INTRODUCTION

The ancient TamilNādu has been divided into six main divisions such as Tondainādu, Cheranādu, Pandiyanādu, Cholanādu and Kongu Nādu, in which Kongu Nādu has been taken up for a study and research. Regional study owes its importance since the comprehensive history of India or TamilNādu be attempted only on the basis of an intensive and meaningful study of the various micro-units. According to L. Panikkar, “Every region in India has contributed to the evolution of the Indian people; every group added to our common heritage”.

According to Stein, an interesting aspect of ancient and modern, Tamil country as a cultural territory is the different kinds of sub-regions within the macro-region of Tamilakam.

According to Banerjee - A proper study of the regional history is necessary to understand the unique features of the micro-units and their interaction with the macro-unit.

The significance that lays in choosing the Kongu country for the regional study is its mystical and inter-state configuration and intended to focus on this particular area, especially during the megalithic period. (i.e. Iron age).

Megalithic period though has unveiled many mysteries, but still has to go with way excavations and researches to bring about the political socio-economic, and the cultural traits hidden within itself and the Kongu country with its variegated political history, well-knit
geographical unit and its unique cultural instincts together brings out the earnestness and eagerness to chose this topic.

**Previous work**

With regard to Kongu Nādu there were many pioneers in this field who had taken up the history of Kongu Nādu relying on the early Tamil works and scantily with the archaeological evidence, and this paved the way and rendered immense help and persuaded to give a much convincible work.


Alluded to these works there are many explorations and excavations conducted in this area by many explorers and Archacalogists. Several archaeological findings were discovered in pre-Independence area by various explorers like, William Fraser (1861) in the foothills of the Western Ghats along the Bhavani valley in the North and Pollachi area in the south.

M.J.Walhouse (1873, 1875) explored and opened a few cists around Perundurai, Coimbatore, Pollachi and adjoining areas
Harding (1889 – 1994) excavated the site lying in a field between Makinaickenpalli and Nattukal palayam the peculiarity of the site was that monoliths planted on the periphery of the circle.

Sandford in the year 1901, gave a vivid picture about the the megaliths in and around Coimbatore region. Longhurst (1913 -14) excavated the village Sirumugai North – east of Mettupalayam railway station.

H.H. Khan (1930- 1935) excavated the site chettipalayam 19km south- East of Coimbatore in Palladam taluk. Alexander Rea excavated the site of Kaniyampundi in (1910- 1911) in Coimbatore region.

Horace Beck described the beads found in the megalithic tombs in Sulur and neighbouring regions of were excavated by W.H.Tucker.

In the year (1970-1971) K.V.Soundara Rajan and B.Narasimbiah of the Archaeological survey of India carried out a trial digging at Perur, 8km to the south- west of Coimbatore and this yielded three cultural phases, in which the third phase was excavated by R.Selvaraj and C.Santhalingam on behalf of the TamilNādu state department of Archaeology at Boluvampatti situated 20km North-West of Coimbatore.

Thus the works of early scholars and archaeologists which are of pioneering nature, deal with isolated patches in time and space.
Scope and Significance

This thesis attempts to give a clear picture about the Megalithic society and economy in the Kongu region. Though certain studies have been made previously on the spatial and Megalithic separately, but both the arenas of the socio-economic and period have not yet been merged together with a literary corroboration, which has been made in this particular study. The study of the society, economy and culture through the burial practises has spread its wing all over the world and has attracted and urged the interests of many archaeologists, which has to be dealt with a systematic, artifactual and interpretative aspects combined together. Infact to a certain extent reliance can be placed on burial types for working out ethnic distinctions in the society. The ‘Manimekalai’ of the early centuries C.E. lists several methods of disposing of the dead; cremation, exposure, burial in pits, entombment in subterranean vaults and interment in urns and makes no distinction between these modes. This is also studied with the various forms of ‘living Megalithism’, and a comparative study of this with the “Dormant” ones. Ethnographic parallels also indicate the prevalence of more than one method of disposing of the dead in several societies, as Anthropological research in modern societies has shown that the preparation of food including the way it is eaten and the utensils used differ not only regionally but also by group. Hence even the minor variations in the same region has to be dealt in the ethnographic approach through the artefacts procured.

The Socio-economic conditions of the Kongu region is propitiated with the recent excavations and portrays the condition that
prevailed during the Megalithic period. The Kongu region being a great menace in gaining its hold by the three kingdoms (Chera, Chola and Pandya) proves it to be a significant place, since it serves as a link-region between the Western and the Eastern coast through the Palghat gap. It is through this gap that the ancient commercial activities were taking place. A road called “Kongap-Peruvali” – the high road to Kongu, is referred to in some records of the Imperial Chola rulers, which confirms the fact that it was the highway for the trade activities between the east and west coast. Through this research work the diffusion of the Megalithic people in this commercial place as their epicenter could be assumed and to bring about a comprehensive socio-economic history of Kongu Nādu during the Megalithic period.

