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# Essence of Megalithism among the Ethnic Communities from Assam-Meghalaya Border Region

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**Abstract:** *The ethnic people living in the Assam-Meghalaya border region have a long-standing tradition of erecting megaliths in honour of their deceased ancestors. The study area is home to a heterogeneous population of tribal and non-tribal communities, such as the Bodo, Khasi, Tiwa, Karbi tribes, Bengali and a few Assamese caste populations. In the border region, there are quite a few megalithic sites where this tradition is still continued. The present study was conducted to examine the structural, functional, and socio-religious features of the megaliths recorded from the area in light of the ethno-archaeological potential of the megalithic tradition in this area. The researcher also tries to outline the structural and cultural changes that have been reported within this practice currently. Ethnographic methods of observation, interview, case study, genealogical method are applied to collect data. The study reveals that megalithic practice is deeply rooted in the socio-religious life of the followers. It stands as an emblem of clan solidarity, territorial marker, foundation indicator and holds the entire community to one whole. Changes also an inevitable aspect in this traditional age old practice due to the impact of urbanisation and industrialisation, but yet the continuity from ancient time till today is significant, which can be looked from aspects like ethnic identity and assertion, respect to their ancestral tradition and impact of environment etc. The current study also demonstrates the consistency and fusion of the megalithic typology, which is believed to have been a component of a huge geo-cultural region that stretched from Southeast Asia via Northeast India up to Eastern India.*

**Keywords:** *Tradition, Continuity, Changes, Clan Solidarity, Morphology, Symbolic*

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## Introduction

Megaliths are stone structures that may hold the remains of the dead or objects used in burial. Because of the tremendous typological variety of the megalithic structures, their socio-cultural and philosophical

significance, and their substantial temporo-spatial distribution, the megalithic tradition has captured the interest of academics in the fields of anthropology and archaeology. The study of megaliths began in the context of colonial Europe, notably through diffusionist theories with widely questioned foundations (Laporte 2022). The phrase, which derives from the Greek terms *megas*, which means ‘large’, and *lithos*, which means ‘stones,’ was first used by antiquarians to refer to a group of monuments in western and northern Europe that were very simple to define. These monuments were large stones known as dolmens, cromlechs, and menhirs. Later, it was expanded to include a much wider range of construction and even excavation across the ancient and new world (Childe 1948). Northeast India holds a significant position on the worldwide archaeological map, because of its massive megalithic remnants and as one of the few locations in the world where this practice has still continued to date. In the work of J.P. Mills (1933), who recognised the significance of Northeast Indian megaliths, asserts that Assam’s megalithic richness is a well-known ethno-archaeological trait. Although experts agree that structure of megaliths has become a common practice in Northeast India since prehistoric times, but no specific date has yet been ascribed to any of the region’s megalithic structures (Clarke 1874).

Northeast India is home to a number of megalithic locations, including the plains of Assam’s Nagaon, Morigaon, and Kamrup districts, the hill districts of North Cachar and Karbi Anglong, and the states of Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur and Meghalaya. In addition to various regions of Northeast India, megalithic arrangements have also been found in Southeast Asia, Africa, and European countries. According to T.C. Sharma (1984), the Khasi and Jaintia hills districts of Meghalaya, possess Northeast India’s largest concentration of megaliths. Some of the Meghalayan localities with notable megalithic structures are Cherapunji, Lailong, Kote, Maollong, Jowai, Laitkor, Nartiang, and Mawphlang (Godwin Austen 1872; Gurdon 1914).

Disposal of dead in archaeology is inevitable as it can provide a crucial context for the deposition of artifacts and other associated findings. Burial records have provided some of the earliest information on cultural activities. Early civilisations’ mortuary monuments have shown amazing information and revealing details about ancient lifestyles (Metcalf and Huntingten 1991). The rank of the departed is expressed by the height of the funeral tower, the quality of its decoration, the number of people needed to carry it, the number of attendants, and the number of commoners’ towers. According to Geertz (1980), the biggest and most expensive royal ceremonial is cremation. It is the rite that is most extensively devoted to the assertive declaration of status.

