruthazhuvuthal In kalihougai, of the seventeen songs, in Mulai kali, there were seven songs related to the custom of Aerithazhuvuthal. The custom of women being at the spot to give the girl in marriage with the guy who had succeeded in his attempt to tame the bull, was very well described in Kalthogai (kali.101.10.14). It was also stated how, all the youngsters were very enthusiastic to participate in the race of Aeru thaluvuthal and the way in which how they worshipped their gods before the race, was also mentioned in the literary work. The guy who was very afraid of facing the deadly bull would not be preferred

for marriage which was the opinion of all women in those days and this fact had also been mentioned in kalithogai.

**Kouleiruk koudanjchuvanai marumaiyum**

**Pullaalae Aaya magal (kali.103:63-64)**

The fact that the most deadly bull which was clasped and controlled by the guy was only liked to be married by those women in those days was derived from the Sangam literature Even if harm was done to the participants in the race called Aeru thazhuvuthal, in those days various types of bulls, we're trained for this festival and also what types were brought in to the, aerina, - all these factors were mentioned in kalithogai Mulai kali. (105:1.22) Black bull, white bull with red spot, the most aggressive bull, some having very long legs, and also we can know about the various types of them mentioned. As different kinds of bulls were brought up, for the festival and the most victorious was admired and selected for marriage by women in general and as it was Celebrated as a social festival, we are able to find out the significance of the festival relating to bulls in Sangam period. This, was how all the remnants excavated at Keeladi research evacuation study's evidences had reflected all the Sangam peoples cultural tradition as mentioned in all Sangam literature. Even now the Eiru Thazhuvuthal has become the part of the game revealing the cultural tradition of the ancient *Tamilars in Jallikattu*. Not only for the requirement of food but also for maintaining the traditional life, style of the people that rearing of the bulls had become most significant in those ancient days. The bones of bulls unearthed at Keeladi seemed to testify the fact. about it being very significant at the ancient days. At Keeladi the bones of wild bore too were obtained. It was known from the Sangam literature how the Ancient Tamil people had tactfully caught the wild boar by strategic devices.

**Cheinoun agalntha madivaai, payampin**

**Veelmugak keilal (Madurai, 294:295)**

## Tamil Bhrahmi letters in mud tiles.

Inscribed Tamil Brahmi Script in pot sherds



The literacy period of the Tamils being the 3d century was not likely to be so for the Tamil letters

engraved on the pot tiles obtained at the excavation study at Keeladi showed that it had been only at the 6th century. Of all the tiles identified at the excavation, in some of them the names like, Aathan kuviran Kouthira, Aathanedunka, Theeran, Ouyi, vaanenai were found. Of all the, pot tiles identified at Keeladi excavation research study Aathan was the name often used in many places in the Sangam literature. In all the Pathu paddal, in Aynngurunour the page called Marutham begins like this, in all poems.

### **Vaazhi Aathan vaazhi Avini** (Aynngurunour1-10:1)

The details about Aathan pounthai patinathukuriyavan can be known from the Puranaanuru. The descriptions of the beauty of the ladies made in the Sangam literature by the great poets in comparison with the beautiful cities are numerous evidences. It was in this way the beauty of the daughter of the king, Oureiyina was compared with the richness of the Aathan's Pounthai pattinam in the following example.

### **Aeir panratha vayal neerparantha cheruvin**

### **Then malintha Manila, poun malintha marukin**

### **Paduvandu Aarkum panmalar kaavin**

### **Neduevl Aathan pounthai anna**

### **Perunchir (purana.(338.1-5)**

Besides the name, Aathan, joined with alishi has become Aathan alishi (Puran\_71: 13) who was found to be one of the friends of the king called Oulaiyur Boothapandiyan which had been revealed in the poem of Puranaanuru At

the same time the name of Vaigai which was responsible for the civilization of Keeladi was also referred in the same poem which seemed to be another evidence for this case study. The poem was given below.

