CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION
As is already well known, Kerala is archaeologically rich. However, no comprehensive study of the archaeological relics has been carried out excepting some systematic attempts made by a few scholars on particular aspects such as megaliths in some areas. Although material remains of different cultures and periods have been brought to light in different parts of Kerala, this study till recently pushed back the cultural history to the beginning of the iron age megalithic only. The story of man preceding the megalithic culture was apparently blank. Sankalia (1974:P 69) while reviewing the development of prehistoric cultures in different parts of India observed that Kerala and Malabar have so far not yielded any palaeoliths, probably no search has been made or it may be that the coastal belt is of a recent growth. Thus reasons for the absence of palaeoliths might be truly geographical. Agarwal (1984:P.12) opines that for the absence of the traces of the early man in Kerala there could be two reasons; either the palaeolithic man avoided this area because of the dense forest and lack of raw materials or the recent alluvium as well as the forest residue has covered the older sites.

A thorough study of all archaeological remains of a region is essential to trace the history and development of cultures in that region. The necessity of such a study is realized in view of the fact that
although Indian archaeology in general is pursued well over many decades, still a coherent and correct picture of the cultures in many regions remains vague, for many parts of Kerala, Assam etc., have not been investigated as thoroughly as possible. Further explorations in such areas should be carried out as early as possible since many important archaeological evidences are fast disappearing or being destroyed in the wake of expansion of industrial, agricultural activities etc.. It is only after having a complete documentation of all the available archaeological remains that it is possible to have the most cogent and complete picture of the cultures through the ages in different parts of India. It is gratifying to note that such area-wise studies are being taken up especially by individual scholars in Universities and Institutes.

Meanwhile a young scholar took up field survey in North Malabar region looking for palaeolithic remains and indeed he succeeded in locating mesolithic sites in particular. Evidently therefore the earlier views regarding the palaeolithic cultures in Kerala will have to be given up or revised.

Further the existence of innumerable iron age, megalithic vestiges in Kerala is already wellknown. But the neolithic stage intervening the mesolithic and iron age megalithic culture is still hardly known. However mention may be made of the occurrence of a single neolithic celt from the foot of the Kanniyakode mountain. It
should be noted here that in the areas of the neighbouring states of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu many neolithic sites have been noticed. There is every possibility therefore of the diffusion of the neolithic culture into the Kerala region from the hinter lands especially in view of the fact that comparatively the incipient mesolithic culture could flourish in Kerala as in the neighbouring states. Obviously it is wrong to presume the absence of the remains of stone age cultures. On the other hand, non finding of stone age sites only indicates lack of intensive survey keeping in view the problems related to different stages of culture.

In Kerala Palghat region like some other areas is archaeologically potential. Moreover study of a smaller area will help to unravel different periods of cultural developments with accuracy and details. Palghat is contiguous to Coimbatore region of Tamil Nadu. Its cultural contacts with Karnataka are of time immemorial. In view of these facts one can very well expect the penetration of cultures developing in the two neighbouring regions and their coexistence, and their mingling with the local cultures even from the pre-historic times.

The present task is to carry out a systematic study of the various archaeological data obtained from Palghat region. Among these megalithic tombs constitute the major portion. Thus detailed study of megalithic tombs and comparison with similar tombs in the neighbouring
states forms the main theme of this thesis. In addition to the common types of megaliths like cist burials, found in other parts of India, Kerala had produced her own types such as Topikals and Kudaikals. Against this background a thorough study of all these types and other coexistent cultures in a particular region is undertaken.

PREVIOUS WORK.

