The presence of pottery shapes characteristic of the Neolithic-chalcolithic tradition among the assemblages at Umichipoyil, a recently explored and excavated megalithic site from northern Kerala, prods one to explore the possibilities of empirically and theoretically construing the traces of the survival of the Neolithic in the megalithic context. Here an attempt is made to analyze the megalithic site of Umichipoyil structurally, spatially, and in terms of artifact occurrence to make sense of not only the megalithic culture and the culture preceding it but also the possibilities of explaining why these traditions survive in the megalithic in northern Kerala.

Marking the megaliths as a culture distinct from the preceding one has always been subject to debates and discussions. Such discussions have always taken as the point of analysis the decline of the pre-megalithic cultural phase. Explanations for the decline, however, have been perceived differently in the Deccan and peninsular India. For Dhavalikar, climatic changes and its consequence in nature is the prime factor for the decline.¹ To others, the invention of iron technology and the use of fast moving horses by the megalithic community could explain the disappearance of this phase.² To yet another group of scholars, the coexistence of multiple factors like climatic changes coupled with problems of increasing population pressures could explain the same.³ These arguments no doubt, seem significant, but in a way sealed possibilities of thinking in terms of the survival of Neolithic-chalcolithic in the megalithic.

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On the contrary, in South India stray references were indicating such survivals. Dr. Gurumurthy’s Ceramic Tradition of South India bears such evidences.\(^4\) He clearly speaks of the existence of Neolithic pottery shapes in the megalithic sites of T. Narsipur and Palani.\(^5\) P. Ramachandra Murthy’s book on the megalithic tradition in the Godavari region also tried to find out the interface between Neolithic and megalithic. He states “the shapes noticed in the Neolithic-chalcolithic shape at the end have occurred in the megalithic burial and this would not have been possible had there existed a yawning gap between the two cultures.”\(^6\) What seems interesting here is that material evidences signified survival and explanations did not centre on the decline of Neolithic–chalcolithic phase. These evidences were vital perhaps not just in understanding the distinctiveness of the megalithic phase but its associations and bearings with the preceding phase. Unfortunately, evidences for thinking in this fashion were restricted to Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, and Andhra Pradesh although the phrase peninsular India has been used. Kerala remained outside the orbit of such discussions for a variety of reasons. The explored and excavated sites in Kerala were far too few in comparison to the rest of the peninsula. The available explored and excavated material has never been subject to such discussions either because of the near absence of the evidences or otherwise. Umichipoyil however has provided rich and varied data in comparison to other megalithic sites of Kerala. It forces one to explain this varied data not just in terms of the surprises the archaeological record has thrown up for the megalithic phase, but also to analyze the existence of pre-megalithic phase tradition.

The existing knowledge in Kerala on the culture preceding the megalithic shows a lacuna. No archaeological evidences are there to talk about the Neolithic culture except a host of stray hand axes.\(^7\) Despite the presence of bronze and copper artifacts at Arippa, a distinct chalcolithic phase has not yet been discerned as they are seen with iron artifacts.\(^8\) Such categorical statements have tended to treat the pre-iron age phase in lighter vein making it appear that the Neolithic-chalcolithic phase was very brief, being exposed quickly to the use of iron.\(^9\) There is however one exception, the Citari rock cut cave report, a megalithic site, excavated by Sri. K.J. John. He says that,

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\text{[t]here were no black and red ware or iron implements, in this cave. The pottery consisted of black ware and red ware having the shape of vases and bowls, the two pottery bowls which treasured the bone relics were covered over with lids and the rest were without covering. Interestingly out of the 13 pots recovered only two were containing charred bones and surprisingly among the fragments of pottery, sherd of Neolithic pinkish ware having the shape of a channel spouted bowl, and grey ware, were conspicuous.}\]

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\(^4\) S. Gurumurthy, Ceramic Traditions in South India: Down to 300 A.D., University of Madras, Madras, 1981.
\(^5\) Ibid, p. 35.
\(^7\) R. Gurukkal and M.R.R. Varier (Ed.), Cultural History of Kerala, Department of Cultural Publication, Thiruvananthapuram, 1999 (pp. 74 –77
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K. J. John’s Citari report, though seemingly fragmentary, enhances the significance of the discussion on the survival of Neolithic in the megalithic. If a comparison is to be made with Umichipoyil both these sites fall within the geographical limits of northern Kerala, which is also culturally and geographically with south Canara. But want of sufficient detail from Citari prevents any kind of comparison. However Umichipoyil is being explained in terms of exact location, cave distribution in the landscape, artifact occurrence, their positioning within the cave together with the structural details of the cave.

