



## Historiography on central Indian Megalith

**Radha Devi**

Research Scholar (Ph. D.),  
Department of History,  
University of Jammu, Jammu -180006

There is always been curiosity to know about the history of Megaliths. From the Iron Age (1000 B.C.) we do have a reference of stones with different size in many archaeological sites, which we commonly known as Megaliths. This standing stones have mysterious history and each stone is following a particular pattern. Since, eighteenth century numerous works had been produced upon Megaliths by western and eastern scholars. All of them had used different approaches like ethnological, astronomical etc., to better understand the reason behind their construction. From these studies we have come to know that this stones were erected in the memory of departed souls. There are some central Indian tribes like Gond, Munda, Bhill, Santhal etc., which have their existence in the past and still continue to erect these stones. This paper is an attempt to sort out important literature available on the megalithic culture in Central India.

**Keywords:** Archaeology, megaliths, monuments, historiography.

### Introduction:

The magnificent appearance of some of Megaliths in India attracted the attention of antiquarian's early on nineteenth century. The historical writings on megaliths begin in the second decade of nineteenth century primarily written by British Administrators. Significant attempts in the realm of megaliths occurred with the arrival of works of M. Wheeler, V.G. Childe etc. Different theories had been formulated about the origin of this culture like European scholars had tried to place the origin of Indian megalith from west Asia. To defy them Indian scholar took interest in megalith culture and write about megalith culture as indigenous culture.

### Archaeological and Megaliths:

In Central India J.D. Begler for the first time documented the broken blocks of stone in his work A Tour in Central Provinces, which he explored in 1873-1874. He mentions, "From the village of Nava Para to Majhgan runs a long stretch of broken blocks of stone lying loose on each other in irregular masses, and presenting the exact appearance of the ruins of a great fort



two miles long, at intervals stand upright stones looking like Sati pillars."

The report which deals with the excavation at Dhanora in 1957 is critically analyzed by M.G. Dikshit. His report Excavation at Dhanora-District Durg contributes in providing the gist of classification of megalithic structure such as Dolmens, Menhirs. undertook an exploration in 1987. The new explored megalithic site in Bastar district is recorded in his work Archaeological Remains in Bastar. This work gives information about the Maria Gond, which still practices megalithic discourses. His study shows a flood of light on funerary rites of ancient megalithic culture. He also examines the megalithic monuments in South Bastar at Timelwada, Handaguda and Nelakanker<sup>3</sup>.

The documentation work of A.K. Sharma in 2000, documents the tradition of erecting memorial stones varying in size and shapes, which is still continues amongst various tribes of Bastar<sup>4</sup> region in his work The Archaeo- Anthropology of Chhattisgarh.

The manuscript The Archaeology of the Megaliths in India: 1947-1977, traces the developmental phase of research on megalith, from pre-independence to post-independence

period. R.K. Mohanty and U. Selvakumar in 2002, has explains the meaning and evolution of megalithic culture. They had discussed in detail about the megalithic explored sites, burial practices, ceramics, metallurgy, settlement patterns, economy, social organization, their Ideology and belief system etc.

Harendra Prasad Sinha and his wife Nutan Sinha they worked on Megalithic Culture in Jharkhand from 2005 onwards. Since they are the part of the archaeological survey of India they had explored Belwadag, Khunti, Toli etc sites.

The responsibility of exploring the megalithic sites in Ranchi was taken by Mathura Ram Ustad of Giridih district in 2014; he has given the detail description of five megalithic sites Chokahatu, Khunti, Toil, Amlesha, Burudih.

### **History, Ethno-history and Megaliths:**

The work which produces a descriptive account of the funerary rites and eschatological belief of the aborigines like Hill maria, Bison Maria and Jhoria of Bastar<sup>6</sup> is written by V. Elwin in 1945. He in his work Funerary Customs in Bastar State had recorded about two kinds of megalithic monuments namely uraskal and



danyakal, were erected in honor of the dead because the aborigines considered the dead as a guard.

C. Von Furer Haimendorf, in 1945 wrote his paper The problem of Megalithic Culture of Middle India 1945 mentions the similarity of customs and rituals between the central Indian<sup>7</sup> and North East Indian tribes.

The primitive work which study uncovered stones of Europe, Asia and particularly in East Asia is of V. Gordon Childe in 1948. The work Megaliths deals with the critical understanding of the concept megalith<sup>8</sup> and its origin from the outside India.

The credit of presenting list of various works on megalith goes to K.S. Ramachandran. In 1971 work entitled bibliography on Indian Megaliths presents bibliography<sup>9</sup> of all works on Indian megalithic culture.