In terms of the continuum between the past and present, Megalith is one of the crucial characteristics of ethno-archaeological inquiry. Megaliths are mostly found among the Karbis and Tiwas of Assam, the Khasis of Meghalaya, and a few tribes of Manipur and Nagaland in Northeast India. In other places of the world, megaliths are prehistoric and extinct cultural phenomena. Megalithic tradition may be seen along the entire tract from Manipur, Nagaland, via North Cachar, Meghalaya, and Karbi Anglong up to Central and Eastern India. These traditions share several typological and socio-ideological characteristics in common.

Many academicians have expressed their opinions on the meaning, importance and significance of these megalithic remains. Mentioned may be made of Hutton (1922), Mills and Hutton (1929), Ruben (1939), Renfrew (1976), Rao (1979), Devi (1993), Medhi (1999), Saikia (2007), Yekha-ü and Marak (2021) and Jamir and Müller (2022) etc. David Roy’s initiative to methodically document the ritualistic elements and ceremonial phrases uttered by the Khasis during the construction of megalithic structures is regarded as a noteworthy endeavour (Roy 1963). In order to reconstruct the culture-history of the Khasis, Namita Sadap Sen (1981) also prepared a comprehensive chapter on the megaliths of Khasi-Jaintia region in her published PhD thesis titled “*The Origin and Early history of the Khasi-Synteng*” With the exception of sporadic mentions made by P.C. Chaudhury (1959) and N.P.

Chaudhury (1985), no scholar has conducted any systematic study of the megalithic remains of the Karbi Anglong district of Assam. In his essay on archaeological study in Karbi Anglong, D.K. Medhi (2000) provided a description of the megalithic remnants of Western Karbi Anglong. Bezbaruah (2003) conducted systematic study on Megalithic structures and associated beliefs and practices in Karbi Anglong district, Assam. Hazarika (2016) carried out an ethno-archaeological study in the Garbhanga Reserved Forest to evaluate the archaeological record and the ethnographic material collected from the local Karbis, in order to draw the ‘direct historical analogies’. Mitri (2016) conducted research using the Khasis’s living traditional mortuary practice as an ethnographic lens to examine their megalithic legacy. Bora and Bezbaruah (2018) try to highlight the continuation of megalithic practice from past till present among different tribes of Northeast India. Hazarika *et al.* (2020) undertook a study at the Silchang megalithic site to comprehend the functional flexibility of the megaliths and their usage as a seat of authority in the Khola kingdom of the Tiwa community of Assam. Through the performance of *Chongkhong Phuja* and the associated living megalithic tradition among the Hill Tiwas inhabiting in the Umswai Valley, Patar and Hazarika (2023) provide unique information on megalithic tradition related to agricultural activity. Despite the rich anthropo-archaeological findings one can access very few written accounts on the Assam-Meghalaya border region. The author has considered the study area as one geo-cultural zone and tried to interpret the archaeological findings from ethno-archaeological perspective. In the present study, an attempt is being made to understand the topography of the sites, to interpret the morphological, ceremonial features as well as symbolic meaning associated with the archaeological remains and to outline the changes associated with megalithic erection if any reported from Assam-Meghalaya border region covering south-eastern part of Kamrup district, south-western part of Karbi Anglong district, Assam and north-eastern part of Ri-Bhoi district, Meghalaya.

## Methods and Study Area

This exploratory study is conducted in Assam-Meghalaya border province covering border area towards south-eastern direction of Kamrup Metro, Karbi Anglong district towards south-western part and north-eastern part of Ri-Bhoi district, Meghalaya. Total seven sites have been reported during exploration namely Sukurberia (SRB), Nazirakhat (NZR), Tetelia (TTL), Khamar (KHM), Baolagoh (BLG), Umswai (UMS) and Nongpoh (NGP) (Fig. 1).

