



Recent Observation over Megalithic Sites in Bandgaon Block of West Singhbhum District of Jharkhand

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Abstract: *The present work is a brief observation on the occurrence of different megalithic sites and localities spread in south Jharkhand, particularly, in Porahaat region of West Singhbhum (Chaibasa) district. The region is inhabited by the Munda and Ho communities, who practice megalithism. There are several megalithic localities in the valley of Bandgaon and the outskirts of the village settlements of Hos in Porahaat plains. The megalithic types in the study area are mainly menhirs, located in isolation, in pairs, and alignments. The present paper is concerned with the typology and distribution pattern of the sites in two different landscapes, i.e. dense forest of a high-altitude valley with 400 to 600 AMSL and the plains with 200 to 300 AMSL of Porahaat region of the district. The paper also concerns to focus on the correlation of ancient megaliths with ethnographic evidence in the region to understand the possible affinity of the present megalithic community with these monuments.*

Keywords: *Menhirs, Alignments, West Singhbhum, Jharkhand, Mundas, Hos, Living tradition*

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Introduction and History of Research

Megalithic monuments are reported in abundance in different regions of Jharkhand. Valentine Ball reported the first megalithic site of Jharkhand in the year 1872 from Pokaria village of the Singhbhum (now West Singhbhum district) region, where he has noticed two different alignments of menhirs (Ball 1872: 291-92). After a year later, Edward Tutie Dalton has reported the site of Chokahatu in the Ranchi district and also mentioned some other sites from different regions of Jharkhand (Dalton 1873). Later, in the early decades of 20th century, S.C. Roy has taken some trial diggings at few sites in Khunti region (Roy 1916a: 61-77; 1916b: 485-487; 1920: 393-433). There was only one megalithic excavation conducted in the year 1965 at the site of Khuntitoli in the Khunti subdivision of Ranchi district (now Khunti district) by the mid-eastern circle of the Archaeological Survey of India (IAR

1965-66: 10). In recent years, there were several megalithic sites from northern to southern Jharkhand in regions of Chatra, Hazaribagh, Ramgarh, Ranchi, Lohardaga, Khunti, Gumla, and Simdega districts (Imam 2014; Das 2009; 2011; 2017 & 2018; Vind 2017: 190-194). They have been studied as mere reporting, trial diggings, ethnographic and astronomical point of view. Recently, the author of this paper has conducted Doctoral research on megalithic sites of Chatra, Hazaribagh, Ranchi and Khunti district by the survey of previously reported sites and fresh exploration. All together 216 sites were researched with the imprints of ethnoarchaeological study of the megalithic monuments based on the living megalithic tradition of Mundas, Bhumij, and Ho people. They presently have inhabited the region (Shekhar *et al.* 2014: 706- 719; Shekhar and Joglekar 2015: 257- 269; 2016: 261- 278; 2017a: 19- 36 & 2017b: 65- 74; Shekhar 2019: 347- 360 and 2020:1-12). 5 megalithic localities in two villages in *Porahaat* plains were discovered and reported by the present author in the year 2017, and they were briefly studied and compared by the ongoing tradition of the Hos of the same villages (Shekhar and Joglekar 2017b). Several megalithic localities in the valley of Bandgaon block of West Singhbhum were documented in that year, which remains unpublished. This small note is concerned with those localities along with new discoveries of megaliths in the year 2019, considering the typology and distribution of the monuments.

Study Area

The study area lies in the northern portion of West Singhbhum district, comes under Bandgaon block. The region is vegetated by the forest of Saal (*Shorea robusta*), Asan (*Terminalia elliptica*), Mahua (*Madhuca longifolia*), Sisum (*Dalbergia sissoo*), Karam (*Nauclea Parvifolia*), Kusum (*Schleichera oleosa*), Gular (*Ficus glomerata*), Gamhar (*Gmelina arborea*) trees and shaded by South Koel River and its tributary; Karo river and other rivulets. Geologically, the region is formed by granite of Archean formation. The region is culturally represented by Mundas and Ho people, who believe in nature worship and animism, living their life on slash and burn cultivation, collecting wild fruits, and hunting and fishing-based subsistence (Fig. 1). Both communities belong to the same lineage separated in course of their movement into the region, hypothetically, from the place Ajabgarh region of Uttar Pradesh, crossing Rohtas, and Palamou of the adjoining region of Bihar and Northern part of Jharkhand, somewhere around 6th C. B.C. (Roy 1912).

