Neolithic Reconsidered: Uncovering Uncharted Territories in Mizoram, India

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Abstract: *Prehistoric investigation in the state of Mizoram, India is still in its infancy. Although the state of Mizoram is well known for its megalithic traditions, there is virtually no site investigated from the point of prehistory. Moreover, Mizoram's location shows its importance to tracing, cultural, linguistic, traditional and genetic linkages between east and South East Asia especially with the country of Myanmar. This paper lays down the first attempt to report the presence of Neolithic tools, which are mostly accidental, solitary findings and understand its nature of development keeping in mind the uniqueness of Northeastern states in India coupled with migration and cultural transmission.*

Keywords: Mizoram, Prehistory, Neolithic, Megalithic, Feasting, Migration, Folksongs

Introduction

The field of prehistoric research in Mizoram is relatively young and under-developed. Although the state of Mizoram is well known for its megalithic traditions (Lalhminghlua and Sarkar 2017, Malsawmliana 2017, Malsawmliana 2019), there is virtually no site investigated from the point of prehistory. Moreover, Mizoram's strategic location facilitates the exploration of cultural, linguistic, traditional, and genetic connections between East and Southeast Asia, particularly with Myanmar. This study is the first of its kind to investigate the Neolithic period in Northeastern India, taking into account the unique cultural and historical characteristics of the region, as well as the influence of migration and cultural transmission from neighboring areas.

The Northeastern region comprises the states of Assam, Meghalaya, Manipur, Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh, Tripura, Sikkim and Nagaland. This entire area displayed several ecological settings and geomorphology. A large number of Neolithic tools for the first time were reported from Assam by Lubbock (1867). Worman (1949), Dani (1960), Krishnaswami (1960), and Thapar (1985) made a systematic study of Assam Neolithic tools and placed these materials within the framework of Indian

Neolithic as well as within the chronology of the Neolithic of the Indian subcontinent. Dani (1960) made a systematic study of Assam Neolithic tools. Most of the Neolithic sites are located on the hilly tracts of upland areas suggesting a unique trait of this cultural phase in the region The important excavated Neolithic sites are Parsi – Parlo (Ashraf 1990) and Daporijo (IAR 1996 - 97) from Arunachal Pradesh; Daojali Hading (Goswami & Sharma 1963), Sarutaru (Rao 1977) and Marakdola (Rao 1977) from Assam; Nongpok Keithelmanbi (Singh 1993) and Napachik (O.K. Singh, unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation 1993) from Manipur; Selbalgiri II (IAR 1967-68), Pynthorlangtein (IAR 1992-93), Lawnongthrow (Mitri & Neog 2016), and Mirkhan (Mitri &Neo 2016) from Meghalaya; Chungliyimti (Jamir 2011) in Nagaland.

Physical Settings of Mizoram

Bounded by Myanmar and Bangladesh internationally and with its domestic neighbours of Assam, Tripura, and Manipur, Mizoram lies between 21°56N – 23°31N latitudes and 92°16E-93°26E longitudes. The Tropic of Cancer passes through the state almost dividing in equal halves. The maximum dimension running from north to south is 285 km while that from east to west is 115 km (Pachuau 2009). Owing to rugged terrain and thick vegetation, geological studies in Mizoram is comparatively low (Mandaokar 2000; Pachuau 2009) (Fig 1). However, geological studies have shown sedimentary settings consisting of sandstones and shales belonging to tertiary age (Pachuau 2009; Sati 2019 b) and which are continuation of rock formation belonging to Patkai range and Cachar hills. There are evidences of marine fossils embedded in the rocks (Pachuau 2009).

Table 1: General geological succession of Mizoram (Pachuau 2009)

Geological Age	Group Name	Formation Name	Rock Type
Recent		Alluvium	Mainly in river beds
Pleistocene		Unconformity	-
Mio-Pliocene	Surma	Bokabil	Shale, Siltstone, Mudstone and little shale
		Upper Bhuban	Mainly sandstone, siltstone and little shale
Oligo-Miocene	Surma	Middle Bhuban	Mainly shale and Siltstone
		Lower Bhuban	Mainly Hardstone
Oligocene	Barail	Barail	Predominantly shale, siltstone and grey wakes, etc.

