



## MEGALITHIC CULTURE IN JHARKHAND

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The history of investigations into the nature of megalithic culture in India, may be traced back to a period more than 150 years. The occurrence of megalithic monuments and related urn burials in our country has been noticed from time to time by scholars like James Fergusson and Col. E. T. Dalton etc. In 1872 James Fergusson dealt in detail the South Indian megaliths in his book 'Rude Stone Monuments in all countries : their Age and Uses.' (1) Almost about the same time in 1873. Col. Dalton was wandering in the dense forests of present day Jharkhand's Silli block in Ranchi district, where he came across a cluster of approximately 7500 megaliths, mostly of dolmen type, spread over an area of about 6-7 acres.

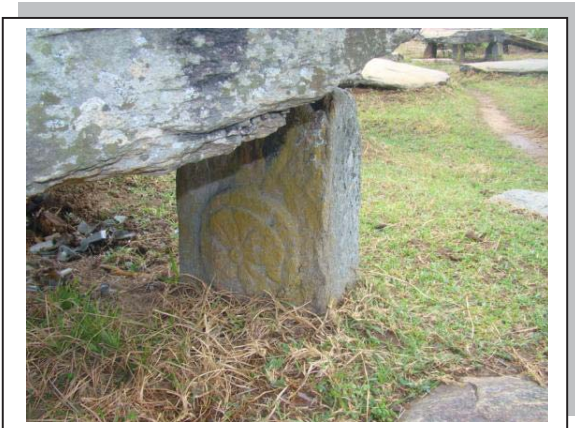
Since then, nothing important could be done in the arena of megalithic investigations in Jharkhand probably due to very difficult access to these areas. It

is only in the early decade of the 20th century that an anthropologist of fame Dr. S.C. Roy excavated some megalithic burials at a few sites like Belwadag, Khunti Toli etc. belonging to present day Khoonti district. In his brief report on Khoonti Toli excavation (2), he has informed that some 50 large stone slabs were seen, of which 12 were investigated and excavated by him. Cinerary urns or earthen jars containing human bones were found concealed below the large stone slabs. Some of the jars were placed one above the other up to a maximum number of four. In each jar, an earthen lamp and a jug with narrow mouth were found. In some of the jars, beads of stone or even copper were also found. After a gap of few years, some more megaliths were opened by Roy (3) at this site itself, in which besides potteries some iron implements, rings and bracelet etc. were found inside the grave, apart from a few copper and bronze bracelets, bell and anklet etc.

As mentioned earlier, in the year 1873, Col. E.T. Dalton reported a huge burial

site covering approximately 7 acres of land at Chokahatu, near Sonahatu in Ranchi district. Dalton counted 7360 megaliths in all mostly of the dolmen type (4). He had also measured some of the huge megalithic burials. Most of the slabs were resting on 7, 6, 4 or 3 small pillars.

The place was revisited recently by the author with (late) Dr. Nutan Sinha, an archaeologist under Govt. of Jharkhand and the megaliths were examined personally. (Pl. I).



It is a very extensive site, one of the largest in the country, probably. Some of the burials were sunk in the ground and only their capstones were visible. In other cases capstones resting on small pillars were seen. These two levels of

megaliths probably indicate two different periods for the burials. It was found that the capstones are in various shapes and sizes. The shapes of capstones include a circle, rectangle, elliptical and triangle etc. Some of them are not even dressed properly. Pillars are small as also seen and described by Dalton, and they are 3 to 7 in number below each capstone. One remarkable feature was noticed that one of the pillars of a large megalith bears a lotus flower carved in high relief on the inner face of pillar under the capstone. This decorated pillar under the capstone is a rare feature in megalithic burials (Pl. II).



This is the largest burial at this site which measured 4.52 m X 1.37 m X 0.258 m. It seems to be a grave of some

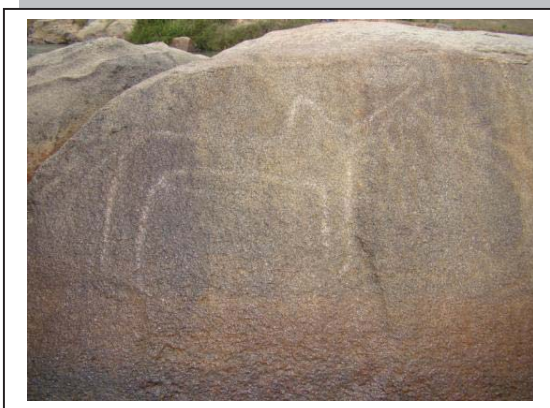
important person. Excavation of some of these megaliths may throw welcome light on the research of megaliths in the country.

Usually menhirs are found in large number in Jharkhand. In recent years the author duo have discovered many new megaliths in different parts of the state.

(Pl. III),



(Pl. IV),



(Pl. VI)



(Pl. VII)



Chatra, khoonti, Ramgarh and West Singhbhum districts have yielded several sites which should be probed to solve the megalithic problem in India. Incidentally, permission was granted to the author by the Archaeological Survey of India for excavations of Ramgarh and

Lohardaga megalithic. But due to superstitious prevailing among the local tribal groups, the work could not be started.

