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PIPELINE WORK LEADS TO VAST MEGALITHIC SITE IN KERALA

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August 19, 2023 05:17 pm | Updated August 20, 2023 12:31 am IST - MALAPPURAM

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An archaeologist examines a rock-cut burial chamber during a salvage excavation at Nagaparamba, near Kerala's Tirunavaya. Photo: Special Arrangement

A large number of megalithic hat stones were found from a single site during a recent archaeological salvage excavation conducted by the State Archaeology Department at Nagaparamba in Kuttippuram village, near Tirunavaya, in the district.

Hat stones, popularly called *Thoppikkallu* in Malayalam, are hemispherical laterite stones used as lid on burial urns during the megalithic period.

Archaeologists say it could arguably be the largest number of hat stones in an unprotected site in the State. Many hat stones are feared to have been destroyed inadvertently by the local people in recent times. Some of the local people say they had no idea about the archaeological relevance of the hat stones and many were destroyed when they cleared their land for house construction.

"We need to conduct a detailed survey and document the finds as well as the site," says archaeologist K. Krishnaraj, officer in charge of the Pazhassi Raja Archaeological Museum, Kozhikode, who led the recent salvage excavation.

A large number of megalithic burial sites and relics were found at Nagaparamba during the salvage excavation. Mr. Krishnaraj and colleagues were called in when a unique rock cut laterite burial chamber was found during a pipeline work. They salvaged a large number of earthen urns and iron implements with unique features, which could ostensibly throw light on the life and culture of people who lived in those parts more than 2,000 years ago.

"The architectural features of the rock cut cave are different. The pots we recovered too are different from the usual urns found in such sites," says Mr. Krishnaraj.

Ashes were found in the pots recovered from the chamber as well as from under the hat stones. "We used to get cremated bones from the urns. The ashes we found are special," says Mr. Krishnaraj.

The local people of Tirunavaya and its neighbourhoods are excited about the hemispherical hat

stones recovered from Nagaparamba. Even when demanding the preservation of the archaeological site, they say Tirunavaya deserves a heritage status.

“The government should consider the historic significance of Tirunavaya on the banks of the Bharathapuzha and declare it as a heritage village,” says Salman Karimbanakkal, a teacher and archaeology enthusiast.

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