From a geological perspective, the state is part of Tripura-Mizoram Accretionary belt belonging to Cenozoic age (Evans 1964; Srivastava et.al. 2008). The state has been divided into five geotectonic provinces (Mandaokar 2000). The general formation of Mizoram geology is of repetitive succession of arenaceous and argillaceous sediments in NNW-SSE trending anticlines and synclines in longitudinal directions (Srivastava et.al. 2008; Pachuau 2009). The anticline shows long, narrow and tight formation but

the synclines are broad and gentle (Mandaokar 2000). The stratigraphic succession of Mizoram is given as follows (Table 1).

As mentioned, Mizoram is mountainous in physical set up with ranges separated by valleys. The lowest elevation can be found at Tlabung, i.e., 21m while the highest elevation is that of Phawngpui (Blue Mountain) at 2157m. Since the terrain is young, the landforms do not show much diversity in formation, except for a distinctive feature that the western mountain have higher degrees of slopes (Pachuau 2009; Sati 2019b). The eastern half of the state has higher slopes and are steeper than the western half with the altitude ranging from 400-2157 meters. Generally, the high points are over 1000 meters. There are various mountain ranges such Sialkal Range with Lengteng being the highest peak at 2149 meter above sea level; Chalfilh Range with an elevation of 1905 meters and Ṭawi Range at 1889 meters. Other range includes Mawmrang, Hmuifang, Reiek, Mamit, and Hachhek (Pachuau 2009).

Table 2: Physical divisions of Mizoram (Sati 2019b)

Sl. No.	Geographical Unit	Altitude (M)	Area (km^2)	Percentage	Location
1	High structural hill	>1200	1732.1	8.2	Eastern part of the longitudinal half largely and central part of the state with limited distribution
2	Medium structural hill	800-1200	4350.6	20.6	Found in the surrounding of the high structural hills comprises of foothills
3	Low structural hill	<800	13,013.3	61.7	They cover almost the entire area of the state
4	Valley fill	Along the valleys	574.3	2.7	The unconsolidated sediments deposited by streams or rivers in a narrow fluvial valley
5	Flood plain	Low-lying plains	78.4	0.4	Formed by deposition of recent alluvium—gravel, sand, and silt
6	Linear ridge	Parallel and linear ridges	1338.3	6.4	Low-dissected, parallel and linear ridge of uniform heights and dimensions, found along the western and south-western parts of the state stretching from the Lawngtlai district in the south to Mamit district in the north

Amongst the high elevation and mountainous terrains, there are some flat areas, the largest of which is located in Champhai with a length and width of 11.27 and 4.83 kilometres respectively. Presently, the whole area has been taken up for terrace farming. Other flat areas include Tuiphai in North Vanlaiphai and Thenzawl both belonging to Serchhip District; Chemphai flat land is located along Serlui River while Buhchangphai flat land is that of Teirei River. Smaller flat areas can also be found at Zawlpui, Hortoki, and Bairabi etc. (Pachuau 2009). Sati (2019a & b) has stated that 3.1% of the geographical area are floodplains and valleys, linear ridges form 6.4%, while 90.5% is that of hills with varying low and high altitudes. Physical division table of Mizoram is given as follows (Table 2).

Naturally forming lakes are few and formed only where the mountains can provide embankments. The naturally formed lakes are Palak, Ṭamdil, and Rengdil apart from various other smaller lakes. With regard to drainage, most of them originated in the central part of the state flowing either towards north or south directed by the ridges. There are rivers such as Tlawng (the longest river in the state), Tuivawl, Tuirial, Langkaih, and Tuivai all draining into Barak River in the north. The southward flowing is Chhimtuipui while Khawthlangtuipui flows towards the west. Ṭiau and Chhimtuipui forms natural political boundary with Myanmar (Pachuau 2009).