As described earlier Umichipoyil is located in the northern most district of Kerala, Kasaragod, and lies between the Chandragiri and Nileswaram rivers. Explorations and subsequent excavations has yielded eleven rock cut caves in a perimeter of 30 meters on low sloping laterite formations in a region of undulating land skirted by the western ghats. In form and structure, they are representative of typical megalithic monuments found occurring profusely in the region of Kerala. Structurally, but what sets, the rock cut caves of Umichipoyil apart is not just the architecture and spacing of these caves but also the assemblages within four of the excavated caves and their positioning within the caves. No doubt they stand different in their form and interior details when compared to the rock cut caves of Trichur which have always formed the basis of any discussions on rock cut caves in Kerala. The characteristic bench, stool, and multi-chambers are conspicuous by their absence here. The assemblages recovered also show certain distinctness.

Of a total of eleven rock-cut caves discovered only four have been subject to excavation and the remaining has been despoiled. Among the caves, one has a central pillar, another is a half finished one, and yet another happened to be an abandoned one. Except the pillared and the half finished caves, all have a top opening round in shape sealed by a capstone, which is not uniform in structure or in measurement. Meanwhile, the absence of the capstone (cave no. 7), that otherwise also stands distinct (will detail below), has a top opening that is not exactly circular. Two of them have circular grooves filled with stones as if in a stone circle, enhancing their visibility in the landscape. The entrance to all the caves is sealed by a capstone and the floor is higher than the ground level. It has recessed entrances like the jams of a doorway varying in each cave from one to four. All the caves have a hemispherical domed vault and four of them have an internal wedge running through the center in some cases prominent and in some cases faint. Two of the caves that stand distinct in architectural grandiose have well fashioned hooks on the left side towards the northeast of the cave.

The assemblages in the four excavated caves and the despoiled one include pottery and iron objects. Excepting cave 7, all have yielded iron objects and legged jars. The lipped bowl occurs in all the caves excepting one. While one of the caves (no.5 in the big cluster) have yielded pottery in all wares and varieties of shape, two of the caves have yielded only red ware and shapes not encountered in the others. A solitary stone in granite from a cave (no. 2 in the big cluster) and likewise a single circular terracotta bead and a gold bit from yet another

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11 Ibid, (Foot note).
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What is apparent from the above surmise of the descriptions of
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also in their placement and in the presence and absences of certain
assemblages.

**Placement of Pottery**

The placing of assemblages in the caves shows a certain kind of
uniformity and also divergence. For the following discussions the four
excavated caves (in the big cluster referred to as cave numbers 1, 2, 5 and
7 in the previous chapter are taken into consideration. In cave 1, 2 and 5
potteries are encountered at the entrance of the cave. In cave number
seven, which has yielded unique shapes not encountered in the others, a
huge red pot is placed in an inverted position in a niche even before
entering the cave right in the center of the doorway. This cave has
yielded 26 pottery out of which excepting for a bowl and two pots in
black and red ware all the other pottery are in red ware. The positioning
of the pottery inside the cave [Fig.5] shows red ware huge in size placed
together on the left side of the cave. The unique shapes of spouted
vessels, carinated vessels, cups, lipped bowls are clustered together
towards the end of the wedge squarely opposite to the niche of the cave
and two pots in red ware hundi type, are seen as if spreading towards the
right side of the wedge. The two black and red ware pots and one bowl
are placed at the extreme right hand corner of the cave at a considerable
distance from the rest of the pottery in the cave. In the rest of the caves
i.e. in nos. 1, 2 and 5 pottery are positioned on all sides of the cave
indiscriminately where the red ware are placed together with the black
and red and other wares eclipsing the spatial distance found in the cave
no 7 [Fig5.1&5.2].