### **Aran nilai thiriyia anbin avaiyathu**

### **Thiran eil oruvanai naaiy muraithirinthu**

### **Melikoul chaithein Aaguka, malu pukal**

### **Vaiai chulntha valankelu vslspin.poiyaa**

### **Yaanan maiyal koumaan**

### **Maavanum maneyil Aanthaiyum urai saal**

### **Anthuvanj saathanum aathan alichiyum**

### **Venchina eakanum ulapadprarum**

(purana 71:7-14)

At the same time this name Aathana is supposed to have combined with one of the seven philanthropists called Ouri is what was believed by all.

### **Malaiyani kundrathu kilavannaalum**

### **Elaiyani yaanai erapourkku eiyum**

### **Chudar vidu pasun pon churpannam munkai**

### **Adupour Aans AathanOuri**

### **Maari van kodai kaaniya nanrum** (puran.153: 1-5)

As per this poem, the king was supposed to be the ruler of country which was full of hills wearing rain like an ornament, often seen riding on the elephants adorned with costly jewels, willing whole heartedly to donate anything to those who would approach him for charity, would appear in splendor with outshining golden ornament on the wrist, very brave at the battle field and full of compassion to bestow wealth upon the needy as well. It was at this juncture we can see the word Aathan being written in the unearthed pot tiles at Keeladi which had been found in the Sangam literature separately and at some of the literary works with the name our joined. All the evidences obtained at Keeladi showed how the people of Keeladi lived in the urban civilized society with a sense of literacy.

### Weaving Industry

Recovery of 10 spindle whorls, 20 sharply pin pointed bone tip tools used for design creations, hanging stones of the yarn, terracotta spheres, copper needle and earthen vessels to hold liquid clearly attest the various stages of weaving industry from spinning, yarning, looming and weaving, later for dyeing. The archaeological findings of the Excavation wing of Archaeological Survey of India at this site confirmed of the dyeing industry. So, the occurrence of recent antiquities also attests the existence of weaving industry.



### Life Style of Ancient Keeladi People

The occurrence of seven gold ornaments, copper article, beads of gems, more than 4000 beads of semiprecious stones, glass beads, shell bangles, ivory bangles and well crafted household utensils which indicate the culture richness and economic prosperity of Sangam Age.



### Terracotta vessels



Red, black ware, pot sherds, red pot tiles, black pot tiles, heated mud plates are the things made of mud, gathered

at keeladi which was the news released by the Tamil Nadu, Archaeology Department. It was on the, basis that the pot tiles and vessels made of mud and the tiles used for ceiling show how Keeladi became very remarkable in making artifacts in the ancient period. The people living in Sangam period made use of mostly the vessels made of mud. In particular they used the vessels for storing the food materials, for cooking, for eating for drinking water and

kal, for keeping the plants bearing flowers, for conducting funeral rites and, all also for several needs, the things made of mud were used which was gathered from the reading of the Sangap paadals. Moreover the things made of mud, excavated at keeladi seemed to confirm it. The line given below shows the use of pots for making food.

**Nedunkinaru Ouluuru uvari thondi thoulai**  
**Muravuvai kulichi muri aduopu eiri**  
 (peru.97-99)

The meaning of the poem shows how in ancient period water being taken from the deep well in to the rimless pot and poured in to another pot kept on tire for cooking rice and also lots of pots were taken on journey to distant place to get food cooked which was enumerated in (perum\_362-367) To drink kal too the mud pots, were used. (Puram297:6) and, at the, same time to extract curd too these were used. (Puram 33.3) Agam. 276.kali.9: 2) of all the pot sherds, the Thazhi seemed to be very huge. It was used by the ancient people for conducting funeral rites. It was at Keeladi excavation research study the red and black mud sherds were gathered. The Sangam song too made a mention about the use of the Thazhi in red hue which was confirmed at the excavation centre .