Distribution and Typology of Megalithic Sites

The sites are in the valley of Bandgaon, divided into different localities around small settlements of the Mundas and down to the *Porahaat* plains, which has been recognized by the land of Hos (Roy 1912). Apart from this, few of them are found in the jungle away from the settlement, along the highway. They are distributed in the Jungle of *Porahaat* in the valley at an average mean sea level from 661 to 404m and in plains at an average mean sea level from 311 to 285m. Even in the plains, the sites are located near the hilly reach of the valley and several outcrops are also found in proximity (Table 1).

Table 1: Details of Megalithic Sites in West Singhbhum (Chaibasa) district

Sr. No.	Site	Village	Block	Latitude	Longitude	Elevation (AMSL)	Typology	Orientation	References
1	Ichahatu I	Ichahatu	Bandgaon	22°43'38"N	85°32'02'E	285	Menhirs, Capstones	E-W, N-S	Shekhar & Joglekar 2017
2	Ichahatu II	Ichahatu	Bandgaon	22°43'41"N	85°31'58'E	285	Menhirs	E-W	Shekhar & Joglekar 2017
3	Damudih I	Damudih	Bandgaon	22°44'08"N	85°31'54'E	296	Menhirs, Capstones	E-W, N-S	Shekhar & Joglekar 2017

Sr. No.	Site	Village	Block	Latitude	Longitude	Elevation (AMSL)	Typology	Orientation	References
4	Damudih II	Damudih	Bandgaon	22°44'04"N	85°31'53"E	292	Capstones Surrounded by cairns	S-N	Shekhar & Joglekar 2017
5	Damudih III	Damudih	Bandgaon	22°44'05"N	85°31'52"E	297	Capstones Surrounded by cairns	S-N	Shekhar & Joglekar 2017
6	Kondeyong I	Kondeyong	Bandgaon	22°46'22"N	85°22'60"E	412	Menhirs	E-W	--
7	Kondeyong II	Kondeyong	Bandgaon	22°46'26"N	85°22'39"E	404	Menhirs	E-W	--
8	Kondeyong III	Kondeyong III	Bandgaon	22°46'33"N	85°23'31"E	423	Menhirs	E-W, N-S	--
9	Kundruguttu	Kundruguttu	Bandgaon	22°46'70"N	85°21'26"E	419	Menhirs	E-W	--
10	Bandgaon I	Bandgaon	Bandgaon	22°50'98"N	85°20'21"E	601	Menhirs	N-S, E-W	--
11	Bandgaon II	Bandgaon	Bandgaon	22°50'98"N	85°20'21"E	601	Menhirs	N-S	--
12	Lumbai I	Lumbai	Bandgaon	22°52'24"N	85°20'33"E	626	Menhirs	N-S	--
13	Lumbai II	Lumbai	Bandgaon	22°52'60"N	85°20'02"E	661	Menhirs	E-W	--
14	Lumbai III	Lumbai	Bandgaon	22°52'23"N	85°19'63"E	631	Menhirs	E-W	--
15	Lumbai IV	Lumbai	Bandgaon	22°52'44"N	85°19'34"E	640	Menhirs	N-S	--
16	Karika	Karika	Bandgaon	22°49'78"N	85°21'12"E	572	Menhirs	N-S	--
17	Pingu	Pingu	Bandgaon	22°46'22"N	85°22'12"E	414	Menhirs	N-S	--
18	Talmya	Talmya	Bandgaon	22°46'22"N	85°23'31"E	423	Menhirs	N-S	--
19	Bhandra	Bhandra	Bandgaon	22°52'24"N	85°20'09"E	639	Menhirs	E-W	--
20	Jagda	Jagda	Bandgaon	22°52'15"N	85°20'23"E	637	Menhirs	E-W	--
21	Nakti I	Nakti	Bandgaon	22°43'29"N	85°29'22"E	311	Capstones	N-S	--
22	Nakti II	Nakti	Bandgaon	22°43'11"N	85°29'46"E	298	Capstones	N-S	--
23	Tokkad	Tokkad	Bandgaon	22°49'97"N	85°20'84"E	585	Menhirs	E-W	--
24	Tirla	Tirla	Bandgaon	22°50'16"N	85°20'48"E	626	Menhirs	N-S	--
25	Matlayong	Matlayong	Bandgaon	22°52'53"N	85°20'05"E	653	Menhirs	E-W	--

Bandgaon

Two different localities are in proximity to each other at both the road of the highway and crop field, near Bandgaon village. Typologically, they are represented by menhirs, aligned in the north to south. Locality one has 7 menhirs aligned north to south with east-west facing and one isolated menhir, oriented east to west. The other locality is in the proximity of NH75, where 4 menhirs are raised in similar alignment, covered by bushes, and the 2 more menhirs found in the same alignment, with a considerable distance, suggesting the gap could have been the result of anthropogenic activities, particularly, in this case, road construction (Fig. 2). The village has a continuity tradition of constructing such monuments as a memorial, which is evident by the newly raised megalithic structure of upright stone with details of the dead and respective family.