Cultural Landscapes

The term Mizo is a generic word meant to comprise of the various tribes living within and outside the state. The major clans of Mizo are Lusei, Ralte, Hmar, Mara, Lai, Paite, Kuki etc. (Lalzarzoa 2021). Origin according to traditional viewpoint is *Chhinlung* (Covering stone) from which people emerged. The origin viewpoint of *Chhinlung* can be found in the folksongs of Hmar clan. However, the meaning and interpretation of *Chhinlung* vary among scholars. One of the earliest Mizo writers Liangkhaia identified it with that of a Chinese story *Chhinlunga* who left home and settling in Myanmar *c.* 750 CE. Following his death, the people dispersed in different directions and calling themselves *Chhinlung chhuak* (originating from *Chhinlung*). Another writer K. Zawla (2011) says that they passed through a gap in the Great Wall of China escaping the clutches of the ruler. Ginzatuang placed *Chhinlung* in Tibet from where Mizos moved out; Sangkima connects it with the builder of the Great Wall of China while the need for locating the people at a larger context culturally and geographically, according to Joy L. Pachuau becomes the reason for historicizing the myth (Chhangte 2021).

It is difficult to ascertain when Mizos entered Myanmar from China but believed to have happened in three stages. Amongst the first group, there are the Pyu, Arakanese, Kachin and other smaller tribes. Shans or Tais, Karen, Mon-Khmer and others are believed to be in the second and third group. Mizos forming part of the first group entered Myanmar reaches the Chindwin River (Lalthangliana 2014; Lalzarzoa 2021) and moved westward to Kabaw Valley called as (*Kawlphai* by Mizos) and departed again *c*. 800-850 CE (Lalthangliana 2014). Based on some words such as *Kawlhnam*, *Kawlhrei*, *Kawltu*, *Kawlbahra*, *Kawlhai*, *Kawlthei*, *Kawlfung*, *Kawlhren*, *Kawlper* etc. they

appeared to have interacted and shared some aspects of culture. According to K. Zawla (2011, Lalzaroa 2021), they departed again for Khampat *c.*950 CE and after staying for some period, they headed for Chin Hills *c*. 1200 CE according to Lalthangliana (2001) and *c.* 1250 CE according to K. Zawla (2011). Here, some groups such as Zous, Paite, Simte, and Haukip belonging to Thado clan moved towards Manipur while others moved towards the southwest settling in Tiddim, Falam, and Hakha. Belonging to another group Pautu, Hualngo, Khawlhring, Darlong, Hmar etc. crossed Ṭiau River and entered Mizoram. Thântlang and Rûn area (Chin Hills) was occupied by clans such as Hauhnar, Chuaungo, CHuauhang, Ngente etc. *c*. 1250-1400 CE and moved towards Lêntlang and Ṭiau area *c*. 1450-1700 CE (Lalthangliana 2001). Not all groups and clans migrated at the same time and Hrangkhawl, Darlong, Biate or Hmar clans are thought to be at the forefront and venturing beyond the present-day Mizoram boundary. Some have labelled them as old Kuki. They were thought to be driven out by Thado, Jangshen and their offspring. The last to enter into Mizoram was the Sailo clan around second half of the 17th century CE (Sangkima 2000); Lalzarzoa 2021).

It is difficult to ascertain when the word 'Mizo' came into use. According to Lalthangliana (1980), the term came to be used in the reign of Lallula of Sailo clan, during his rule at Zopui *c*. 1765 CE. The term Mizo did not circulate widely for identification that by the time of 1901 census, there was none who considered himself/herself as Mizo. However, by the 1961 census, there were over 200,000 thousand people who considered themselves as Mizo. In the record of the earlier census, people identified themselves according to their clans such as Hmar, Lusei, Paihte, Pawih, and Ralte. However, the latter census shows identification of only three i.e. Hmar, Mizo, and Pawih. It can be surmised that certain level of cultural unity occurred in between the census where people began to identify themselves under a single term, and that clan-based identification took hold for quite a significant amount of time.