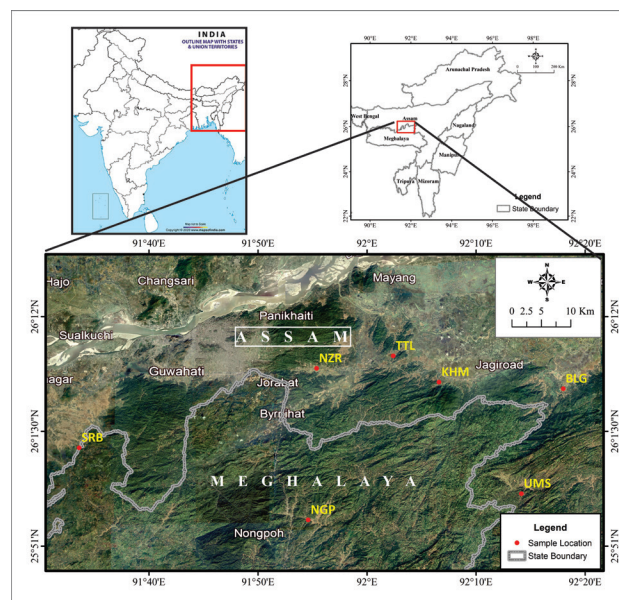


Figure 1: Map showing the Study Area

The study area is predominantly inhabited by the Karbi, Tiwa and Khasi population. Standard archaeological method of exploration is conducted in foot hills, hill slope, habitation area, agricultural field and megalithic sites etc. Both structured and unstructured interview method is applied to collect data on associated ceremonial ritualistic practices. Elderly persons, village headman, priests and persons who have recently engaged in stone erection process were interviewed to collect relevant data. Genealogy and case study method were applied to collect information about the lineage system and other socio-religious rite and rituals associated with stone erection process from key informants. Scientific observation method is applied to understand the geomorphology of the sites, morphology of megalithic remains and sources of raw material of the monoliths. GPS device is used to record the co-ordinates of the sites. Moreover measuring tape, ranging rod is used to measure the monoliths and extend of the sites.

## Findings

**Site 1: Sukurberia** (Co-ordinates: 26°00'28.4" N, 91°33'40.2" E, Elevation= 137.86 m)



Figure 2: Site of Sukurberia bearing megaliths

This area is located in Kamrup district at a distance of about 31 kms away from Guwahati city and 13 kms from Rani Bazaar in south-western direction in the Assam-Meghalaya border. It is one of the megalithic sites in the plains. Geographically, the region experiences humid environment. The general soil colour is reddish brown to blackish brown and texture is fine to medium. The Tropical Moist and Dry Deciduous forests and Tropical Semi Evergreen Forests are observed nearby. There are total 154 megaliths out of which 38 are standing, 32 are completely fallen, 17 are partially fallen and 67 are subterranean (Figure 2). The megaliths are placed in a circular fashion. However, some very small sized monoliths are also found in erect posture. This site is adjacent to the main road connected to Assam and Meghalaya and surrounded by hills from south-eastern direction. Closeness to the road with heavy vehicle is a factor affecting the status of the megaliths.

**Site 2: Nazirakhat** (Co-ordinates: 26°7.26'N, 91°55.38' E, Elevation= 36 m)**Figure 3: Megaliths of Nazirakhat**

Nazirakhat is located in the outskirts of Guwahati city about 25 km away and 9.0 km away from Sonapur. The site is situated beside National Highway 37 near the river Digaru, which flows into the Kalang River close to its embouchure into the Brahmaputra. The Tiwa, Boro, Assamese, Karbi communities form the majority inhabitants in this area. Both Tropical Moist and Dry Deciduous forests and Tropical Semi Evergreen Forests largely cover the region. Here investigators recorded a living megalithic site practiced by the Karbis (Figure 3). The megaliths are located on a hill slope at the backyard of a temple in alignments. The site is surrounded by paddy fields and settlements of people. Among the Karbis of Nazirakhat area, it is prevalent to erect stones in a straight line with a table stone in front as a post cremation rite. This practice has been carried out for more than 200 years. There are more than 200 monoliths placed in a straight alignment at the site. The site measures about 32 m in length and 20 m in breath.

