CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION
INTRODUCTION

In the last three chapters we have tried to understand the megalithic tomb types and their cultural contents made available through explorations, excavations in the region under study, by cataloguing the sites, providing all the field data and the description of the types and the antiquities respectively. These now would help us to discuss the various aspects of the megalithic culture in the region. In this context it is necessary to understand the distribution pattern, similarities and probable relationship of the various megalithic types with the types found in the adjacent region. In order to understand this aspect in a smaller region, a thorough study of the distribution pattern of the various types in a larger region and their probable relationship with the neighbouring regions is necessary. Therefore an assessment of the distribution pattern of the megaliths in entire Kerala is attempted here because Palghat forms only a part of the larger geographical unit.

DISTRIBUTION PATTERN OF THE MEGALITHS IN KERALA

From the analysis of the various types and their relative geographical locations the following observations are made regarding their distribution pattern. They are given below typewise.
CISTS are widely distributed but on a small scale concentrated in Trivandrum districts. Cists are found in the Wynad, Palghat and Trichur districts also. In Wynad near the celebrated Edakal caves numerous cists were noticed.

DOLMENS are found in the districts of Trivandrum, Kottayam, Idukki in small scale. The region is an upland where laterite formation and granite hill ranges are more. This type is more loosely distributed in various parts of the country along with some other types of megaliths.

CAIRN CIRCLES are also widely distributed but more in Idukki district.

KUDAIKALS AND TOPIKALS are found in the lateritic plains of Kozhikode immediately adjacent to Cannanore and Trichur district.

MENHIRS are mostly found in Idukki and Kottayam. Here it should be noted that Idukki is not far away from the Palani hills. So if a thorough exploration is conducted, we can trace the connection with the types found in Palani hills and of Idukki region. Here also other types coexist with menhirs. In Coimbatore - Palani area at Sittanavasal in Pudukottai district there are cists having two menhirs in the bounding stone circle. This indicates the overlap of these two in Sittanavasal area.
6. **ROCK-CUT CAVES** are more found in the laterite formation of the region. They are concentrated in the district of Trichur, Calicut and Cannanore. They are conspicuous by their absence in the coastal alluvial sand. In recent times rock cut caves are found in the northern part of erstwhile Malabar region i.e., the present South Kanara district of Karnataka State.

**OBSERVATIONS**

Malappuram district in the north, lying between Kozhikode and Palghat region, has not yielded many megaliths whereas Trichur on the South, Wynad on the north and Palghat on the east of Malappuram have yielded many megaliths of various types. Keeping this aspect in view, the explorations carried out by the author, have resulted in the occurrence of many megalithic sites with rock cut caves, Kudaikals, Topikals, (Chapter Two) and menhirs. But structural chambers made of granitic slabs are not usually met with. This may be because of the predominance of the laterite exposures.

In the south-west, Alleppy has not yielded megaliths whereas the adjacent districts Kottayam and Quilon have yielded many megalithic monuments. Therefore this area also needs exploration.

For obvious reasons (Geological) cists, menhirs and dolmens are found more in the granitic trap of the ghat region and the rock cut caves, Kudaikals, and Topikals are located in the lateritic plains.
Cannanore district has yielded the largest number of rock-cut caves. The adjoining regions like South Kanara district of Karnataka State have recently yielded rock-cut caves. Therefore Cannanore appears to be the focal area of the rock-cut cave types.

A general comparison of these zones indicate that typologically the megaliths of Wynad-Cannanore regions are akin to those of Mysore and Mercara and the megaliths of Idukki and Palghat to those of Palani and Coimbatore. Further Wynad-Cannanore area and Idukki Palghat area seem to form the peripheral zones of the megalithic focal areas of Mysore, Kcdagu (Coorg) and Coimbatore focal areas respectively.

In the region under study some of the cists and dolmenoid cists in the site at Thonipadom with square parthole are intimately akin to Coorg, Mysore tradition. The oblong cists and dolmenoid cists are intimately akin to the cists at Coimbatore typologically and in respect of contents, especially the occurrence of russet coated white painted pottery in wavy line design is noteworthy. The burrows with cist chambers are akin to dolmens of Palani hills typologically.