The lack of writing system proved to be a hurdle when it comes to reconstructing the past. Information was passed on orally through forms such as stories and lore etc. Recordings were first made by the Colonialists. The history that is now available are all based primarily on colonial accounts and oral sources. This naturally narrows what may actually have been the case in the past. Historian Lalthangliana (2014) has made an attempt in understanding how farming may have been conducted in the past. According to him, during their stay in Chindwin and Kabaw valley, their conditions would not have been too poor owing to the flat fertile land and their contacts with the Burmese. However, he is not certain if terrace farming was ever practiced by the Mizos. With migration to the Chin Hills and occupying the areas between Thân Tlang and Rûn River, their economic conditions have deteriorated. Owing to the high altitude, rice was not yielding and they had to rely on corns, millet, taro (*Colocasia esculenta*), and broad beans (*Canavalia ensiformis*). They did not have proper tools and antlers of deer and sazuk (*Rusa unicolor*) including sharpened sticks were used for weeding and clearing the cultivated lands. This is reflected in an old song:

Khisa chhuk chho chhumpui zing hnuaiah,
A ki riau riau riang lo thlawh nan a ṭha e.

(Lalthangliana 2014)

A deer moves around under the cloud,
The horn is good for clearing cultivated land.

(Translation: Lalhminghlua)

Colonial records on the cultivation system do not differ much when compared to the present day in terms of cultivated items and the nature of cultivation. The use of plough apparently was not practiced as mentioned by Lewin (1870) and that jhum system was practiced by everyone. Stevenson (1943) has written a detailed account of how crops were rotated on the basis of seasonal change. There were two main seasons – *Fur* (June to October) and *Ṭhal* (November to May). The cultivated crops have been classified into four classes – gain, pulses, roots and vegetables (Carey & Tuck 2008). The staple foods include rice, millet, corn, sulphur beans, and pea. There are also subsidiary foods such as broad beans, pumpkins, melons, taro, and gourds etc. (Stevenson 1943). Colonial records on the tools used for cultivation are axe and hoe (Stevenson 1943; Carey & Tuck 2008), the broad edge not measuring more than four inches (Carey & Tuck 2008), Burmese working chopper, indigenous billhook (Stevenson 1943).

Archaeological Findings

From Context: Neolithic in Mizoram up until now are not exhibited by habitation sites. Hence a major challenge faced was to decide on a starting point. However, few neolithic celts as accidental, solitary findings have been reported and is getting reported every now and then. Under the present study an extensive village to village survey was undertaken to find these Neolithic celts and locate their original context. From Champhai District, villages surveyed were Buang, Dilkawn, Zotlang, Zote, Bulfekzawl, Leisenzo, Lianpui, Sesih, Vangchhia, Sazep, Chawngtlai; from Khawzawl District, Chawngtlai village and from rom Saitual District, Maite village was surveyed (Figure 1). The reason why probably habitation sites are still not found is because they were not truly practising intensive agriculture.

They probably were hunter-gatherer, forager living in rock-shelters but showed a tendency of making settlements at open stations as primitive farming developed among them. The area was rich with natural resources and the people learnt to utilize these plants and animals. For this season few villages in eastern Mizoram were selected; especially the ones which has reported Neolithic celts. The findings are as follows:

Zote*:* This is a Village in Champhai Block in Champhai District of Mizoram State, India. It is located 5 KM towards East from District headquarters Champhai. It has reported Neolithic celt (Figure 2). It is 9.8cm in length and 4.1 cm in breadth along the

cutting edge and 3cm along the butt end. The maximum thickness is 2.1cm. Although the specimen was in Aizawl, however we wanted to visit the original location and also understand the landscape context from which it was found. The specimen was found from a paddy field and was an accidental finding (N 23. 49156, E 93.35621; accuracy 2 m radius; elevation 1288m). The provenance was a naturally low-lying area developed further for terrace farming. The area is fed with perennial river Tuipui and there are streams which cone from the mountains. The paddy cultivation area is surrounded by mountains and vegetations. While returning some sections were observed, however no habitation deposit was found.