**Site 3: Tetelia** (Co-ordinate: 26°08'547"N, 92°02'607"E, Elevation = 169 m)**Figure 4: Site of Tetelia with Menhirs**

The village Tetelia is located at a distance of 20 kms towards the eastern direction from Guwahati city. The archaeological site is located at a distance of about 7 kms from the National Highway 37 near Sonapur. The weather is mostly moist and moderate throughout all the seasons in this Assam-Meghalaya Border region. Due to less rainfall in the dry winter season it makes convenient to carry out exploration. The area is surrounded by agricultural field, an under-constructed road leading to the village, runs near the eastern side of the site. The vegetation pattern of this area is tropical in nature with different types of trees like mango, betel nuts, coconut, bamboo etc. The colour of the soil ranges from light brown to dark brown. The site is protected by Directorate of Archaeology, Assam with proper fencing facility. The area is mostly inhabited by the people of Karbi community.

The site has been declared as State Protected Archaeological site under “The Assam Ancient Monument and Records Act, 1959”. This site is known as “Karbi Memorials Archaeological site”. The site has a group of Megaliths which are locally known as “*Long-A-Ari*” among the Karbi community. These have been erected in memory of a dead person following ritualistic tradition of worshipping the soul of the dead for earning piety and prosperity locally known as “*Long-A-Ki-A*”. Within the site there are specific allocated areas for each clan, which resulted in the groups of menhir within the site. After the cremation rite of the dead person the villagers erect the stone on the same day. The stone are collected from the nearby mountains or jungles by the elderly knowledgeable persons following specific rituals and carry two stones - one elongated and another horizontal flat in shape to the site.

The site have total 158 megaliths structures, (Figure 4), out of which 58 are completely standing, 48 subterranean, 32 partially fallen and 20 are completely fallen. Among them 33 are large in size (above 1.52 m), 73 medium (1.52- 1.18 m) and 52 are small (below 1.18 m) in size. Regarding the orientation of the megaliths in this site, it is difficult to assign in one specific direction as almost all are placed in an unsynchronised pattern.

**Site 4: Khamar** (Co-ordinate: 26°06′02″N, 92°06′77″E, Elevation= 74 m)



Figure 5: Site of Khamar with menhirs

The place is situated at Dimoria town in Kamrup district of Assam. It is located 46 km towards Eastern direction from Guwahati city. The region is bounded by Chandrapur towards north, Guwahati towards west, Umling towards south, and Ri-Bhoi towards east. While going from Guwahati, the study site is located in the right side of National Highway 37. From the NH 37, an under-constructed road leads towards the study area. The site is surrounded by the household of the people of Karbi community. The climate of the area remains humid and moderate. The area is covered by tropical trees and plants of mango, banana, beetle nut, coconut, bamboo etc. and the colour of the soil is found to be reddish brown to blackish brown and texture is fine to medium.

The megalithic site of Khamar reported inside the village is an unprotected site open to all visitors (Figure 5) where a total of 123 numbers of megalithic structures are recorded. Out of the 123 megalithic structures, 53 megaliths are found to be in completely standing position, 26 are in partially fallen state, 10 are completely fallen or grounded and 34 are found to be in subterranean state. Among all the megaliths present there, 25 megaliths are large (above 1.52 m) in size, 58 are of medium (1.52 - 1.18) m and 40 are small (below 1.18 m) in size.