Karika

There were two huge menhirs raised next to a mud house of a local inhabitant at the side of the highway and few fallen menhirs are also found on the other side of the road. Both menhirs are said to be raised for the people who were killed by a tiger in ancient times, according to the legend explained by village elder Deoro Mundu (Fig. 3). Such case was also earlier observed by the author during the previous exploration conducted in few villages adjacent to Murhu block of Khunti district (Shekhar

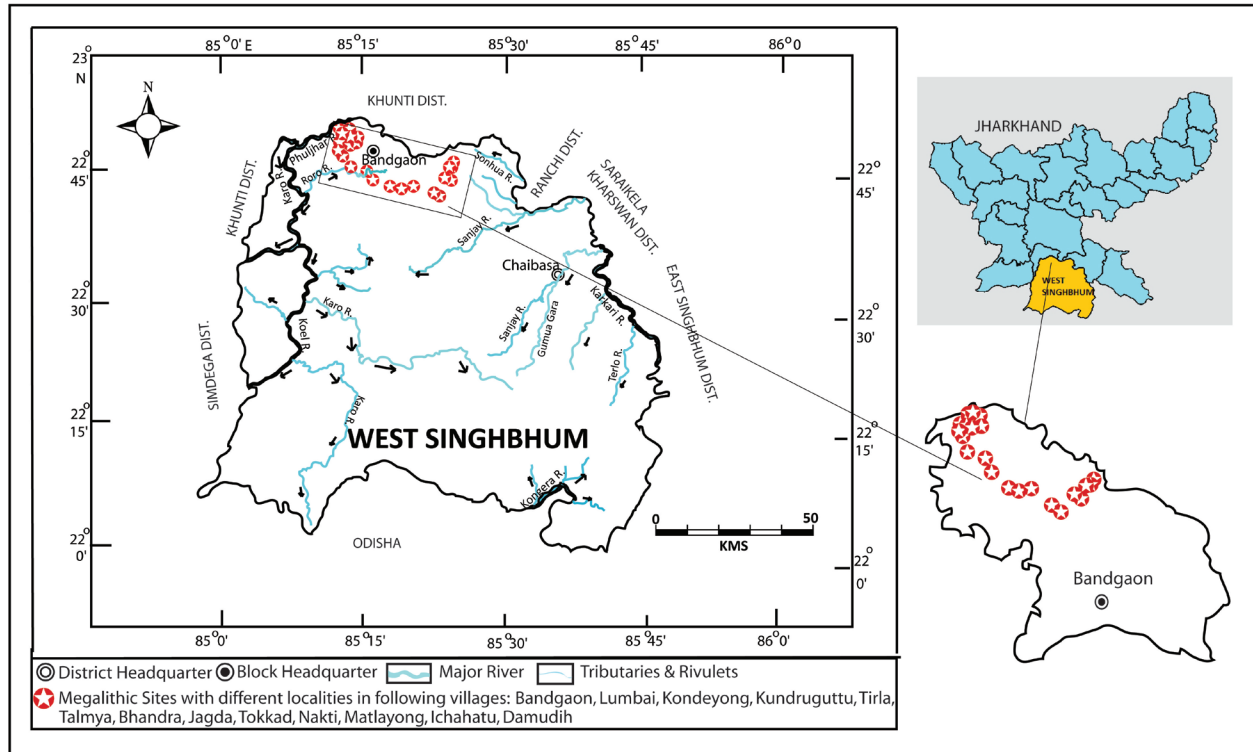


Figure 2: Alignment of seven menhirs aligned north to south and oriented towards east to west

and Joglekar 2017), even such provision of raising monument for death by tiger kill used to be a common practice among the Mundas (Hoffman and Emelson 1932: 320; Topno 1955: 715).

Lumbai

Four different localities of megalithic monuments were found in and around Lumbai village. Fourteen menhirs were found standing in alignment north to south with orientation of east-west, along the roadside on the highway in the outskirts of Lumbai village. Apart from this, a capstone with few cupmarks was also found adjacent to the menhirs (Fig.4). Alignment and cluster of menhirs were also noticed in the market area and inside the bushes alongside the road. Apart from this, few menhirs were also distributed in different areas within the village. The village has different localities of menhirs along with the continuity of the tradition among the Mundas of Jharkhand.