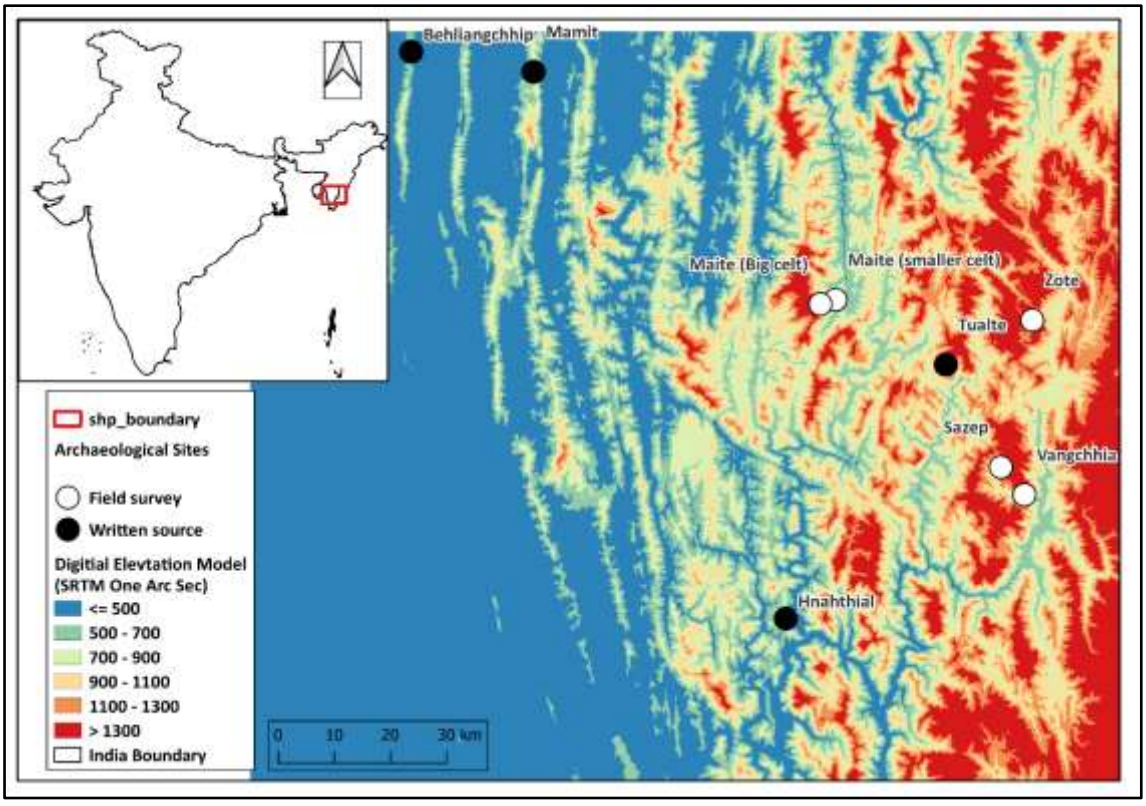

Figure 1: Villages surveyed for Neolithic celt (Data sources: Shape Boundary from Bhuvan portal, vector and raster map data from Shuttle Radar Topography Mission - SRTM)