The minimum occurrence of black and red ware and a large
presence of ill-fired dull red ware, the placing of the two wares on the
opposite sides of the internally running wedge and away from each other
shows a certain uniqueness not encountered in any other cave which lies
in close proximity and within the cluster were cave 7 is located.
Interestingly the alignment of cave number 7 is different, while the
remaining in the cluster have a west-east orientation and are aligned at
angles somewhere between 250° - 280° from the north. Cave number 7 is
oriented south west and at an angle of 250° 30'. Structurally, spatially,
in terms of artifacts occurrence and their placing within the cave stands
different from the rest. What could be the meaning attached to such
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**Presence and Absence of Pottery**

All the excavated caves have yielded pottery and in terms of
quantity it ranges from a maximum of 90 to a minimum of 10. But a close
observation of the pottery unearthed from each cave would force us to
state that there are differences in the composition of the deposit of pottery
and that at least one among the caves carries pottery generally not
associated with typical megalithic culture. While cave no. 5 yielded the
largest amount of pottery and had wares including black ware, red ware,
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Figure 5 Pottery in Cave7
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Figure 5.1 Spacing of Pottery in Cave 5
Figure 5.2 Spacing of pottery in Solitary Cave
perforated carinated pot, small single spouted carinated pot exceptionally small lipped bowls, huge pots are seen only in cave no 7. The cups, hundi type found here are seen in one of the other caves (no. 2). ‘V’ shaped bowls, dishes, two, three and four legged jars, ring stands, knobbed lids, pots in various shapes and sizes in red ware and black and red ware, huge lipped bowls including a double lipped one are seen in cave 5. Excepting cave 7, legged jars are present in all the excavated caves. Lipped bowl in black and red ware is seen only in one cave. [No. 5]. The lipped bowl in red ware is present in three of the excavated caves and also in a despoiled one but absent in one cave [no. 1]. The cursory review of the presence and absence of the pottery given also shows that cave number 7 contains pottery (Fig.5.3) that is not generally associated with the megalithic context. If the presence and absence of certain pottery in relation to caves are considered as signifiers a deep analysis of the same would provide new structures of meaning on the Neolithic-chalcolithic and megalithic cultural interface.

**Pottery**

The pottery from the excavated caves of Umichipoyil has yielded the black ware, red ware; red slipped ware and the black and red ware. Prominent shapes in the black ware include ring stands, bowls and dishes, lids. In the red ware pots of various sizes, legged jars, lipped bowls, spouted vessels, hundi type pots, storage jars, cups and ring stands are the prominent shapes. In the black and red ware, bowls dishes, pitcher pots, lipped bowl, lids occur. In the red slipped ware we get only pots. Among the above mentioned pottery types the lipped bowls, spouted vessels, cups, hundi type pot and storage jars are ones, which have not been encountered in other megaliths of Kerala. In the south Indian context these are shapes characteristic of Neolithic-chalcolithic phase. In the following pages an attempt has been made to substantiate that these pottery from Umichipoyil have a Neolithic linkage. These Neolithic linkages are explained in terms of pottery shapes, ware wise and techniques of production.

**Lipped Bowl and Channel Spouted Vessel**

Hitherto knowledge on the ceramic traditions of megaliths in south India says that except from T. Narsipur and Palani hills lipped bowls are not associated with megalithic sites, whether it is from habitation or burial site. While speaking on the pottery of Iron Age at T. Narsipur Gurumurthy refers to an ill fired red ware in which lipped and channel spouted bowls occur in considerable numbers. The channel spouted could be compared to those from the chalcolithic sites of central India. According to him these channel spouted vessels are not noticed elsewhere in Iron Age habitation sites in south India. But they occur in the burials form Palani hills. The presence of these potteries in Iron Age context is considered exceptional and is interpreted as the relic of the continuation of Neolithic-chalcolithic tradition. Meanwhile we have reference in plenty of the appearance of these lipped bowls in Neolithic-chalcolithic tradition of south India. In the Neolithic chalcolithic tradition the lipped and spouted bowls are seen in Tekkalakotta, Hallur, Bramhagiri, T.Narsipur, Hemmige, Ramapuram. The cultural significance of the association of these typical bowls with the Neolithic culture too remains unexplained except by the stray reference that they were made for the purpose of ‘ceremonial functions-in sacrifices and shraddhas and other religious ceremonies’. Likewise its absence in the post Neolithic-chalcolithic phase too is left unexplained.

