

**Report on**



**Multidisciplinary Documentation of  
Rock Art and its Allied Subjects in Kerala**

**(Field Documentation, Phase-I)**

**24<sup>th</sup> - 28<sup>th</sup> October, 2015**



**INDIRA GANDHI NATIONAL CENTRE FOR THE ARTS  
NEW DELHI**



The first phase of ‘Multidisciplinary Documentation of Rock Art and its Allied Subjects in Kerala’ conducted from 24<sup>th</sup> – 28<sup>th</sup> October, 2015 at Wayanad district, Kerala. Expert team members consist of Dr. Jenee Peter, State Coordinator (UC College, Aluva), Dr. S N Kumar (Geology, Kerala University), Benny Kurian (Natural History, Marayoor).

### **1. Edakkal Rock Shelter (N 11° 37' 36.2" E 76° 14' 07.2")**

One of the prominent rock art sites in Kerala, Edakkal rock shelter situated in 1148 m above Ambukutti hill, Ambalavayal Panchayat of Sulthan Batheri taluk in Wayanad district of Northern Kerala. Wayanad district stands on the southern tip of the Deccan plateau and the hill ranges are part of the Western Ghats. A large area of the district is covered by forest and many forest tribes inhabit in the area. Rock forms of the area are granite and gneiss. Shelter has two storeys of massive stone boulders. Lower floor is without any rock art and a perennial water source flowing from one side to another. Upper storey is after a steep climb on top a cleft in between two large stone blocks and a large stone block sheltering the cleaved formation and south portion is open to sky. Entry to the shelter is from northern side where a small area is open. From the entry, either side is engraved with stylized anthropomorphic figures, animals, geometric and non geometric symbols.

Shelter covers an area approximately 50 acres land, 28 meter length and 10 meter width. Height of the engravings is varied in different part of the shelter, but commonly above three meters. Trial excavations conducted in the shelter uncover the habitation in the lower strata.

The shelter was first discovered by F Fawcett in 1894, during his exploration he noticed few Megalithic burials nearby. Fawcett attributed some associations with local tribes like Kurumbar and their reverence towards Edakkal shelter need

special mention, while Paniyas tribes assisted him during fieldwork. Fawcett also stated the association of Chettis and conducting tiger hunt. He pointed out the myth with local minor goddess called Mudiampilli and Kuttichattn.

There are total five inscriptions noticed in Eddakal shelter, they are in Brahmi and different south Indian languages, various scholars have different views regarding these inscriptions. Hultzch, an epigraphist from the department of epigraphy, Madras reads the first panel on the left side as “*Pala pulinânam ta-kâri*”/“*Sri Vishnu Varma Kutumbiya Kulavardhanasya li –it-a*” which means “*one who killed many tigers...*”. A short inscription in Tamil-Brahmi on the right panel is read by Raghava Varrier, a retired professor in Epigraphy as “*Shri Vazhumi*” which means “*Brahma*” in Tamil, and the same inscription was read by epigraphist Iravatham Mahadevan as “*pazhama*” which means “*ancient or antique*”.

The left wall of the shelter has a very prominent anthropomorphic figure with strange face, headgear and raised arms. Adjacent to this another figure with similar pattern and same size is seen, but a remarkable circular design at the chest. There are few more anthropomorphic figures adjoining these two, some are small while some are large in size. There are animal figures like dog, elephant, deer / antelope (?), a large size peacock / wild hen (?), spoke wheels and carts, humans engaged in different activities including jar / basket bearing female as well as different poses of male and female human figures.





**Human figures with raised arms**



**Edakkal Rock Shelter, left panel**



## Megalithic Monuments

The whole area is rich in Megalithic monuments which including dolmens, cist burials and pit burials. An area of around 7 km away from north west of Edakkal, where some cultural materials has been associated with Megalithic period.

1. Megalithic cist / stone circle (N 11°37'48.8" E 76°12'13.8")

Spotted in a circular form of granite stone slabs, the area is disturbed totally due to high human interference and plantain cultivation is seen around it.

2. Open pit (N 11° 37' 47.5" E 76° 12' 13.6")

Square cellar is seen in swastika interlocking pattern, outer portion is 30 cm length in each four sides.

3. Stone block (N 11° 37' 47.0" E 76° 12' 14.8")

Scattered granite stone blocks probably part of the cist.

4. Stone block (N 11° 37' 46.4" E 76° 12' 15.3")

Scattered granite stone blocks probably part of the cist.

5. Stone block (N 11° 37' 45.7" E 76° 12' 15.6")

Scattered granite stone blocks probably part of the cist.

6. Megalithic cist / stone circle (N 11° 37' 46.1" E 76° 12' 17.0")

Spotted three stone blocks formed circular and projected parts of pit also seen.



Megalithic Monuments

## Tribal Colony

A colony of Mullukurumba tribal colony situated in the valley of Edakkal shelter, the area is known as Ambalavayal Kurumba colony. The area is plain and near to the paddy field. The village is headed by *mooppan* or headmen; known among them is '*Porunamuthan*'. Their life is centred on a temple known as '*Daivapura*' which means 'house of gods', located middle of the colony. They worshiped ancestor sprits and also *Vellakkalli appan*, *Kattu bhagavati* and *Gulikan* etc, but now they are following Brahmanical deities. All their festivals and ceremonies like birth, marriage and also death rituals were take place in *Daivapura*.



**Daivapura in the centre and surround by houses**

## **2. Tovari Rock Shelter / Tobarimala (N 11°37'34.9" E 76°15'49.2")**

Tovari hill is on the western side of the paddy field called Malavayal in Nenmeni Panchayat, near Ambalavayal of Wayanad district, Northern Kerala. This site is inside the private property of Malayalam Harisons Plantations Pvt. Ltd.

There are three or four huge boulders with a massive rock resting on them. In Tovari hill, there are three rock shelters known to local people as ‘purappāra’ which means ‘house of rocks’. Among those, only one which is little below the summit of the hill, covered by tea plantation, facing west with engravings.

The technique of engravings at Tovari and Edakkal are similar, at the same time theme is different. Probably the authors used same kind of tools for etching but the lines were narrow and shallow when compared to Edakkal. The engravings are found on the walls and ceilings. Tovari shelter is 6m height and 8m width. Tovari group of drawing consists of highly stylized figures which include triangles, square and circle and combination of these. There is an engraving of typical hoe like tool which is still used by tribal people for cultivation in hill slopes. Another one is probably a highly stylized representation of the female genital organ or stylized representation of hills. On the roof of the shelter has a circle with an arrow and oblong square divided into several parts by horizontal lines probably as a ladder.



**General view of Tovari Rock Shelter**





**Tovari Engravings**

### **3. Kappikunnu / Veliyambam Kotta (N 11°45'42.5" E 76°08'29.8")**

This site is situated in Pulpalli village of Ambalavayal taluk in Wayanad district, northern Kerala. This is an open air site, engraving seen on a huge talc boulder and a piece of stone block. The area is come under Patiri Reserve Forest region.

The engravings are of animal probably deer and some abstract images / lines look like foot prints on a huge boulder. A small piece of stone dislocated from the huge block also having some engravings, they resemble palm tree leaves or lines.

There is a live temple, around 50 m away from the site. It is dedicated to Lord Shiva and Parvati, along with this some minor deities like Ganesha, Ayyappa and Vanadurga (Forest Goddess) can also be found there. The age of the temple is believed to be 2500 years old. Sanctum sanctorum is in *Gajaprishta* shape, made of talc stone commonly known as soapstone. This kind of stone rarely used in constructions.





Animal figure and lines

Shiva Temple

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