***Vangchhia**:* The village of Vangchhia is located in the Champhai district, Mizoram. The village is home to the state's first protected archaeological site. There are around 180 menhir stones of different shapes and sizes in this village that are fully carved. Not too far away from these menhirs is a cave or a rock shelter that overlooks Myanmar. Vangchhia (Aizawl Circle, Archaeological Survey of India 2018) has also been subject to excavation by Archaeological Survey of India. Besides structural findings, handmade cord impressed pottery and smoking pipes have also been reported from the excavation. Another interesting finding is stone paved pathways leading to the Ṭiau River. These pathways might have been used for fishing, hunting, agricultural activities and other subsistence activities along the river courses of Ṭiau river by the

people of the bygone ages. A neolithic celt (Figure 3) has also been reported from the site. Its small in size, finely polished with a convex cutting edge and resembles late Neolithic in nature. Its 4.7 cm in length and 4cm in breadth along the cutting edge and 1.8 cm at the butt end. The maximum thickness is 1.3 cm. It's broken on the butt portion and also fresh damaged marks were noticed both on the cutting edge as well as sides. The location (N 23.18370, E 93.34249; accuracy 3 m radius; Elevation 943m) from where this tool was found has a gentle slope. The trail to reach this area goes down from the mountain almost 5.8 km from the motorable road. The trail was heavily vegetated as no one has used the same road for last 5 years. This locality is on the southern side of the present village of Vangchhia. From that locality the mountain slopes down further and meet the Iva River. The area from where the celt was found is a flatter area approximately stretching 70 to 80 m and then again ends in a cliff.

Figure 2: Celt (Zote)

Figure 3: Celt (Vangchhia)

Sazep: It is a village in the Champhai district of Mizoram, India. A neolithic celt (Figure 4) has been reported from the village. The location (N 23.23240 E 93.30175, Accuracy 2 m radius; Elevation 1376m) of the celt from where it was found is just a few meters away from the habitation area of the present village above the road close to a banyan tree. Its 8.6 cm in length and 4.1 cm along the cutting edge. The breadth of the butt end is 2.4 cm and the maximum thickness is 1.6cm. This tool was actually found in 1994 during slash and burn activity along with some potsherds as well as metal artefacts none of which has survived. The whole area looks like old settlement as it is strewn with pottery and the colour and composition of the soil looks like that of an older settlement. The present village also has a long history and was established in 1888 by Hualngo clan. Before westward movement, people from Chin areas used to hunt in the present day Sazep area. This was supposedly a rich hunting ground. Hunters who came here always have successful hunt and hence wanted to keep this area secret to others. The name Sazep comes from two words, "Sa" means meat and "Zêp" means hidden. Although this is literal translation of the word but popularly it should be taken

as a hidden hunting ground. There are plenty of water sources around. In the bygone eras there were competitive feasting as well as sharing of the entire hunt with the community.

Figure 4: Celt (Sazep)

Figure 5: Celt (Maite)

Figure 6: Celt (Maite)

People who set up the present village came from Saṭawm side of Myanmar. The present village is sitting on an old settlement. When these people came the name Sazep was already in vogue and they just adopted the name. Based on the long history, archaeological evidences and the strategic location of the village it seems to have a prehistoric foundation and has potential for more intensive archaeological investigation.

Maite*: Maite* is a village in Thingsulthliah Block in Aizawl District of *Mizoram* State, India. It is located 44 KM towards East from District headquarter Aizawl. Two Neolithic celts were found in the village. The first one (Figure 5) was a bigger one highly polished, 16.6 cm in length and 6.3 cm in breadth along the cutting edge. The butt end has a breadth of 3.8cm. It weighed approximately 800 gm and probably was used for heavy duty. The maximum thickness in 3.1 cm. The other one (Figure 6) was not as polished as the first one and small in size too. The length of the tool is 6.7 cm, the breadth at the cutting edge is 6.2 cm and at the butt end is 3.2 cm. The maximum thickness is 1.4 cm. Both are intact complete tools with some surface scratchings.