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Figure 5.3 Pottery from Cave 7
perforated carinated pot, small single spouted carinated pot exceptionally small lipped bowls, huge pots are seen only in cave no 7. The cups, hundi type found here are seen in one of the other caves (no. 2). ‘V’ shaped bowls, dishes, two, three and four legged jars, ring stands, knobbed lids, pots in various shapes and sizes in red ware and black and red ware, huge lipped bowls including a double lipped one are seen in cave 5. Excepting cave 7, legged jars are present in all the excavated caves. Lipped bowl in black and red ware is seen only in one cave. [No. 5]. The lipped bowl in red ware is present in three of the excavated caves and also in a despoiled one but absent in one cave [no. 1]. The cursory review of the presence and absence of the pottery given also shows that cave number 7 contains pottery (Fig.5.3) that is not generally associated with the megalithic context. If the presence and absence of certain pottery in relation to caves are considered as signifiers a deep analysis of the same would provide new structures of meaning on the Neolithic-chalcolithic and megalithic cultural interface.

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15 H.D. Sankalia, Prehistory and Protohistory of India and Pakistan, Deccan College, Pune, 1974, p 526.
The lipped bowls available from Umichipoyil include bowls in the red ware and one in black and red ware. Shallow lipped bowls with single lip, double lipped bowls, extremely small deep-lipped bowls and the channel spouted bowl are the variety available. From the excavated caves cave no. 5 yielded the largest number of lipped bowls (5 nos.), which includes one in black and red ware. In size they varied from small, medium, and extremely large in the red ware, while the black and red ware was of medium size. Cave no. 2 yielded the medium sized lipped bowl in red ware. Cave no. 7 yielded a big one and three small ones all in red ware. The despoiled cave yielded a lipped bowl in red ware but cave number 1 did not yield a single one. Lipped bowls in black and red ware haven’t been reported from anywhere in south India and Umichipoyil provides the only evidence. The black and red ware lipped bowl unearthed from cave number 5 is found in association with red ware, black ware, red slipped ware and other black and red ware forms along with iron, terracotta bead and gold. The occurrence of the lipped bowl with other forms of pottery and artifacts in other caves throws up certain kind of surprises. In cave number 7 the lipped bowl is not found in association with iron and occurs only in the red ware and is positioned away from the bowls and pots in black and red ware but found clustered with the channel spouted vessel, double spouted perforated pots. There are no traces of legged jars. In cave no. 2 it is found in association with the red slipped ware black and red ware in other shapes, black ware and other red ware, granite stone and iron objects. The lipped bowl is conspicuous by its absence in cave no. 1, which has yielded legged jars and iron. In the despoiled cave it is found in association with iron and all other wares found in cave number 5.

In the occurrence of the lipped bowls of typical Neolithic-chalcolithic tradition what can be gauged is that they are found in the cave that yielded maximum number of other kinds of Neolithic-chalcolithic pottery where iron and other typical megalithic pottery are absent. The cave that contains black and red ware lipped bowl along with red ware lipped bowls has yielded maximum number of pottery but of typical megalithic and it also contained iron implements, gold and a bead. A third one becomes significant because it does not bear a lipped bowl either made of red ware or black and red ware, but contains typical megalithic pottery and iron objects. If we are taking into consideration the structural presence of these three caves one will see that the presence and absence moves from one end to the other, i.e., from south to north. Cave number 7 bears more survivals of Neolithic-chalcolithic in the extreme north, the one in the middle carry lithic assemblages of Neolithic-chalcolithic and megalithic traces and the one which does not carry any traces of the Neolithic-chalcolithic is in the extreme south.

**Double Spouted Carinated Vessel**

Yet another pottery that does not occur in the same frequency as the lipped bowl but stands distinct not only in terms of number but also shape and ware wise is the double spouted perforated carinated and single spouted vessel. No such pottery has ever been reported from any of the Kerala megaliths but Umichipoyil happens to be the first to reveal such an assemblage.