According to the local people, the site belongs to the 'Royal Dynasty' of 'Dimoria King' where the megaliths were erected in memory of the departed soul of the royal dynasty's family and clan members. But the megalithic site is found to be far away from the house of the kings descendants. This is because, during the ruling time, a large area was under the king's jurisdiction. Later with time, migration took place as Meghalaya border is nearby and the site is present on the foothills, new population came and settled in the area and started building houses close to the site. The megalithic site of the Royal Dynasty consists of some huge megaliths which are found to be very difficult to carry by humans. This also depicts that there might have been use of elephants by the kingsmen. The raw material of the stone is similar to the stones available in the nearby hill which falls under Meghalaya, which means that the stones were collected from the neighbouring hills. Further investigation reveals that the site is not a living site and the practice has stopped by the kings descendants, even after discontinuation of the practice in that site, locals don't use the site for any purpose as to pay respect to the departed soul of 'The Royal Dynasty'. The place is cleaned and maintained by the locals. The descendants of the Royal family come once in a year and lights lamp at the megalithic site to pay homage and wish blessings and prosperity from their ancestors.

**Site 5: Baolagog Ceremonial Ground** (Co-ordinate: 26°4'54''N, 92°17'36''E, Elevation 154 m)



**Figure 6: Megaliths at the site of Baolagog**

Baolagog is a small village situated at about 10 km away from sub-district headquarter Donka and 60 km away from district headquarter Diphu of Karbi Anglong district of Assam. The village is mostly inhabited by the Tiwa and Karbi people. Towards the northern part of the village, a cluster of megaliths have been reported. The area is covered by rubber garden towards north, Baolagog village towards south, agricultural field toward east and a few hills towards west. The death of a Tiwa villager is inevitably marked by the stone erection process with elaborate religious ceremony followed by community or clan feast noticed presently. The area is a living community site (Figure 6), where a total of 71 megaliths are recorded in different conditions like completely standing, partially fallen and completely fallen. The orientation of the stones is reported towards south to north direction.

**Site 6: Umswai** (Co-ordinates: 25°56'06''N, 92°14'17''E, Elevation 681m)



**Figure 7: Site of Umswai**

In Karbi Anglong district of Assam, Umswai village is situated in Donka Tehsil. It is located around 250 kms from Diphu, the district headquarter, and 80 km from Donka, the sub-district headquarter. One megalithic site has been reported in Umswai village which is situated at the top of a hill, surrounded by thick vegetation (Figure 7). A small hilly track is leading towards the site from the foothills or the village entrance. More than 400 clusters of menhirs have been recorded in different status in this area. The Tiwa community consider this menhir site as very sacred and it stands as a symbol of solidarity within the community. The villagers are allowed only in one particular day that is the stone erection ceremony day to enter into the sacred place. In the village a day long elaborate ceremonial practice is devoted for stone erection process and everyone from the village has to participate without fail for the wellbeing of the entire community. The entire process holds the community as one and the numbers of menhirs signifies the apparent chronological age of the settlement or the village.

**Site 7: Nongpoh** (Co-ordinates: 25°53'445''N, 91°54'79''E, Elevation 5966 m)

The site of Nongpoh is situated on the foothills and one side of the National Highway 40. Distance wise it is 51 kms far from Shillong, Meghalaya and 60 kms from Guwahati, Assam. The area is mostly inhabited by the people of the Khasi community. A total of 26 numbers of megalithic structures





**Figure 8: Menhirs with table stone at Nongpoh**

found inside a well fencing area while going towards Maranger Lake along the side of the road at Nongpoh (Figure 8). Out of the 26 Megalithic structures, 17 of them are with horizontal stone slab in front of the vertically erected megalithic stones (menhir) and 9 of them were without stone slabs. At present, erection of stone is not practiced by the people residing near the site. But this site holds a very significant position among the villagers. The village organisation holds the annual community meeting at this site where they took all the major decisions, resolutions for the welfare of the village, resolve conflict take place inside the village. All the villagers strictly follow the decision that has been taken at the site. They consider the place to be their forefathers meeting place and thus sacred for them.