**Statement of the Problem**

One of the source which has been largely neglected so far is the Megalithic burials and its research through the evidence from archaeology, in solving problems relating to the chronology, settlement patterns, the layout of habitation areas, proliferation in crafts and changes in the modes of their production, for instance at sites which show a transition from the Megalithic to the early historic period.

As far as Kongu Nādu is concerned the Megalithic people who actively took part in the trade also undertook the agriculture depending upon the volatile climatic conditions. Geographical factors may have influenced the economy in another way as well. The rugged terrain coupled with uncertain rainfall has made the Kongu region an
area of overall low agricultural productivity. Hence the implements revealed from the excavations were mostly of war weapons and rarely agricultural implements, but the ‘Prestige and Status’ goods and the availability of semi-precious stones indicate their trading aspects.

**Source**

The sources are the availability that alludes and augments the interpretations and hypothesis of a research work in an objective manner, invariably being primary or secondary.

The sources that were utilised for the writing of this work were (i) The literary sources (ii) Archaeological sources (iii) Epigraph

Literary sources may be further classified as (i) Indigenous and (ii) Foreign Sources.

**Indigenous Literary sources**

These include mainly the Tamil Sangam Literatures which gives the mention about the Kongu Nādu and also about the active trade that they were indulged in. The Sangam works mainly includes the Paditrupathu of the Chera rulers expicates about their rule in Kongu Nādu.

Ahananuru gives a clear picture of the minor kingdoms of Kongu and their relations with the three major kingdoms of the TamilNādu. It describes the life of the Kongu people and their social and cultural activities.

Apart from this Purananuru and Narrinai etc. The Perunkathai by the Kongu Vēl is another remarkable work that contributes a lot
about their social and cultural life, and about the contemporary rulers of Kongu and their methods of administration. The Saivite literature, the Tervaram hymns and Periyapuranam, make useful references to the important centres of worship in this region, besides making some incidental references to the people and divisions of the region. Though these literatures are not confined to the period of this study, it gives us the scanty references about the ancient systems of socio-economic and political conditions.

The ‘Kongumandala Satakam’ comprises hundred poems dealing with some episodes in the history of the region. It was compiled by Karmega Kavingar, a Jain Brahmin in the eighteenth century. Two published versions are available, one by Muthuswami Konar, and the other by Deiva Sikhamani Gounder.

Apart from these the “Arthasastra refers to pearls from Tamraparani, conch shells from South India and Vaidurya or beryl of various colours probably from Padiyur in Coimbatore district”.

In the same test Kautilya refers to the Daksinapatha as the Southern route known from trade in shells, diamonds and precious stones, pearls and gold, and mentions that the route passed through several miles. Among these trade commodities we could find the excellency of gem stone cutting found in Padiyur as far as Dakshinapatha is concerned and many Jaina settlements found along the trade routes Kongu Nādu. As many as trading commodities were exported from the Kongu region during the Megalithic period is also evident from the hoards of coins found in these sites. These literary sources thus provides the sources and exhibits the megalithic society
in Kongu Nādu as a culmination of both agro-pastoral and trading society since it is an admixture of mullai and Kurinji tracts which in turn changes as pālai due to the seasonal changes.

**Foreign accounts**

Generally, in taking up the spatial study on a specific period especially during the pre-historic period is mainly adduced by its references in the foreign accounts. As far as Kongu Nādu is concerned we get references about this region from the works of Ptolemy, Pliny, Strabo and Marco Polo and from the observations of the unknown Geographer, Periplus of the Erythrean sea.

**Objective**

The main objective of this work is to bring about a discernible picture about the two obscure area, one the Megalithic period and the other the Kongu Nādu. This is mainly because of the social parameters that existed during the Megalithic period and this is proved through the various types of burials followed and this is also studied with the various forms of ‘living Megalithism’, and a comparative study of this with the “Dormant” ones.

The Megalithism in the Kongu Nādu is still more complicated, because through the area has well-knit geographical location, the transformation of the seasonal variations provided a shifting occupations in this region which consisted of all three land divisions (mullai, Kurinji and Palai) in its geographical extent. These varied Megalithic tombs may be considered such manifestations of architecture as part of the solidarity maintaining mechanisms of a
transitional society. However, what emerges on top of all in these theories is the symbolic objectification of an urge of social cohesiveness in a situation of flux.

**Hypotheses**

The following hypotheses are framed to prove or disprove them in the study.