Among the common Neolithic-chalcolithic pottery shapes Gurumurthy includes the spouted pot with carination at the lower portion of the body and saggering base resembling a kettle from Takkalakotta. At Brahmagiri too a similar one is reported but the spout slightly varies and is not so curved. He also includes a spouted bowl (blotchy grey) with a short spout from Takkalakotta and a similar one

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The lipped bowls available from Umichipoyil include bowls in the red ware and one in black and red ware. Shallow lipped bowls with single lip, double lipped bowls, extremely small deep-lipped bowls and the channel spouted bowl are the variety available. From the excavated caves cave no.5 yielded the largest number of lipped bowls (5 nos.), which includes one in black and red ware. In size they varied from small, medium and extremely large in the red ware, while the black and red ware was of medium size. Cave no. 2 yielded the medium sized lipped bowl in red ware. Cave no 7 yielded a big one and three small ones all in red ware. The despoiled cave yielded a lipped bowl in red ware but cave number 1 did not yield a single one. Lipped bowls in black and red ware haven’t been reported from anywhere in south India and Umichipoyil provides the only evidence. The black and red ware lipped bowl unearthed from cave number 5 is found in association with red ware, black ware, red slipped ware and other black and red ware forms along with iron, terracotta bead and gold. The occurrence of the lipped bowl with other forms of pottery and artifacts in other caves throws up certain kind of surprises. In cave number 7 the lipped bowl is not found in association with iron and occurs only in the red ware and is positioned away from the bowls and pots in black and red ware but found clustered with the channel spouted vessel, double spouted perforated pots. There are no traces of legged jars. In cave no. 2 it is found in association with the red slipped ware black and red ware in other shapes, black ware and other red ware, granite stone and iron objects. The lipped bowl is conspicuous by its absence in cave no. 1, which has yielded legged jars and iron. In the despoiled cave it is found in association with iron and all other wares found in cave number 5.

In the occurrence of the lipped bowls of typical Neolithic-chalcolithic tradition what can be gauged is that they are found in the cave that yielded maximum number of other kinds of Neolithic-chalcolithic pottery where iron and other typical megalithic pottery are absent. The cave that contains black and red ware lipped bowl along with red ware lipped bowls has yielded maximum number of pottery but of typical megalithic and it also contained iron implements, gold and a bead. A third one becomes significant because it does not bear a lipped bowl either made of red ware or black and red ware, but contains typical megalithic pottery and iron objects. If we are taking into consideration the structural presence of these three caves one will see that the presence and absence moves from one end to the other, i.e., from south to north. Cave number 7 bears more survivals of Neolithic-chalcolithic in the extreme north, the one in the middle carry lithic assemblages of Neolithic-chalcolithic and megalithic traces and the one which does not carry any traces of the Neolithic-chalcolithic is in the extreme south.

Double Spouted Carinated Vessel

Yet another pottery that does not occur in the same frequency as the lipped bowl but stands distinct not only in terms of number but also shape and ware wise is the double spouted perforated carinated and single spouted vessel. No such pottery has ever been reported from any of the Kerala megaliths but Umichipoyil happens to be the first to reveal such an assemblage.

Among the common Neolithic-chalcolithic pottery shapes Gurumurthy includes the spouted pot with carination at the lower portion of the body and sagggering base resembling a kettle from Takkalakotta. At Brahmagiri too a similar one is reported but the spout slightly varies and is not so curved. He also includes a spouted bowl (blotchy grey) with a short spout from Takkalakotta and a similar one

from Piklihal and Brahmagiri. He also speaks about a spouted globular vessel with blunt carination and a spouted vase from Takkalakotta and Brahmagiri. But, none of these above mentioned sites have yielded perforated or double spouted pots. Neither of them belongs to the red ware tradition. References to perforated types in south India is the one by Allchin of a single sherd described as perforated ware found at Patapadu.  

17 While describing the Neolithic chalcolithic pottery of Kallur perforated pot sherds of the Neolithic-chalcolithic are mentioned. From Hemmige in black on red ware spouted pot with a carinated neck appears. Nagarjunakonda, which has recorded several Neolithic settlements in phase III that has yielded, perforated pottery and long and short spouted vessels in grey ware.  