But the most important megalith of Jharkhand has been discovered recently by the author duo, in the district of Lohardaga. Near Lohardaga town, right on the bank of river Koel, a typical megalithic stone circle was noticed during the exploration of the area. Its diameter is 2.84 m.

(Pl. VIII).



Identical stone circles have been found in Kerala, Tamilnadu and other South Indian states where they have dated between c. 600 BC to 1st cent. AD. On stylistic grounds, the Lohardaga stone circle may be dated tentatively to c. 1st cent. AD.

The migratory pattern of the South Indian megalith builders also supports this tentative date for this particular Jharkhand megalith.

At a short distance from this monument, some menhirs also were noticed. Another very important discovery at this site is a rock painting in white (kaolin) drawn on an outcrop present in the mid stream of the Koel river there is a bull with a prominent hump and on the right a tiger as suggested by its coiled tail, is drawn.

(Pl. IX).



This painting is very interesting and the elders of the area say that they have seen it since their childhood. It may be contemporary to the neighboring megalith.

Recently, hundreds of old megalithic burials have been explored for the first time in the interiors of Chatra district



from places like Pathargara, Simariya, Chatra, proper, Giddhaur and Tandwa etc. But the most important piece of information came from a megalithic site in the Lutidih village on Chatra-Ranchi road near Bagra More, where excavation work of a drain was in progress by the local administration. During exploration, when this site was being examined, this ditch was encountered. Its section was full of ancient pottery and then only it was observed that some menhirs were also present there. In fact the labours had cut across a megalith of menhir type accidentally, which was never excavated earlier anywhere. It can be considered simply a human vandalism which should be checked by the administration. But taking advantage of this unfortunate situation for enhancing the knowledge about our megaliths, the nature of the burial was studied properly in detail.

This particular menhir burial is of secondary type in which the whole body of the dead was not entered into the grave instead corporeal remains of the dead were buried. In course of the rituals

during the disposal of the dead, first of all a ditch measuring approximately 5' x 3' x 3' was dug. Then the remains of the dead, in form of charred pieces of bones and ashes, were put in a medium size red pot, covered by another similar but smaller pot. These pots, one placed over the other, were finally placed vertically on the bottom of the ditch. Probably some edibles etc. were also placed near the pot burial in small plates as is indicated by a number of potsherds found around it. In the next step, earth was filled up to the level of the top of the pots. Here after, small and thin stone slabs were arranged in layers carelessly to fill up the rest portion of the ditch, and menhir was also erected at this level itself. In another nearby burial it was noticed that more than one pot burial was entered into the same ditch. It may be due to the reason that two persons must have died in the family at the same time so both of them were entered into the same grave and other possibility is that the grave was opened after one year or so

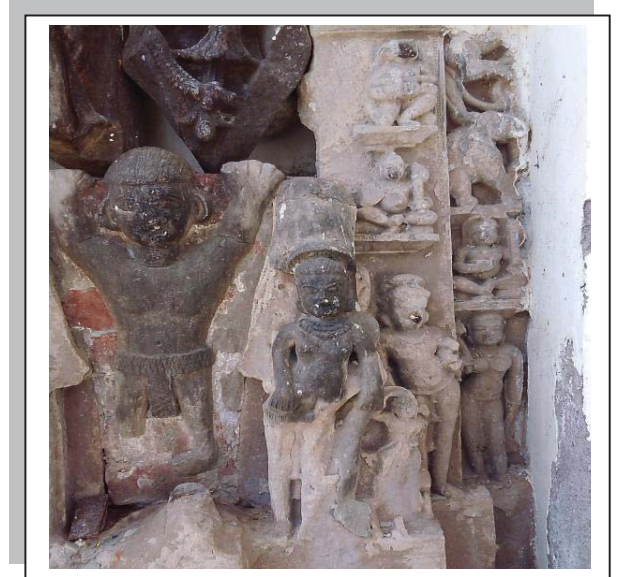
for certain other rituals for the peace of the departed soul found in Kerala.

In Jharkhand, megalithism is a continuing tradition in the local Munda tribe. They bury their dead since time immemorial and raise a large stone slab by its side. Some modern megaliths, raised by the local Mundas, were studied properly. Their religious belief, rituals related to disposal of dead etc. are being studied deeply to explore the possibility of a link, if any, between them and the ancient megalith builders. Some interesting results are coming.



### References:

1. Fergusson, J. "Rude Stone Monuments in all countries: Their age and uses" (1873), p. 27
2. Roy, S.C. 'A Note on some remains of the ancient Asuras in the Ranchi district' Journal of Bihar and Orissa Research Society, Vol. I (Part II) p. 229
3. op. cit., JBORS, Distribution and Nature of Asur sites in Choota Nagpur, Vol. VI (Part III) p. 393.
4. Dalton, Col. E.T. Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal, (1874), p. 116.



ग्राम-काकूपुर, जिला-कानपुर से प्राप्त मूर्ति