1. The Megalithic being comprehended through various names as per the change in the social scenario.

2. The variations in the burial practices forecast the practices of the varied ethnic groups and the variation in the prominence of the genders in their respective societies.

3. Another important distinction is the way in which a socially ‘inferior’ group would attempt to adopt the life-style of a socially ‘superior’ group for better acceptance.

4. The myths related with the sepulchre construction interpret them as the Dravidians.

5. The anthropological conclusions by various scholars help us to declare tentatively that the Megalithic – folk of the Coimbatore region belonged to the Austroloid group.

6. The ideo-technic factor that lies in the Black and red ware which is a predominantly associated ware and the Dolmen constructions, which reveals the anthropological analogies.

7. The ‘Hoe culture’ which was practised and made the Megalithic people in Kongu region to confine themselves to the river side settlements.
8. The Kongu region was a transit zone and the trade was also in a transit mode though it was a long distance trade, they were mainly dealt by the middlemen or the intermediaries.

9. Both the Jains and the Megalithic traders lay their settlements in the transit and the hinterland areas. The jains were predominantly internal traders and the Megalithic sites are also located mostly on the river sides than on the coastal sites. Another factor that brings about the propinquity between these two folks is their adaptability towards ecological and the social sector as far as their migrating places are concerned. This brings about the close association by the Jains with the Megalithic folk.

**Chapterization**

The thesis is arranged into five Chapters besides an Introduction and a conclusion. In Introduction, a brief summary of the study, Period of the study, hypotheses, chapterization, sources and review of relevant study and methodology is given. The first chapter entitled ‘The location, physiography and Historical background’ explains the location of the Kongu region and its physiography. Apart from this the historical background of the region is explained upto the early historical periods since the megalithic construction extends upto this period.

The Second Chapter deals with ‘Emergence of the Megaliths’, Megalithic is an architecture used by those people to demarcate the social cohesiveness among the peer and thus the ‘Peer polity
interaction” prevailed and this stretched along the borders where the social unanimity prevailed.

According to certain explorers, the location of their burial destines the direction of their migration, though the chronology and the diffusion are speculative, but to a certain extent could be ascertained.

The Third chapter ‘Social Formations, Percolations and Relations’ in which the society was focussed mainly on the three aspects such as the (1) socio-technic artifacts (2) Technomic artifacts (3) Ideo-technic artifacts. The social based artefacts have been brought under these three broad division which reveals the symbiotic relations that prevailed among the different ethnic groups and another important distinction is the way in which a socially ‘inferior’ group would attempt to adopt the life-style of a socially ‘superior’ group for better acceptance.

According to the Megalithic society in Kongu Nādu, besides a nomadic pastoralism does not rule out an agricultural component within it. As we could see the presence of pastoral nomadism in the Megalithic culture, it is also felt that agriculturists formed an equally important element, the two groups being tied together in a symbiotic relationship.

The Fourth chapter is ‘The Origin Diffusion and Disposal of the Megalithic Builders’ in which the modes and methods of burials have been discussed and the varied causes for the different kinds of disposal. The myths related to the construction of their sepulchres, portrays the significance, necessity and cultural synchronisation
among the varied social and cultural group. The gradual changes from the hunting and gathering groups to the pastoral society is reflected through the burials.

The Chapter Five deals with ‘the Economic conditions of the Kongu Nādu during the Megalithic period’ The Economic conditions mainly deals with the three occupational groups (1) the agriculturists (2) the pastoralists (3) the traders. The agriculture is assumed to be confined with the ‘Hoe culture’ which was practised by the Megalithic people due to the occurrence of Hoes predominantly. The pastoralists were mainly focussed from the archaeological excavations and from the literary evidences. The traders were mainly leading the trade in the transit zone since it was not their destination point of trading commodities, in which existed a ‘subsistence economy’.

The pastoralists were of two kinds, mounted and unmounted pastoralists. There re-exists a fluctuating 'symbiotic/parasitic' role of this system interaction. We could also consider the megalithic settlements in Kongu Nādu as the mounted pastoralists who led a subsistent life in which they came across the various economic groups and adapted themselves accordingly.

The pastoral nomad economy has been described as a highly specialized 'parasite' strategy but this may not always have been the case.
There existed a “subsistent economy” and this being proximal with the “itinerant societies” in various aspects. But the gem stone cutting industries that prevailed in the Kodumanal for a span of 400 years from 3rd C. B.C.E to 1 C.E proves the devastation of the city states which caused the disintegration of this trading centre.

**Methodology**

The methodology followed in this thesis is partly descriptive and partly analytical and interpretative. In order to describe the major developments in the historical sequence and to establish their interconnectedness, an ethnography based narration became essential. In highlighting the most significant developments, symbolic representation, diffusion, historical explanation and critical interpretation became imperative.