18 The perforated potteries appearance in Iron Age context too is meager. Gurumurthy reports its appearance in Tirukkampuliyyur. He describes ‘perforated pot shreds as in coarse red slipped ware’ he adds that, fabric is coarse and the core is dull in colour potted on a slow wheel and the slip is applied in the exterior or on both sides of the vessel.  

19 While discussing potteries having Neolithic linkages what is apparent is the spouted perforated or carinated vessel as typical of the Neolithic chalcolithic tradition.

The solitary cave number 7 at Umichipoyil which makes one time and again speak on its differential artifact occurrence and structure is the only cave which has yielded two double spouted vessels, one is carinated perforated and another spouted but non-functional. Both are made in red ware and ill fired. Their presence in cave number 7 is significant as we stated earlier that this cave could have more elements showing traces of Neolithic survival. Like the lipped bowls they are positioned a little away from the very negligible amount of black and red ware available from the cave. How do we account, explain such apparently different types of pottery in a cave, which shows traces of the typical black and red ware of the megalithic tradition.

Others

Cups, big storage jars, bowl with lid, Neolithic Celts are other material excavated from Umichipoyil bearing the traces of Neolithic-chalcolithic material culture. It bears traces of Neolithic-chalcolithic tradition because it stands different to somewhat similar type of pottery available from other caves from Umichipoyil as well as from other megalithic sites: ware wise, shape wise and in the technology of production. No such analysis has ever been made from any of the megalithic sites of Kerala. However, the above mentioned pottery shapes occur in dull red ware in the iron age context at T. Narsipur in Karnataka, Salihundam in Andhra Pradesh, Kanchipuram and Thirukamappiyur in Tamil Nadu. But the archaeological record at Umichipoyil has thrown surprises because these shapes occur in the cave, which has not yielded any iron or any of the typical megalithic legged jars, while all the other caves of Umichipoyil have yielded iron and legged jars but not the kind of pottery mentioned.

Ware Type, Quality and Production Process

The pottery analyzed in the preceding pages presuming that they bear traces of Neolithic-chalcolithic material culture are all in dull red ware except one lipped bowl which is in black and red ware. The fabric is coarse with sand particles, ill fired and hence very fragile when you touch it, it is pulverizing. The clay is not well lavigated. Generally the

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pottery is of very inferior quality including the black and red ware lipped bowl when compared to the megalithic pottery from Kerala. Most of the pottery is hand made or made through turn table method. A field visit made by the present researcher pointed out the fact that the clay used to make pottery even today does not vary from the one the megalithic potters used. If we are talking in terms of technology also, it is not very different. The living tradition of utilizing turn table technology can be seen in the vicinity of the Umichipoyil megalithic site. A comparison of the ware type of these potteries in other south Indian Neolithic-chalcolithic culture and Iron Age context is attempted below. The lipped bowl in Karnataka occurs in grey ware tradition, which according to Gurumurthy is not noticed beyond Payampalli in southern districts of Tamilnadu and Kerala. In the Iron Age context we see the appearance of an ill fired dull red ware at T. Narsipur habitation site. It has also been noticed from burial sites of Palani. The red ware at T. Narsipur also is an ill fired red ware of coarse clay with large quantity of sand particles and has shapes like utilitarian storage jars. The same variety has been excavated only from cave no. 7 of Umichipoyil. Why its absence in other caves of Umichipoyil has yet to be explained? In Andhra Pradesh in the Iron Age context a dull red ware is reported, which contains sand and its fabric, is medium to coarse and ill fired. Two bowls with lid in red ware are found from cave no.7.

To sum up, Umichipoyil is the only excavated megalithic site in Kerala to have yielded typical Neolithic-chalcolithic pottery shapes along with megalithic types. It is the only site from South India from where the lipped bowl comes in black and red ware (Fig. 5.4). To trace the Neolithic survivals there are caves having different constitutions in a single site. As far as Umichipoyil is concerned, there is little value in thinking on a hiatus between Neolithic
Figure 5.4 Lipped Bowls in Black and Red Ware
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