**Table 1: Combined Inventory from the seven sites**

No	Site name	Different Conservation Status of Megaliths								Total	
		Standing		Partially fallen		Completely fallen		Subterranean		number	%
		number	%	number	%	number	%	number	%		
1	Sukurbaria (SRB)	38	5.24%	22	15.94%	32	28.57%	62	33.15%	154	13.25%
2	Nazirakhat (NZR)	131	18.06%	21	15.21%	25	22.32	34	18.18%	211	18.15%
3	Tetalia (TTL)	58	8.0%	20	14.494%	32	28.57%	48	25.66%	158	13.59%
4	Khamar (KHM)	53	7.31%	26	18.84%	10	8.92%	34	18.18%	123	10.58%
5	Baolagog (BLG)	64	8.82%	6	4.34%	1	0.89%	-	-	71	6.11%
6	Umswai (UMS)	364	50.20%	34	24.63%	12	10.71%	9	4.81%	419	36.05%
7	Nongpoh (NGP)	17	2.34%	9	6.52%	-		-	-	26	2.23%
	Total	725	100%	138	100%	112	100%	187	100%	1162	100%

## Discussion

The Northeast Indian Megalithic tradition includes elaborately connected ceremonies and rituals, which are important components of this practice. According to Shadap-Sen (1981), the Khasis-Synteng people's entire religious life in the past revolved around the megalithic rite. At each of these rites, the Khasis show their support for one another as a clan. Mitir's (2019) work offers an overview of the functions and roles of the megalithic monuments scattered throughout the Khasi-Jaintia hills. It also closely examines the clan cists, which have a direct bearing on the customs of the people regarding their funeral rites and their importance within the megalithic tradition. According to an analysis of the hymns performed by the Karbis during the construction of megaliths, indicate that in addition to appeasing the spirits of the dead, there is also a connection of their fertility aspect (Bezbaruah 2012). At each of these occurrences, the ethnic communities exhibit their clan solidarity.

The sorts of megalithic buildings that have been discovered in South India to date are described in a ground-breaking research by Krishnaswami, who also compares them to those reported in Northeast India, where megaliths are still an important practice among certain indigenous communities. Additionally, before providing the nomenclature used by the Indian Archaeological Survey, he also made an effort to describe the terminology employed by different researchers in various geographic areas (Devi 2011).

During the course of exploration in seven sites, a total of 1162 numbers of megalithic structures have been reported in four different conditions – standing, partially fallen, completely fallen and subterranean (Table 1). The current analysis demonstrates that the monoliths recorded from the study area are primarily menhir and menhir with stone platforms in terms of structural type. Menhirs, alignments, and a very small number of dolmenoid menhir are the main megalithic types found in the western part of Karbi Anglong of Assam. The tallest menhir is generally placed in the middle position. The orientation of the megaliths in all the sites is found to be three types - circular, straight alignment and arch pattern. All the reported sites of the present study are community site in nature. In four sites – Nazirakhat, Tetelia, Baolagog and Umswai the stone erection practice is still going on and in the rest three sites the villagers or descendants try to maintain the tradition by performing the rituals at least once in a year without fail. According to Patar and Hazarika's (2023) research in the Umswai Valley, there is a correlation between the villagers' agricultural cycle and their practice of erecting stones. Such kind of agricultural association with megalithic practice has not been found in neighbouring area or other parts of Assam till date.

According to Heine-Geldern (1928), the Austroasiatic component of the Munda people is what brought megaliths to Eastern India. According to Walter Ruben (1939), the practice of erecting megaliths spread from Palestine and Persia to India in the early Iron Age, with one branch travelling as far east as Chota Nagpur and the other into Southern India. He opines that the megalithic tradition of the Mundas and the ancient Asian tombs originated in the west and later spread throughout the Iron Age farther towards east into Assam. However, according to Furer-Haimendorf (1945), the megalithic complexes discovered in Assam and other parts of Southeast Asia were not just a random collection of varied cultural aspects; rather, they were part of a well-organised system of rituals and beliefs, as well as a philosophy of nature and life.