Figure 3: Pair of menhirs for people who were killed by Tiger during remote past (interviewed Deoro Mundu)



Figure 4: Alignment of Menhirs near Lumbai village

Talmya

Four more menhirs in similar alignment and orientation were found in a dense forest of the valley near the right-hand side of the highway. Apart from this, on the other side of Bandgaon- Chaibasa highway in the outskirts, there is an isolated menhir standing, perhaps for the person, acquired different social status (fig.5).

Kondeyong I, II & III

Three clusters of menhirs were found in different localities around a local nursery of Kondeyong village. Two clusters indicate a sort of east-west alignment, but the other one does not show any orientation. Locality II also has evidence of megalithic capstone, oriented north to south with weathered cupmarks bear over the eastern corner of it (Fig. 6).

Kundruguttu

A cluster of 8 menhirs standing in the alignment of the east to west was found on the right side of Khunti-Chaibasa road. Due to road extension, one huge to a cut in the foundation, which exposed a clear cross-section. They seem to be arranged in the alignment of double row, but most of them were collapsed or broken due to anthropogenic and other unknown reasons. No evidence of pot or ceramic seems to be exposed and even other portion of the site showed any evidence pottery or other cultural material, which indicate that all these menhirs were raised for symbolic purposes by the megalithic building community in ancient time (fig. 7).

Bhandra, Jagada, Matlayong, Tokkad and Tirla

Apart from all these above sites, there were few more megalithic localities near small hamlets, as, Bhandra, Jagada, Matlayong, Tokkad, and Tirla. These areas are having both ancient menhirs in isolated areas, along with recently raised megalith, generally have complex structures like upright stones associated with slab or capstone (Fig. 8).



Figure 5: Spatial distribution of megaliths in Talmya village



Figure 6: Different cluster of menhirs in Kondeyong village



Figure 7: Symbolic menhir with exposed cross-section standing on the side of highway with other menhirs



Figure 8: Different localities of menhirs in the valley of west Singbhum with ethnographic parallels

Nakti I & II

Down towards the *Porahaat* plains of the district, there are several villages of the Ho tribe, a sister tribe of Munda's, another megalithic community in the region (Ball 1872: 291-292; Shekhar and Joglekar 2017a). The sites are located inside Barandia and Deogaon hamlets of Nakti village. Few slabs were found in and around these settlements, which according to local informants, belong to their ancestors. Three megaliths bear cupmarks in an irregular pattern, numbering 30, 19, and 14, respectively (Fig. 9). Such cupmarks have been studied by various scholars all over the world with various aspect, including, astronomical features, gameboard, and ritualistic uses in several primitive societies (Rivett- Carnac 1879: 4; Coimbra 2001; Abbas *et al* 2010; Fulvia 2010:2-0-220; Menon *et al*. 2011; Abbas 2014; Arjun 2014; Arjun and Shekhar 2014; Arjun 2017; Ellis and Ballin 2019). In the region of Jharkhand several megalithic slabs, stone outcrops and mud surfaces bear cupmarks, with a rich evidence of ethnographic parallels in form of gameboards and association of rituals (Das 2017: 2-15; Shekhar 2020 in press).

Sense of Direction, Placement, and Orientation

Megalithic monuments in the region are typologically dominated by alignment of single and double row menhirs, predominantly aligned roughly in north-south, facing east-west direction. This indicates



Figure 9: Cupmarks in irregular pattern over the capstones of megalith

that megalithic builders of ancient times had a sort of idea of the direction of the sun and believe in setting the monuments in an alignment with sunrise and sunset. Such observation is been made even by several scholars, who worked over the archaeoastronomical aspect of megalithic monuments in Jharkhand and in various parts of the Indian subcontinent, in general (Das 2018; Menon *et al.* 2011; Abbas 2014). Ethnographic data related to belief of the Mundas, with respect to the direction of such monuments, is different on clan-wise variations. Some of the clans of the tribe raise menhirs in a north-south alignment. Few clans raise menhirs in east-west alignment, for the person who died in different circumstances (Shekhar and Joglekar 2016: 261-278; Shekhar and Joglekar 2017a:19-36).