BURROW

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PLAN OF THE CHAMBER

A noteworthy feature noticed is that the chambers concealed in the burrows are invariably trapezium in plan. Elsewhere in Kerala region i.e., in Wynad area the oblong pits noticed sparingly beside the rock excavated megalithic tombs are generally trapezium in plan. One can lie stretched in the pit with hands below the head near the wider area. If this is any indicator, the wider end of the chamber under study seems to indicate that the head was oriented towards south-west.
COMPARISON WITH MEGALITHS IN THE ADJACENT REGIONS

About 200 kms as the crow flies, south-south-east of the above site, similar burrows are found in the Bodimetu, Muthukad and Bison valley near Periyakanal in the high ranges (Vasudeva Poduval, 1938-39 pp. 8-15). Here also one or more such groups each consisting of multiple chambers exist. But the burrow supporting the chambers does not tail off to the ground forming a burrow in profile, instead there is a dry masonry wall enclosure holding the burrow. This has been necessitated obviously owing to the erection of the chambers on the bare rock surface, for the orthostats are placed on the rock surface without any pit line. This structural feature readily recalls the Palani groups of megaliths and intimately resembles them. Palani is about 250 kms east of Palakuzhy, Anayadiyamparamthe and Mukhapurutha and about 150 kms north-east of Bison valley. But it looks as though that this area with these sites seem to form the focal area of multiple chambered burrow type with or without burrow masonry wall.

In Palakuzhy although the multiple chambers are erected on the bare rock there is no enclosure wall. However, the dimensions indicate that space between the chamber and the edge of the burrow is longer than that between the multiple chamber and dry masonry wall. It appears therefore that the difference in the mode of construction of
the burrow is due to the different methods rather than any other reason.

Secondly the erection of the round burrow is comparatively elementary. It is quite likely therefore, in this focal region the multiple chamber types with dry masonry wall appear to be developed patterns and may therefore be later than the round burrow at Palakuzhy.

As mentioned in the third chapter the occurrence of terracotta figurines (which are described in the fourth chapter) concealed under the burrow is noteworthy. These terracotta figurines vary in types and are very interesting.

Obviously it is not a sepulchral monument like the other megaliths nearby. The type and the nature of the terracotta suggest the monument to be of ritualistic character.

**TOPIKAL**

A study of the Topikals from the point of view of architecture and contents tentatively prove that there is no underground chamber on the one hand and no burial furniture in the surface chamber (discussed in the third chapter).
Taking for granted the absence of an underground chamber and also the absence of burial furniture in the surface chamber one may pose the question: Are they sepulchral or not?

Here may be recalled the opinion of Babington (1823: pp. 324-330) who had examined two topikals. To quote him "Though from its situation size and appearance I was led to expect my labour would not have been in vain, nothing was found in the hollow space between the stones which supported the topikals and which were themselves placed on the solid rock." He concludes that these monuments are not sepulchral, or if sepulchral, their contents have crumbled into indistinguishable dust.

Two facts emerge out of Babington's observation

1. The monument is raised on solid rock. So the existence of an underground chamber, or an urn is completely ruled out.

2. If it is sepulchral the remains deposited in it with any grave goods were of perishable nature. But the pottery vessels, and urn will not crumble into dust form. At the most it may get crushed owing to over weight and the pieces therefore should be available.

Krishna Aiyer (1929-30: pp. 115-126) reports the excavation of a Topikal at Eyyal which yielded pottery vessels of fragile nature.
and indistinguishable bone bits. But this evidence from a lone site is insufficient to establish the sepulchral nature of this monument. It may be funerary in nature but may be of a particular class.

Now if they are not sepulchral monuments of the general megalithic type, then it is necessary to probe into the nature, purpose and origin of them.

LOCAL TRADITION

Local tradition ascribe these topikals to Budhism. The conical chamber with spread out umbrella-like capstone, however, reminds one of a Budhist stupa with umbrella top.

SO ARE THEY BUDHIST?

In order to understand this aspect, we have to examine various points such as the status of Budhism in ancient Kerala, the views expressed by various scholars about the origin of Topikals and other cognate monuments.

THE STATUS OF BUDHISM IN ANCIENT KERALA

Though Budhism was not a prevailing religion, it had many followers in Kerala. This is attested by the following facts.
In Girnar edicts of Ashoka, there is a reference to Keralaputa which corresponds to Kerala. Ashoka claims that in his dominion, as also in the adjacent countries such as Chola, Pandya, Satyaputas, Keralaputa, Tamarapani, the Kingdom of Antiochus, the Greek king, the system of caring for the sick—both men and cattle—followed by the king, has been everywhere put into practice. And he had brought from elsewhere and planted useful healing herbs wanted for men and cattle. This statement helps us to deduce certain facts.

a. Ashoka had maintained close relation and rapport with the neighbouring kings to the extent that his idea was put into practice in the respective countries also. So in all probability he might have sent his missionaries to those countries.