The beginning of megalithic tradition in this region of the country may have been impacted by the Southeast Asian megalithic legacy during the first half of the first millennium BCE, and it may have come to an end by the first century CE. However, it is difficult to determine when these megalithic traditions first appeared. Some people believe that this tradition was spread to this region from the west. Furer-Haimendorf opines that megaliths were primarily originate from south-eastern Asia,

including Indonesia, Oceania, the Philippines, and Formosa and the Austro-Asiatic linguistic flow of people brought them to north-eastern India (Furer-Haimendorf 1945). He further put forward a theory of initiation of megalithic practices of Southeast Asia, which date back the process to the late Stone Age. According to him, the “centre of megalithic dissemination” arose somewhere in Eastern Assam, Northern Burma, or Southwestern China. He also claims that “The stone circles and menhirs of the South-East Asian kind, which are still flourishing among Bondas Godabas and Bastar Gonds and form an Eastern direction, reached peninsular India in Late Neolithic times, whereas the dolmen and the port-hole reached India from Mediterranean regions. In his essay “The Problem of Megalithic Cultures of Middle India”, Furer-Haimendorf also suggests that “the purpose and significance of the megalithic monuments among the Gadabas and Bondos share a common fundamental concept with that of the few ethnic tribes of Assam. Gordon Childe also concurs with this viewpoint (Childe 1948).

Megalithic erection, which is connected to several beliefs, taboos, rites, and observances are essential to the religious system of the people residing in the study area. The megalithic monuments are constructed not just for burial but also to remember the feast of merit and other occasions which are associated with numerous faiths and beliefs. It is already mentioned that the megalithic culture is still practised today among the inhabitants in the study area. The pristine way of life of the indigenous people is gradually transforming as a result of the effects of modernisation and industrialisation. However, during this period of change, the megalithic heritage has continued among them, shedding some of its more traditional characteristics and embracing others.

In addition to their various structures, the Khasi megaliths are noteworthy for the socio-ideological significance attached to them. Megaliths found among the Khasis are divided into two major categories by S.N. Rao (1993), namely Funerary Stones and Memorial Stones. The funeral stones are those that are specifically linked to the post-cremation rite, such as the burying of the departed body’s mortal remains. On the other hand, memorial stones are erected by clansmen or anybody else to remember a public event that is relevant to social, political, ideological, or other issues. Both of the aforementioned stones can be seen in the study area, particularly in the area close to Nongpoh. Mention may be made of Mawlong’s statement that the megalithic tradition among the Khasis was severely undermined and eventually vanished as a result of the introduction of Christianity and the fervour to eradicate illiteracy, superstition, and the worship of evil spirits (Mawlong 2009). However, this cultural custom of stone erection is still prevalent among the Khasis resided close to the study area. Nevertheless, the bone deposits in the Khasi megaliths reported earlier are missing in the case of the Karbis who lived in the border region of Meghalaya and Assam, demonstrate the tradition’s primitiveness.

Megalithic structures from the study area come in a variety of sizes and shapes. It suggests that there is no set size for these stone blocks. Each megalithic monument in the investigated societies has socio-cultural significance despite the wide range in size. Thus, it becomes clear that in the field of inquiry, megalith does not just refer to big stone structures but also to smaller stone structures. The majority of the recorded megaliths are found in complexes rather than alone, which is their distinguishing characteristic. This complex is made up of numerous different sizes of megaliths.

Granite and quartzite make up the majority of these megalithic structures’ raw materials. Despite granite’s abundances, also for its hardness, the villagers preferred to use it as the best kind of raw material. Ancient people might have chosen granite for two reasons: first, it might have been readily available or simple to access from nearby locations; and second, because they were aware of the stone’s hardness, it might have been stronger and more durable than other stones like limestone or sandstone. Many of these structures are currently in deteriorated, abandoned, and broken condition due to various reasons.