A single neolithic celt collected (Phillip Lake, 1891, pp. 221-237) from the foot of the Kannyakode mountain in Palghat region attests that neolithic cultural elements had intruded into Kerala. Further Rajendran (1975, pp. 125-126) reports many lower palaeolithic sites in Palghat and Malappuram areas. The two places referred to by Phillip and Rajendran are different but with a distance of about 20 kms in between. The area therefore appears to be the scene of paleolithic people's activity. Intensive survey of this area for locating neolithic cultural elements is a desideratum. These investigations may give an idea about the extent of the intrusion or survival of the palaeolithic and neolithic culture. The non-occurrence of any neolithic habitational sites, so far, makes one believe that there was no regular settlement in these regions during neolithic period as in upper Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. But the megalithic builders seemed to have feeble contacts with the neolithic people in the survival stage. For outside Palghat region and North of it in Wynad was found a typical neolithic grey ware bowl with
red ochre painting on the edge within or in the vicinity of megalith

The megalithic tombs attracted the attention of the archaeologists since the early part of the 19th century. Babington (1823, pp. 321-330) was the first to excavate a type of megalith of the topikal type. Then onwards amateur and trained archaeologists continued to explore and excavate the megalith with clear cut objectives. Robert Sewell has prepared a list of megalithic remains found in Palghat region (Sewell 1882, pp. 252-253). Chandrasekhara Menon of A.S.I. (I.A.R. 1968-69, P.10) explored this region and has reported many megalithic sites with cist burials. The State Archaeological Department (I.A.R. 1964-65, P. 73) has reported some rock cut caves at Naduvattom in Malappuram district, Palghat region.

In view of the occurrence of megaliths in abundance and report of the latest discoveries of palaeolithic sites, Palghat region is chosen for study. By the by it should be noted that as in different parts of South India i.e., Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu (Ramachandran, 1971), in Kerala too numerous megalithic sites have been noticed from Northern Malabar to Trivandrum (Gururaja Rao, 1972, pp. 43-61) and Palghat forms only part of this entire megalithic cultural complex.

It should be noted here that the expression Palghat region does not strictly mean the boundary of the present Palghat district. For the
convenience of study, some parts of the adjacent Malappuram (district) are included.

From the above remarks two things are clear i.e., the Palghat region is archaeologically potential and is in a strategic position in relation with the neighbouring states, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. Therefore, further exploration in this region and study of the materials from the past and present exploration are likely to shed welcome light on the early cultures of this region. Keeping these aspects in view it has been taken up for exploration.

**ORIGIN OF THE NAME PALGHAT.**

Diverse theories have been propounded by scholars for the origin of the name Palghat. One view is that the name is in accordance with the Tamil classification of lands. In Tamil barren and rocky areas are called pala or palai. The cultivated area is called 'Marutham'. The coastal tracts were known as Neytal. So the postulation is that the name Palghat is derived from the combination of two words 'Palai' and 'Kadu' (forest). But major portion of this region is suitable for cultivation and many crops such as paddy, coconut, cereals are raised here. So the theory based on the Tamil tradition does not fit well with the geography.

Another version is that the whole area was once covered with
pala trees (Alsterialscholaris). Hence this region came to be known as 'Pala + Kadu = Palakadu' (Palghat district Gazetteer p. 1). In the references made by Francis Buchnan this area is known as Palghat (Palghat district Gazetteer, 1976 p. 1).

LOCATION

Palghat district is located between latitudes 10° 20' and 11° 14' N and longitude 76° 62' and 76° 66' E. This district is bounded by Malappuram and Nilgiri districts on the north, Coimbatore district on the east, Trichur district on the south, and Malappuram and Trichur districts on the west.

NATURAL DIVISION:

This region can be divided into high land and mid land geographically. The mid land regions vary in height at 7.62 mts to 76.2 mts from the mean sea level. The high land region is generally still at a higher level. On the eastern side of the western ghat mountain ranges form the border of the region and in this range there is a pass leading to the upghat region of Tamil Nadu, and it is considered a notable national feature. It has a width of 32.2 km. This is the only important passage connecting Kerala and Tamil Nadu. The height of the western ghat varies from 914 to 2,132.7 mts above M.S.L. The highest peak in this ghat is Ananginada.
PLATEAU AND PLAINS

This region consists of vast plain land and plateau. Both kinds of lands are very fertile and they supply major portion of paddy output in Kerala.

RIVERS.