2. Narayana Pillai (1941, p. 505) opines that although Buddhism was not practised in considerable degree among the masses as other religions in the early period, there were of course, Buddhists in considerable number in central Travancore and Vanji (Earstwhile Cochin State). It is interesting to note that in a Temple at Nilamperoor in central Travancore a Buddhist image is worshipped as God Vishnu (?) (whether the image is of Vishnu or Budha is to be verified). In this context it may
be noticed here that Porkalam, an ancient site where Topikals, kudaikals and rock cut chambers were found, was in erstwhile Cochin state.

3. Buddhism and Jainism gained considerable popularity in Kerala and seemed to have been in the ascendant till about 6th century A.D. The Vihara at Srimulasthana was internationally famous as a centre of Buddhist learning (Panicker, 1960 pp.5-6).

4. In the 1976 gazetteer of Palghat district the number of Buddhists is recorded as four. It shows that there might have been many more in the ancient times. All the above mentioned evidences show that Buddhism was popular in Kerala in the past. But the Buddhist origin of the topikal cannot be ascertained.

Here it may be worth recalling the views of various scholars about the origin of rock cut chambers, Topikals, Kudaikals and examining them.
THE VIEWS OF VARIOUS SCHOLARS ABOUT THE ORIGIN OF ROCK CUT CHAMBERS, TOPIKALS AND KUDAIKALS

JOUVEAU - DUBRAIN'S VIEW (1922·P. 12)

First let us take up Jouveau-Dubrail's view. He argues that the Buddhist stupas are the perfect imitation of the huts of the Aryan Chiefs. The rock cut chambers of Malabar from the architectural perspective are the imitations of the Buddhist stupa or the Aryan huts.

From a careful study of his argument one may feel that it is inappropriate in the case of rock cut chambers because all the rock cut chambers are not alike in architecture. On the contrary, it may hold good in a small degree in the case of a particular aspect of Topikal i.e., the capstone looking like a Chuttery or umbrella which may have similarities with umbrella found on the top of the 'anda' part of a Buddhist stupa. Further as in the case of Buddhist stupa, a standardisation of architecture is also followed in the case of Topikal. Hence it may not be wrong in surmising that the builders of this monument might have been familiar with the stupa from which they might have copied certain architectural aspect i.e., the umbrella and made it part of their tomb(?) architecture.
UMBRELLA AS THE MODEL FOR THE ORIGIN OF TOPIKAL

Krishnaswamy (1949 p. 142) refuting the argument of Jouveau-Dubrail, has put forward his views, "In a region where the rainfall is extra ordinarily heavy and an umbrella a necessity to protect oneself, a structure like an umbrella may easily have commanded the local folk to be employed also in the construction of their tombs, so as to afford better protection to the dead. The Topikal and Kudaikal also may have the same origin."

On a careful examination of the above said view, the following facts emerge:

(a) The necessity of an umbrella under such climatic condition for protecting oneself cannot be ruled out. But certain other aspects are also to be taken into consideration.

(b) If the climatic condition and the importance of umbrella under such condition was the only source for the origin of Topikals, why did certain people construct cist chambers having flat capstones? They also should have a slanting capstone, to ensure protection from the rain.

(c) If umbrella was the model for the Topikals what was the necessity of making a chamber underneath it above the ground?
Thus it is clear that though it looks like umbrella, the aspects of protection under such climatic condition were not the only factor which inspired the origin of Topikal, but there was a different purpose too.

**VIEW OF LONGHURST**

In this context the view of Longhurst is worth examining. He has delineated the prominent part that umbrella has played in the origin of the stupa as a symbol of Sovereignty, Temporal or Spiritual.

This argument is convincing because the stupa is the symbol of the universe and it contains the relic of Budha, the master of the prominent Budhist teachers.

A thorough examination of the architecture, contents and the various theories about its origin may only pose a new question

**ARE THEY MEMORIALS OR VOTIVE MONUMENTS?**

Though we cannot come to a definite conclusion, the following points can be observed.

a) From the point of view of architecture, contents, Topikals do not appear to be sepulchral. Further, they are well dressed
also, unlike the megalithic monuments of the other type. This aspect makes one think that they are not megalithic tombs.

b) The distribution of Topikals in a limited area in limited number gives the idea that, it was constructed for only certain class of people of a tribe, may be chiefs or religious leaders.

c) In view of the fact that the vihara in central Travancore was a centre of Budhist learning, perhaps Budhism had many followers in Kerala. But it is difficult to trace out the establishment, if there be any, in the areas because of the artificial change in the topography of the land in due course.

d) Thus whether the Topikals are Budhist or whether they are influenced by Budhism, is very difficult to ascertain.

e) Finally, whether these are new types introduced in Kerala during their migration by the Aryans themselves needs further study.