The findings of the present study make it abundantly evident that the physical state of megalithic structures is significantly influenced by both natural and human activities. Natural occurrences like earthquakes, violent winds, heavy rain, and other environmental factors including moisture, humidity, weathering, trees or branches falling on megaliths, and the growth of new trees and roots all have an effect on them, either directly or indirectly. Fungus or algae growth on the stone's surface is a biological process. A few of the megaliths also contain porous, so-called "honeycomb," openings on their surface. Furthermore, a sizable number of the megalithic buildings in the region were also destroyed by the developmental factors such as road construction, dirt dumping, encroachment, embankment, etc.

Megaliths have a variety of purposes and significance among the followers in the investigated area. Megalithic construction and restoration were extremely unusual occurrences, yet the followers maintain and preserve the ancient monuments. The inhabitants feel a sense of belongingness because this is a long-standing custom from their great-grandfathers. For varied purposes, like memorial, commemoration, sitting, religious, burial, foundation, meetings, judiciary, boundary etc. different sizes and shapes of stone structures are observed. These are more than simply stone towers; they also have subliminal socio-cultural symbolism.

The custom of the feast of merit, which is essential to the construction of megaliths, guarantees a brighter afterlife in addition to prestige in this life. In contrast to nearby tribes like the Nagas, the construction of megaliths among the Khasis, Karbis and Tiwas have no connection to the Feast of Merit. However, it was undoubtedly necessary to provide food and drink in appreciation for their assistance and labour during erection process. Here, community service or clan cohesion is prioritised over the Feast of Merit, which is seen as a supporting role. The earliest and most basic megaliths could likely serve as boundary markers, representing the rise of socio-cultural complexity along with the idea of land ownership. Three sizable megaliths that act as a boundary or territory marker between two villages mark the beginning of Maranger Lake, which is located just two kilometres from the Nongpoh site. There are occasions when a family or clan's plot of land in a forested area is additionally distinguished by a monolithic construction. Now a day also, many still abide by this system of delineation. This was likely one of the earliest megalithic structures where the concept of land ownership or rights came into being.

Human society, which is not static and undergoes development or alteration through time, megalithic culture also did so. Megalithism has changed in the current study region. Although the megalith's function is still clearly evident, there is very little evidence of complex ritualistic practices. Additionally, there have been modifications in burial customs; among the Khasis, bones are no longer transferred from primary to secondary burial stones, while in other locations, megalithic constructions have given way to more contemporary brick and cement constructions. The Garos of Meghalaya, where the megalithic practice is found in a modified form, may be mentioned in this context. In remembrance of the deceased, they prefer to erect carved wooden post called *Kima* rather than stone structures (Playfair 1909). However, due to strong affiliations to the clans, these clan burial stones are maintained to a significant extent and are thought of as hallowed locations. Megaliths do have a hallowed quality, although it is gradually fading in terms of socio-cultural life.

According to this study, Northeast India holds a significant position in terms of megalithic culture, which has been practiced by several tribes since prehistoric times in Southeast Asia and Northeast India. The megalithic culture of Northeast India is unquestionably a prehistoric tradition, and in this land-locked, isolated region of India, the reason for our ignorance in this crucial area of study can be found in the absence of organised anthropological and ethno-archaeological studies in parts of

Assam-Meghalaya border region. A significant aspect of the populations living in the study area is their megalithic tradition till date. The current study reveals the continuity and combination of the megalithic typology thought to have been a part of a vast single geo-cultural zone spanning Southeast Asia, Eastern India, and Northeast India.

The non-availability of written records and scientifically excavated archaeological remains create difficulty in reconstructing the prehistoric background of these archaeological remains. The prehistoric survived tradition of megalithic practice can be considered an important ethno-archaeological approach in this regard. One cannot deny the impact of environmental factor behind the continuation of this practice as it exerts a profound influence on cultural development, resulting in the continuity and survival of cultures from prehistoric past down to the present. The reporting of megaliths and the on-going practice among the Karbis, Khasis and Tiwas residing in the study area provides another dimension to trace archaeological continuity from past to present.

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The author has no competing interest to declare.

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