The most important rivers that flow through this region are Bharatapuzha, Bhavani and Siruvani. These river systems have played a significant role in shaping the history of this region.

BHARATAPUZHA:

The longest (251 kms) of all the rivers in Kerala is Bharatapuzha known also as Neelanathi. It is a shallow river, very unsuitable for water transport. It originates from Anamalai hills at about 610.20 mts high. The other rivers are

1. Gayatripuzha,
2. Kannadi,
3. Korayar and
4. Thutapuzha.
This river with its tributaries drains major area of this district

THE BHAVANI RIVER.

This river rises from the Kundah mountains near Kudikkadubetta in the Nilgiris. After entering into Kerala it flows in north-east direction receiving a few more tributaries in its course (water sources of Kerala, An Advanced Report, 1988·P.218).

THE SIRUVANI RIVER.

This river originates from the Attappady hills in Palghat district. Through Kerala it flows independently and joins with Bhavani river near Coimbatore.

SEA COAST:

Palghat region has got sea coast with an ancient sea port, on the western side. This port is located in the Ponnani Taluk of present Malappuram district.

SPRINGS

Some of the springs in this region have legends about their origin. A spring in the Thenani village of Palghat is called Tenani Thirtham. People believe that to get Ganga water, Rama shot an arrow
on the ground causing a spring to rise up. At the end of this spring exists a tank called Brahmakundam. People believe that it was created by Brahma to offer sacrifices. Hence they venerate it.

Another two noteworthy springs are Govinda Thirtham and 'Sitakunda'. They are believed to have been created by Devendra and Sita. Therefore they are held in high veneration.

There are about 99 small and large natural tanks in the hill valley and also in plain in this region. These are used for bathing and irrigation purposes.

CLIMATE:

This region has a tropical climate. In March to May the heat is intense which cools down by the south-west monsoon rain in June to September. In the rest of the year thunder showers occur in the western part of the region while rain fall decreases in the eastern part.

The highest recorded rainfall in 24 hours is 415.0 mm. at Ottappalam on May 28, 1941.

The hottest month in the year is March. The recorded mean temperature in a day is 37.1°C (98.8°F) and the minimum is 24.6°C (76.3°F). The oppressive temperature decreases by the setting of monsoon. The highest minimum temperature recorded in Palghat is
41.7°C (107.1°F). On April 26, 1950 and the lowest minimum temperature is 15.6°C (61.1°F) on January 29, 1946.

Throughout the year the air is highly humid, the relative humidity being over 70 per cent. Except in the monsoon season the sky is clear.

Winds are gentle but turn violent during the monsoon season. During the summer season hot wind rushes into this region from the plains of Coimbatore.

**GEOLOGY**

Physiographically the Palghat region is divided into three.

1. Undulating region (Western part of the Plateau).
2. Gorge region (central part of the plateau).
3. Plain at the foot of the ghats.

The geological succession is as follows:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recent</th>
<th>Residual laterite</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Archaean</td>
<td>Dykes</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Charnockite</td>
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<td>Gneisses</td>
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GNEISS:

The major rock type found within archaean is biotite-granite-gneiss. This consists of quartz and felspar and to a lesser extent biotite. Garnet is also found with this rock. It makes a banded appearance in certain localities. This is called granite gneiss. The biotite granite is a grey or whitish rock and is medium or coarse grained. In certain areas hornblend is also noticed associated with the granite gneiss.

CHARNOCKITES

This rock type consists of hypersthene, bluish grey, quartz and felspar. This type of rock is common in the entire region.

DYKES:

This type of rock consists basic or intermediate felspars together with orthopyroxenes and essential minerals.

LATERITE:

This type of rock is found extensively covering the gneiss between the ghats and Arabian sea.
LIMESTONE

Vast deposit of Kankar is also met with in this region.