From Private Collection: Apart from contextual findings, there are also some celts belonging to private collection of a Mizo historian, B. Lalthangliana from Aizawl. They were collected from various places. The authors could document ten celts from his collection as mentioned in his book (Figures 7- 9). The details of the documented stone tools are outlined in Table 3. Amongst the celts that were documented, the length ranges from 4.3cm – 9.5cm; the cutting-edge ranges from 3.7cm – 5.7cm; while the butt edge ranges from 1.7cm – 3.2cm. The tools are polished and smoothened although some damages were observed. Based on the profiles, they may be divided into axes and adzes. Amongst the tools, No. 3 can be of volcanic in morphology, perhaps that of

basalt or gabbro. However, this requires confirmation. Should it be of volcanic, it would mean that it is not of local origin. There are also some tools that have wooden texture in their appearance. They could be made out of petrified wood. This may be considered as silicified woods have been reported from Zawlnuam in Mamit District, Buhchang in Kolasib District (Tiwari *et.al*. 2012; Chandra *et.al*. 2013) and Tuipang in Saiha District (Agarwal *et.al*. 2006). The origin of these stones may only be clarified based on laboratory testing.

Table 3: Neolithic celts from B. Lalthangliana's Collection

Sl. No.	Length (in cm)	Cutting edge (in cm)	Butt edge (in cm)	Profile
1	5.9	5.2	3.0	Single sided bevel edge
2	5.5	4.6	2.5	Single sided bevel edge
3	4.3	3.8	3.2	Single sided bevel edge
4	4.7	4.1	1.7	Single sided bevel edge
5	6.0	3.7	1.7	Double sided bevel edge
6	5.7	5.7	2.4	Double sided bevel edge
7	7.4	4.5	1.9	Double sided bevel edge
8	6.0	5.2	1.9	Single sided bevel edge
9	6.2	3.9	2.5	Single sided bevel edge
10	9.5	3.7	2.7	Single sided bevel edge