ROCK-CUT CAVES

The discussion on the various aspects of rock-cut chambers such as its origin, architecture, distribution pattern etc., in third chapter has helped us make the following observations
1. The theories propounded by the scholars such as Joueau-Dubrail (1922, p. 12) regarding the origin of the rock-cut caves, stating that the caves were the imitation of the circular Aryan huts on the one hand and Buddhist origin on the other appears to be untenable, which has been refuted by Sharma (1956, pp. 93-115).

2. Keeping in view of the occurrence of the caves in the lateritic trap only, it may be argued that the excavation of the rock-cut caves was necessitated by the topographic condition of the region. The nonavailability of the laminated granitic rock to build the subterranean chambers compelled the people who were practising this particular type of burial custom i.e., disposing of the dead inside the chambers, to find out some other way to make the chambers.

Moreover, as the laterite rock was easy to cut into desired shape, it was excavated to form the chambers. It is to be noted here that all the people in a society did not follow the same practice; only a section of the society was practising this system of disposing of the dead in the subterranean chambers. The occurrence of other type of burials in the same area may support this view.

3. In view of the erratic ground plan of these rock-cut
chambers, it is improbable to say that these monuments were Budhist, in comparison with standard type of Budhist monuments, howsoever big or small, found elsewhere in many parts of India.

4. The domical shape of the roof and circular plan of the floor as argued by Dubrail is not an imitation of the Aryan huts or Budhist stupa. In this context it is to be noted here that in all the caves the ceiling was not domical in shape. Flat ceilings are also noticed. The caves were usually circular in plan but polygonal, parabolid, roughly square and rectangular were also there. Further the plans of irregular shape may be owing to the nonstandardisation of the architecture of these caves unlike the Topikals. The plans and elevations were in accordance with the individual's imagination, equipment and the nature of the local rock as well as the economy and status of the person concerned.

5. Regarding the entrance of the caves Gururaja Rao (1972 P.50) has opined that the entrances were wide enough to allow an adult to crawl through. But a study of the height and width of the entrances shows that the size of the entrance was less than the standard chest measurement of a man so that an adult cannot crawl through it or the dead body could be inserted into the cave vertically.
From this it becomes evident that the caves contained only secondary burial along with the grave goods. The non-occurrence of full skeletal remains from any of the chambers so far reported and the occurrence of pieces of bones deposited in a sarcophagus in some of them may support this view (Sharma, 1956: P. 112).

6. As already discussed in the third chapter, the distribution pattern of the caves, especially the scattered distribution and areas of concentration, may be explained in relation to the settlement pattern. They are concentrated more in number in the areas which had either an ancient port or was an ancient trading centre such as Cannanore, Calicut, Western part of Malappuram and the Northern part of Trichur. In all probability the trading centres and its nearby places had been thickly populated compared to other places. Moreover, these caves are more found in the laterite area which are nearest to the sea coast whereas in the interior places though there are suitable laterite exposures, the number of the caves is proportionally less. These caves are reported from within a radius of 40 to 50 kms from each port on the western coast.
As mentioned and discussed in the second and third chapters respectively, in the high burrow beneath the platform with pillars are found fragments of terracotta figurines and vessels in the midst of rubbles. They are in abundance in fabric, type and technique. They seem to belong to at least 2 to 3 periods as can be known from the fragments collected. From the state of their preservation and their characteristics they may be classified into at least two groups—early and late. How old are the earliest is not readily possible to determine. It may be recalled here that even today in Kerala including the region under study, manufacture of such terracotta figurines of various proportions and types is in vogue and the tradition seems to be quite old. Further in different areas the tribal people particularly produced such terracotta figurines and use them in connection with some of the rituals including death (Breeks, 1837 pp. 72-110).

It is therefore necessary to compare these materials from the megaliths with the present or the immediate past. It is only then one may be able to say with some confidence about their cultural context.

These fragments, big and small, are found in the midst of the rubbles. It appears as though rubbles and figurines and vessels were put haphazardly at the same time.