FAUNA

Palghat region with its undulating mountains, forests, valleys, rivers and stream nurtures a rich fauna which includes mammals, birds, fishes and crocodiles. Mammals include primates, ungulata, proboscidea, insectivora and rodentia. These different species are represented by monkeys of various types (primates) the tiger, the leopard etc. (carnivora), hyaena-hyaena, canis aureus etc. (Dog tribe) hoofed animals like Bibos gaurus, deer tribe spotted deer, wild goat etc. (Ungulata), the elephants (proboscidea), wuirrels, the bats, rats, birds and crocodiles, amphibian fishes and invertebrates constitute the fauna of this region.

FLORA

The growth of flora mainly depends on the physiographical and climatic condition of the region. Considering the fertility of the soil and seasonal rainfall, the usual crops, can be assessed. Palghat is known as the granary of Kerala. The major crops of this region paddy, pulses, pepper, ginger, turmeric, betelnuts, mangoes, banana, tapioca, coconut, tea, coffee, rubber. The wet and dry lands are
mainly used for paddy cultivation. The garden lands are used for cultivating coconut, jack tree, arecanut, mangoes etc. In the region adjoining Coimbatore, every variety of grains commonly cultivated in Coimbatore region is cultivated such as groundnut, varagu, ragi, blackgram, cholam, chama, horsegram and cotton. Thus the homogeneity in crops is a noteworthy feature.

FOREST

The forests of this region can be grouped into four:

1. The deciduous forest of the lower ghat slopes:

   This type of forest extends from the north to the pass area and stretches at a height of 457.200 mts. This forest contains valuable trees like Teak, East India, Rosewood etc.

2. The moist evergreen forest of the ghat on slopes climb:

   This extends at an altitude of 1219.200 mts from the foot of the mountains.

3. Ever green shola forest:

   Due to the high altitude trees do not grow big. Ferns and moss comprise the major portion which is ever green.
4. **Deciduous forest of the Attappady valley**

These are found at the slopes of the elevated area, with thick grown trees.

**PHYSIOGRAPHICAL AND GEOGRAPHICAL BEARING ON CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT**

Kerala has been exposed to outside world through its unbroken coast line from time immemorial. During the early centuries of the Christian era the Roman contact with her became very close as evidenced by the occurrence of Roman coins from various parts of Kerala. Roman influence had a bearing on the culture of Kerala. It is well discernible in the moulding of terracotta discovered during the exploration. The technique of manufacturing hollow terracottas was introduced by Romans, in India (Deshpande, 1965). The local people adopted this technique.

Further the origin of iron age megalithic practices in the mediterranean region and their passage to India through the western coast is a matter of serious concern among scholars. If it is so Kerala by her geographical position on the western coast in all probability has received these traits from outside. For Palghat region
Ponnani is an excellent ancient port, but not much is known about its antiquity. Another ancient and the most important port was Muziris, which has been recently renamed as Cranganore in the present Trichur district. This port was the emporium of trade and the meeting place of diverse cultures. Classical writers like Pliny, Ptolemy and the author of the Periplus give sketchy accounts of this sea port. The frequent arrival of foreign traders like the Romans and Arabs to this port resulted in the cultural interaction of this entire region.

LAND ROUTE:

There is a distinct possibility that there was a channel of communication between South India and North India even as early as the Indus valley civilization and that the spices of Kerala found their way to the north and from there to the west Asian countries through an old overland caravan route connecting these countries with Indus valley (Sreedhara Menon, 1979 :P.6). Palghat gap in the western ghat has been serving as an elementary land route, thereby connecting this region with her immediate neighbour Tamil Nadu. This was and is one of the few chief routes by which cultural intrusions in various degrees had taken place into the region through the ages. Kerala's cultural affinity with the neighbouring Coimbatore region is very conspicuous even today. And this was the case even in the past which is discussed below.
Another route that facilitated the arrival of cultural traits to the region is through Mysore, Coorg of Karnataka. These regions, if taken as a single geographical unit, even today present much that is common in various cultural aspects. For instance, megaliths of certain types of the iron age are commonly met with in these two regions.

