

KEELADI EXCAVATION: HISTORY

NEWS: Further scientific studies needed to validate Keeladi excavation findings: Union Culture Minister

WHAT'S IN THE NEWS?

The Keeladi excavation in Tamil Nadu has revealed evidence of an advanced urban civilization from the Sangam age, with artefacts pointing to early Tamil script, industry, and trade. However, the Union Culture Ministry has withheld full endorsement of the findings, citing lack of sufficient technical and scientific backing.

Context

- Union Culture Minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat has stated that the archaeological report submitted by Amarnath Ramakrishna on the Keeladi excavations lacks sufficient technical and scientific validation.
- He indicated the need for further research and evidence to substantiate the claims linking Keeladi to an early urban civilization from the Sangam period.

About Keeladi Village

- Keeladi is a small hamlet in the Sivaganga district of Tamil Nadu.
- It is situated along the banks of the Vaigai River, approximately 12 kilometers southeast of the temple city of Madurai.
- The site gained attention for yielding rich archaeological material that points to an early urbanized Tamil society.

Excavation History

- Excavations were initiated in **2015** by the **Archaeological Survey of India (ASI)**.
- Later, the responsibility was transferred to the **Tamil Nadu State Department of Archaeology (TNSDA)**.
- Excavations continued in multiple phases, uncovering a wide range of artefacts and structural remains.

Key Artefacts Unearthed

- Over **18,000 artefacts** have been recovered, reflecting a rich and advanced material culture.
- Finds include **gold ornaments, copper tools, semi-precious stones, glass beads, ivory bangles, terracotta seals, spindle whorls, and weaving equipment**.
- The presence of such varied items suggests complex craftsmanship and artisanal skills.

Pottery and Inscriptions

- Large volumes of pottery have been discovered, some of which show signs of **industrial-scale production**.
- Over **120 potsherds contain Tamil Brahmi inscriptions**, indicating early literacy and use of script.

- These inscriptions help date the site and suggest continuity with Tamil cultural traditions.

Evidence of Urban Civilization

- The site reveals remains of **brick structures**, indicating **planned urban layouts**.
- Industrial activities like **pottery making, weaving, dyeing, and bead-making** have been inferred from tools and setup.
- This challenges the long-held notion that urbanization in ancient India was mostly confined to the Indus Valley and Gangetic regions.

Aspects of Daily Life and Trade

- Artefacts such as **dice, game boards, and hopscotch pieces** show glimpses of leisure and recreation.
- Discovery of **agate and carnelian beads**—materials not local to the region—indicates **external trade networks**, possibly with North India and even abroad.

Connection with the Sangam Age

- The Sangam period (roughly **300 BCE to 300 CE**) is renowned for its **literature, poetry, and urban culture** in Tamilakam.
- The archaeological findings from Keeladi align chronologically and culturally with descriptions found in **Sangam literature**.
- This suggests that the people who lived in Keeladi could have been contemporaneous with or directly connected to the **Sangam poets and society**.

Concerns and Controversies

- The Union Government has expressed the need for **greater scientific backing** before making definitive historical claims.
- Scholars and cultural activists argue that the Keeladi findings represent a **non-Vedic, Dravidian urban civilization**, and want them officially recognized as such.

Conclusion

- The Keeladi excavations have sparked academic and political debates over ancient Indian history.
- Further interdisciplinary research, including **carbon dating, DNA analysis, and scientific mapping**, is needed to validate its historical significance.
- If confirmed, Keeladi could reshape our understanding of **urbanization and cultural development in ancient South India**.

Source: <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/tamil-nadu/further-scientific-studies-required-to-validate-keeladi-excavation-findings-union-culture-minister/article69677970.ece>