The work which concentrates on the nature of Maria tribe is Maria Murder and Suicide by V. Elwin in 1977. The main subject matter of this work is consequently an examination of the funerary rites of the Maria Gonds<sup>10</sup> and their various stages of life cycle in Gond dominated region.

An important work which surveys the historical background of the Bastar

region is Tribal Development in Madhya Pradesh by Ajit Raizada in 1984, He examines the geographical and ethnographical features<sup>11</sup> of Madhya Pradesh tribes.

The portrayal of murrain lifestyle is presented by Verrier Elwin in his work The Muria and their Ghotul in 1991. This work is an account of construction of memorial stone<sup>12</sup> in the honour of departed souls.

The paper Megalithic Raipur in 1992 which provides a comprehensive account on Raipur megalithic culture is credited to G.B. Deglurkar and G. Lad. This gives information about the megalithic culture in Rajpur district<sup>13</sup>. He further adds that the megalithic traditions still survives among the tribal of Rajpur.

Our understanding of how tribal culture<sup>14</sup> evolved over time in central India and how it differed substantially both in its features and in its evolution from other society is from the article Races, Caste and tribe in Central India: the Early Origins of Indian Anthropometry by Crispin Bates in 1995. This work devotes huge space to the origin of megalith and also recorded the ethnographic profile of several communities.



A periodic study on various tribal groups of Bastar is Spectrum of Tribal Bastar in 1996. Amitabha Sarkar and Samara Basgupta in this work provide information about the historical account of the Bastar 15, geographical environment, food habit and short ethnographic profile of chief tribal groups of Bastar.

The exclusive and fascinating tradition of constructing stone for deceased one is discussed by Michel plstel and Zarine Cooper in 1999. Their work The Bastar Folk Art-Shrine, Figurines and Memorials discuss the horizontal slab, carved wooden, stone pillars and painted stones which are commemorate for the dead person<sup>16</sup>.

The reference to the origin, chronology, and racial affinities of the megaliths<sup>17</sup> from their earliest discovery in the nineteenth century is presented in the work of Hemanshu prabha Ray Colonial Archaeology in South Asia in 2008.

The work which covered in details the ethnography and history of Munda<sup>18</sup> people is of S.C. Roy in 2010. The Mundas and Their Country is recognized for covering Mundas customary social and religious practices.

The Megalithic culture got highlighted as an ancient most culture in

2014 by Vishi Upadhyay in his paperwork Megalithic culture of Chhattisgarh. He in this work says that the geographical setting of this region gave the chance to megalithic peoples for flourishing their culture over the land of Chhattisharh<sup>19</sup>. This work also presents the good instance of living megalithic practice by the tribes of Chhattisgarh.

Some historians in their work have linked megalith culture with Iron technique, Number of works has been produced in this context. To understand the technology<sup>20</sup> used in the construction of megalithic structure there is a work The Megalith: their Culture, Ecology, Economy and Technology in 1985 by S.B. Deo. This work is followed by D.D. Chakravarti's work The Early Use of Iron in India in 1992, primarily focused on the ancient metal technology<sup>21</sup> of north India.

A number of historians have written their work on rituals and reason behind the erection of megalith. The beliefs concerning the afterlife<sup>22</sup> and disposal rituals<sup>23</sup> of the dead one etc become the theme of Haimendorf's work Death and the Cult of the Dead in 1984 and Jagdish Narain Tiwari in 1992 wrote a work Disposal of the Dead in the Mahabharata- A Study in the Funeral Customs in Ancient India had its own importance in studying megaliths. This



work has presented the sight of disposal pattern during the period of Mahabharata.

### **Oral Tradition and Megaliths:**

As no literary source particularly on megalith till date been founded, we are forced to fall back on oral tradition to form an idea of their faith. In the realm of oral tradition quantity of work has been produced like Durga Bhagvat had discussed the folklore<sup>24</sup> of central Indian tribes in his work Folk Tales of Central India in 1972. In this work he mentions the folk tales related to different custom of Central Indian tribal community.

### **Conclusion:**

On the basis of archaeological and secondary evidences one can say that, this culture performed in the Central India is not a recent origin but totally independent culture which emerged in 1000 B.C., belongs to the tribal indigenous culture. The work written from the archaeological, ethnographical and historical point of view presents the glimpse of different aspects of megalithic culture. Therefore, one can say that these perspectives have broadened up our understanding about megalithic culture. These ruins of big and small stones contributed a great deal in building pride in art, technology and

traditions of megalith culture. This tradition of megalithic culture has not died because of the continuing tribal social customs and beliefs. As it is related to perpetuating the memory of a person or ancestors, the tradition has continued so far and might continue in future.

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