Physiographically this area comprises thick forest, undulating plateau, hillocks, valleys and rivers. The find spots of palaeolithic and mesolithic tools are located at the foot of the hills. The material used for making the tools was quartz, which is locally available, reports Rajendran (1985, P. 8). For the probability of existence of human habitation in the hilly area is more in view of the occurrence of megaliths in abundance in such places. The selection of hill slopes for habitation might be in view of safety and the availability of food resources in the nearby forest. Subsequently with the commencement of settled life the arable land in the valley was used for cultivation.

Another reason may be the availability of huge natural sheets of stones from the granite rock exposures on the top of the hillocks because certain types of the megalithic tombs were constructed with granite slabs. Unchiselled crude, sheets of stones were used for capstone. But the orthostats were cut according to the requirements. In many localities burial sites are found in abundance where granite
rock outcrops are in plenty. But laterite stone blocks are used to bound the cist burials. This phenomenon is a usual feature in Palghat region. The builders of Topikals, Kudaikals and rock cut caves used the vast expanse of laterite rock available locally. In the regions which are at present in the Malappuram district, these types are usually found.

There are not much evidences available regarding the habitation along the river banks, unlike those in Karnataka and Maharashtra etc. It is difficult to explain this apparent enigma. Of course tracing of habitation sites in this part of the country is indeed very difficult.

METHODOLOGY

A. FIELD WORK

I. Keeping in view of the megalithic sites previously known on one hand and the areas suitably favourable for the erection of megalithic monuments as well as other favourable environmental conditions such as perennial water supply etc., on the other, certain areas in Palghat region were selected for intensive explorations. The explorations were almost village to village survey of archaeological remains with particular reference to megaliths.
II. In each of the megalithic sites explored every monument has been studied individually such as its present state of preservation, type and its characteristics, its measurements, orientations wherever possible, its contents wherever available, relative position and the local environmental condition of these megaliths.

III. All the megaliths previously known in this region have been studied and reports published previously have been consulted in detail and relevant data thereof have been collected.

IV. Photographs of the typical monuments and general view of the sites were taken, selected antiquities from some of the sites were collected.

B. STUDY

After the study of these sites a catalogue of all these sites giving all the necessary data about the sites and the megaliths is the subject of the second chapter. In the third and the fourth chapter respectively, the types and the antiquities are critically studied. In the fifth chapter discussion of the megaliths under study has been attempted. In the sixth chapter chronology of the megaliths under study has been attempted taking into consideration the field data and
the other appropriate relevant antiquities from the megaliths from the adjacent regions in particular and the latest opinions regarding periods of the megaliths in different regions in general. The last chapter contains observations and conclusions based on the studies in the preceding chapters.

**TERMINOLOGY.**

Perhaps no other branch of pre-historic archaeology has been bedevilled with varieties of confusing terminology as that of South Indian iron age megalithic culture. No doubt in course of time certain attempts have been made to systematise these terminologies e.g., V.D. Krishna Swamy (1949 .pp. 35-46) etc.. But new discoveries again pose problems with regard to the definitions of the terminologies. Hence an attempt is made here below to define terminologies for the megalithic types used in this dissertation.

1. **CIST CIRCLE.**

A subterranean stone chamber covered with a big capstone flush with ground in the centre of a stone circle of juxtaposed boulders without cairn packing.
2. **DOLMENOID CIST**

Cist partially buried in the ground the upper part being visible from above the ground covered with a huge capstone usually within a stone circle.

3. **BURROW**

Usually circular in plan hemispherical in profile made up of rubble stones obviously concealing oblong chambers without any bounding stones.

4. **TOPIKAL**

A conical chamber usually circular exteriorly squarish interiorly in plan above the ground formed by 4 or 5 clinostatic stones and it is capped with a dressed laterite hemispherical cap stone.

5. **KUDAikal**

A hemispherical well-dressed laterite cap stone concealing a big urn buried in the pit beneath.

6. **ROCK-CUT CAVE**

Subterranean chambers excavated in the laterite exposures
having entrance approached by flight of steps to the bottom of the chamber from the ground level located roughly on any of the cardinal points.

7. MENHIRS.

Huge tall stones of irregular shape of granite or laterite planted in upright position beside an urn burial.