Ethnographic Observation

Megalithic sites lie in the region in the vicinity of settlements of Mundas and Ho communities, who practices the tradition of raising megaliths as secondary funeral rites, a commemoration of dead and as a landmark, agriculture rituals, representation of various gods and fortune stones (Shekhar and Joglekar 2015: 257-269; 2016: 261-278; 2017a: 19-36; 2017b: 65- 74 2019: 347- 360 and 2020: 1-12).

Both these communities raise menhirs in east-west orientation in case of unnatural death, away from their settlement area. They raise commemorative alignments of menhirs in north-south orientation for the people achieved a sort of higher status in society at a public place, alongside the village road or within the settlement area. Among the Hos, burial and memorial stones are set in proximity of houses. Alignment of menhirs near habitation deposit was noticed by the present author in Burju village of neighboring Murhu block of Khunti district (Shekhar and Joglekar 2017a: 19-36). Alignments of ancient menhirs in east-west orientation are found in the jungle and nearby the present highway, which could have been raised by the ancient people, probably in case of unnatural death. Such alignments probably suggest their association with believe in attaining blessings for the departed soul from the sun god, which could have a parallel in present believe system of *Singbonga* (sun god) among the Mundas and Hos. Few menhirs found standing isolated can either be assigned to the person, who could have died due to unnatural cause (as the ethnographic data suggest) or as landmarks of the ancient settlement, which could be penned properly only after further investigation for the ancient habitation deposit and locational analysis of burial and habitation of ancient megalithic community.

Concluding Remarks

Megalithic monuments in Jharkhand have been reported by few colonial officers like Dalton and Ball in the last half of the 19th Century and then a few trenches are taken by S.C. Roy in the early phase of the 20th Century on few sites. The only excavation was conducted by the Archaeological Survey of India (Patna Circle) at the site of Khuntitoli where they have excavated a slab burial. The excavation resulted in the discovery of evidence of multiple post-cremated burials in a different urn under one slab, along with grave goods of copper and bronze ornaments and bead of semi-precious stones and of bronze. In recent years very few freelance explorers as mere reporting of the sites. Even a few works have been conducted by archaeo-astronomical approach by Subhashish Das; a freelance researcher, who worked over megalithic sites of northern Jharkhand. Few exploratory works are conducted by a team of INTACH, Hazaribagh in the region of the Northern and southern parts of the state.

Typologically, megalithic monuments in the region of Jharkhand are represented by capstones, dolmens, and menhirs mostly, which are still raised by different clans of Mundas, Bhumij and Ho communities (Shekhar et al 2014; Shekhar and Joglekar 2015; 2016; 2017a; 2017b; Shekhar 2019; 2020). All these three communities practice megalithic tradition as a performance of secondary funeral rites and even as landmarks, representation of gods (benevolent spirits) and to appease malevolent spirits. Few menhirs are also raised during agricultural rituals and some of them are raised as fortune (Shekhar 2020). Some of the exposed menhirs, capstones and dolmens also indicate a sepulchral nature as they yielded fragments of cremated bones (Shekhar *et al.* 2021 (In press)). This is an interesting aspect and new feature of menhirs in megalithic research of India, as such evidences are not found in any excavation or menhir, but it has to be firmly established by a proper archaeological excavation in the region. In comparison to the Iron age megalithic dolmens, the typology in Jharkhand is a little different, as instead of orthostats, four or more vertical columns are used to support the capstone or at few sites stone blocks are also used, depending on the availability and nature of raw materials. Typologically, they are more comparable with megalithic monuments of Khasis and Gonds of Meghalaya and Chhattisgarh, respectively.

The ethnography of Mundas and Hos studies helps us to infer that the monuments indicate at a long history of spatial as well as cultural distribution of both these communities. The ancient megaliths in various sites perhaps possibly represent the existence of ancestral sites of both these communities

located nearby their respective villages. During their entrance into the Chotanagpur region, they somehow got split in the ancient time, the Mundas settled in the region of Ranchi plateau (Ranchi and Khunti region and hilly area of the northern part of West Singhbhum) and Hos settled in the region of Saraikella- Kharsawan, east and west Singhbhum, particularly in *Kolhan* and *Porahaat* plains. Megalithic builders in the region have set their monuments near to tributaries and rivulets of the South Koel river during ancient times, using the forest products for food and hunting and fishing could have been a part of their subsistence strategies, which is continued in the present megalithic communities in the region. In the plain area, agriculture could have been their main source of subsistence, as the Ho community survives on, in present time.

The present work adds a new area of distribution of megalithic monuments in Jharkhand, which could be traced in the report of Valentine Ball regarding the occurrence of the megalithic locality in Pokaria village in the year 1872, which could be better understood by the present survey in the region.

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