

## **CHANGING PERSPECTIVES AND METHODOLOGIES IN EARLY IRON AGE ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH IN SRI LANKA**

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### **Introduction**

The term Early Iron Age in the context of Sri Lanka denotes that period which succeeds the Stone Age. The Early Iron Age culture (from 9<sup>th</sup> Century BCE) is mainly represented by the burial monuments and it formed the earliest socio-economic base of the Formative period of Sri Lanka. The interest in the study of Early Iron Age culture in Sri Lanka goes back to the last part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century CE. Although considerable research has been done on the Stone Age of Sri Lanka, the evidence available for the study of the Early Iron Age is qualitatively and quantitatively limited in character.

### **Objectives**

The main objective of the present research is to undertake a detailed analysis of all available data of Early Iron Age archaeological research in Sri Lanka and to compare these details with some aspects of Early Iron Age research in Peninsular India in order to arrive at a better understanding of the Early Iron Age Phase of Sri Lanka.

### **Methodology**

The research methodology followed in the study is a survey of relevant Early Iron Age archaeological research in Sri Lanka and Peninsular India. This survey is entirely based on library research and visits to important Early Iron Age sites in Sri Lanka as well as Peninsular India.

### **Discussion**

The whole genre of Early Iron Age archaeological research in Sri Lanka spanning almost twelve decades can be conveniently divided into two distinct temporal phases namely the Pre -1960/70 and the post-

1960/70. The temporal distinction is not arbitrary and draws on the fact there are some sharp differences in both research objectives and research methodology between the two phases. While the Pre- 1960/70 researchers concentrated more on the explanation of Early Iron Age events on the basis of legends recorded from Pali chronicles by and large post- 1960/70 researchers concentrated more on cultural chronologies and processual details.

The initiators of Early Iron Age investigations in Sri Lanka were Henry Parker and Hugh Nevil. In 1884, Henry Parker excavated the Early Iron Age habitation site at Tissamaharamaya and Hugh Nevil recorded an urn burial at Malikam Pitti in Ampara District.

Early Iron Age studies in the Post - 1960/70 phase of the island were mostly empirically oriented. During Post- 1960/ 70 Phase deep stratified excavations were launched at the Citadel of Anuradhapura and these yielded successive cultural phases from Prehistoric to Historic period (Deraniyagala 1972). Systematic excavation of Early Iron Age burial sites like Ibbankatuwa and Pinwewa-Galshonkanatta have provided useful insights into mortuary practice, tomb architecture, construction and material culture in the Post- 1960/70 phase. Archaeological research undertaken during the last four decades has gradually expanded into the study of burial typology, archaeobotanical remains, archaeo-zoological studies, soil studies, scientific dating techniques, economic & social studies (Seneviratne 1984) of Early Iron Age society of Sri Lanka.

Cross regional studies in Early Iron Age culture between Peninsular India and Sri Lanka of various cultural aspects of the ancient communities in India as well as Sri Lanka.

Although the study of the Early Iron Age period in Peninsular India commenced in the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Early Iron Age research in Sri Lanka was undertaken only at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The survey and excavations undertaken in the Post-Independence period (1947 and after) of Peninsular India have shed considerable light on the burial distribution, burial typology, chronology and characteristics of the Early Iron Age culture.

With regard to burial sites of Early Iron Age in Sri Lanka a fewer number of burial sites (40) have been found in comparisons with Peninsular India which has over 1700 burial sites. The burial typology of Sri Lanka is not complex as in Peninsular India.

A heightened interest in funerary analysis, especially among the archaeologists of India, emerged with the coming of New Archaeology in the 1960/70's. However, very

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limited studies are available on social organization, ideology and belief system of Early Iron Age in Sri Lanka (through use of habitational and mortuary remains) compared to Peninsular India.

### Conclusion

Research in the Post- 1960/70 Phase represents a progressive transition in the study of the Early Iron Age, and some detailed research like social aspects of Early Iron Age period need to be done in Sri Lanka for a better understanding of Early Iron Age phase of Sri Lanka.

### References

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