### Play things.

The artifacts used for playing to while, away the time, such as dice ,hop scotch-



es , terracotta were unearthed The use of the things relating to the games bring out the urbanised civilization of the ancient people and, also about the ways that they were delighted to spend their leisure time in the ancient period. In Sangam literature too many games were being described. So we are able to find out how the games played at leisure times has become related to their life, style and, also the play things obtained at the excavation research

conducted, at Keeladi were found to be in line with what had been described in the ancient Sangam literature. There are also many evidences about both men and women who had been involved in sports activities. Playing in water is known as in Tamil as Neer vizhaiyattu, which had been mentioned in many poems in Sangam literature. The puranaanuru poem 243- described how both men and, women were very much interested in participating in Neer vizhaiyattu. All people were happy to take with them the games apparatus like Nei pusappatta visiri, (pari.6: 12) and the discs filled with coloured liquid or Neereiki (pari.10:12) on the Vaigai river which had been beautifully described in paripaddal.

### **Urban civilization and commerce.**

Brick works, factories, water management, agriculture, the development of economy with wide streets, congested population, the advancement of Science, the usage of letters with all these things the urban civilization is contained.. The writers like, R. Sivanantham, sundar, and Ganesan had enumerated the ten aspects which had been the basis for the formation of the urban civilization. They were given below. The formation of an urban civilization depends upon the area of occupation, the commercial link that it has within the country and other foreign country, the advanced technology, the industries, the combination of races living there and the use of many languages, among all, the higher level of literacy, mastery over skills, the beautiful workmanship of things revealing the cultural heritage are the denoters which had been regarded as ten valuable aspects. 2019:20) Most of the above mentioned aspects depicting things, were derived at keeladi by means of which it is to be determined that keeladi was supposed to be an urban city with rich heritage of culture.

Keeladi was also called a commercial city too in those days. The things needed for making clothes, the vessel used for dyeing the clothes determined the weaving occupation of the

people, the most valuable ornaments obtained there indicated the prevalence of occupation of making jewels, in those days, the excess availability of the pot shreds, roof tiles and also the setting up of factory there indicated the main occupation of the, ancient people, all these remnants indicated keeladi being urbanized in the ancient period. Besides this keeladi was supposed to have commercial link with other countries through water ways. This also came to be known from the, excavation study. All the excavation studies conducted at keeladi proved as it was situated on the river bed of vaigai, it should have been involved in commercial business, with other countries as well. So as stated above, the nagar nearby Keeladi too was Madurai which was supposed to be a very ancient city There were many instances in Madurai kanchi to prove how that commercial culture had attained its, zenith in the ancient Tamil Nadu. In Madurai Kanchi a description was found emphasising the vast expansion of trade and commerce through the sea and the need for carrying the consumptive goods in very huge ships for the ancient very rich people. In the commercial culture levying tax was found to be in vogue and there were many sunga chavadikal in the big streets too for which there were many evidences. It was at this juncture that the remnants obtained like costly ornaments, the evidences required for the urbanization of the city as described in the Sangam literature, all seemed to testify how the city Madurai became a popular commercial centre with the water way in the ancient period.

### **Conclusion**

The keeladi excavation study is going to make a huge change in the History of Thamilaagam in association with Sangam literature All the, evidences excavated at keeladi showed clearly all the various factors relating to the ancient period. All the evidences obtained from the excavation at keeladi can be known from the study of Sangam literature. Hence a necessity too arises now to conduct once again the re-



search at the excavation centre to testify the factors implied in the Sangam literature. All the details implied in Sangam literature, relating to Madurai, vaigai, and the historical notes are found to be in line with the keeladi research study. The things found at Keeladi relating to weaving like the vessel used for dyeing, the, costly ornaments, tube wells, the bones of animals, pot sherds, the names in Tamil letters, the things relating to games, the brick works, terracotta, stamp, all are the Archaeological evidences which had been related in Sangam literature. It is at such a state that the excavation evidences are found to be the living witness for that conveyed in Sangam literature. Hence keeladi was supposed to be the example for being urbanized in civilization. To add more weight age, many details were provided about the urban civilization in Sangam literature. Besides this, the recent conception about how keeladi became most dominant in sea trade, is formed by the Researchers recently. To confirm the statement, many places on Thamilagam were found to be linked with other countries for the sake of trade and became very popular urban cities all these details had already been registered in the ancient writings. It is, at such a state that it is expedient to know that all that had been gathered at keeladi called, Archaeological evidences were found to be living witnesses for what had been narrated in Sangam literature.

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