Figure 7: Lalthangliana Collection

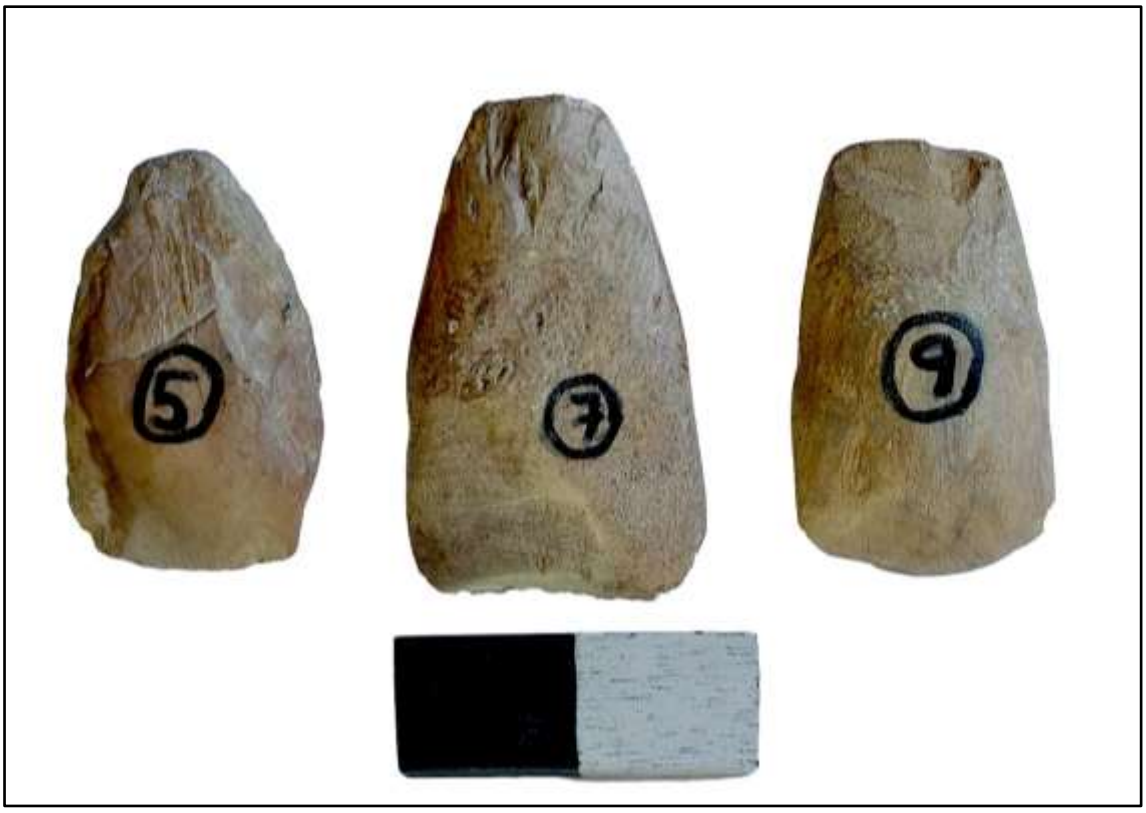

Figure 8: Lalthangliana Collection

Figure 9: Lalthangliana Collection

Ethnographic Context: The importance of Ethnographic survey in archaeology is that it helps in the examination of the role of material culture through observation and interviews. Ethnographic data also helps archaeologists to think more broadly about the original social context of the tangible as well an intangible aspect of the prehistoric society that they are investigating. During this field work many a times the researchers needed to take detours depending on information that was received and to their surprise most of these times instead of finding what they went looking for, they found something more engaging in terms of materials culture of Neolithic on a generic level like cord impressed pottery and food processing equipment like pestle and mortar etc. However, since not a single cord impressed pottery has been found in association to celts no connection could be establshed with ethnographic data and ethnoarchaeological data and hence the understanding will remain ethno-sociological rather than archaeological in this case.

Figure 10: Cord impressed globular pot from Bunag Village

Cord Impressed Pottery*:* In Buang village, an old cord impressed pot was shown (Figure 10) to us that has been passed down through generations. It's a typical cord impressed globular jar. The pot is 50 cm in height; outer rim diameter is 25.5.cm and inner rim diameter if 18 cm. the maximum body circumference is 128 cm and circumference of neck is 70 cm. The condition of the pot is intact. According to the

family the pot is more than 160 years old and was traditionally used for making of rice liquor. However, in the present context it is being used to store tobacco.

Figure 11: Cord impressed jar (Buang village)

A second pot having slight carination and belonging cord impressed black ware (Figure 11) was also there. This pot is smaller than the previous one with an opening in the front side to facilitate dry frying of seeds and chillies. Height of this pot is 21.5 cm; outer rim diameter 17.8cm and inner rim diameter is 12.5 cm. Maximum body circumference is 77 cm. The opening is almost squarish in shape measuring 13 cm in length and 15 cm in breadth. Both the pots are handmade.

Another cord impressed pot was recorded in the village Leisenzo. This was a globular jar with perforations at the base. This particular pot was an import from Saizang in Myanmar by people who came looking for employment in 1990s. At present they are using it to cook sticky rice. They put a vessel with boiling water and hang this perforated vessel on top. The perforations are covered by gourd skin and pre-soaked rice are cooked in it through steaming. Eighteen perforations were noticed at the bottom with an average diameter of 0.7 m. the height of the vessel is 30.5 cm with a maximum body circumference of 97 cm. Diameter of outer rim is 25 cm and inner rim is 18cm.

At the village of Sazep, similar perforated cord impressed pot was found with a family (Figures 12a and 12b). In this case there were thirteen perforations. This is a globular pot with a maximum body circumference of 102 cm. The diameter of perforations ranged between 0.5 to 0.7 cm. the family mentioned that that this perforated pot and the phallus shaped pestle came with their grandparents when they moved to Mizoram and they believe them to be an import from Myanmar. The locals mentioned that perforated pot was traditionally used for brewing liquor.

a b

Figure 12 a and b: Perforated cord impressed globular pot (Sazep village)

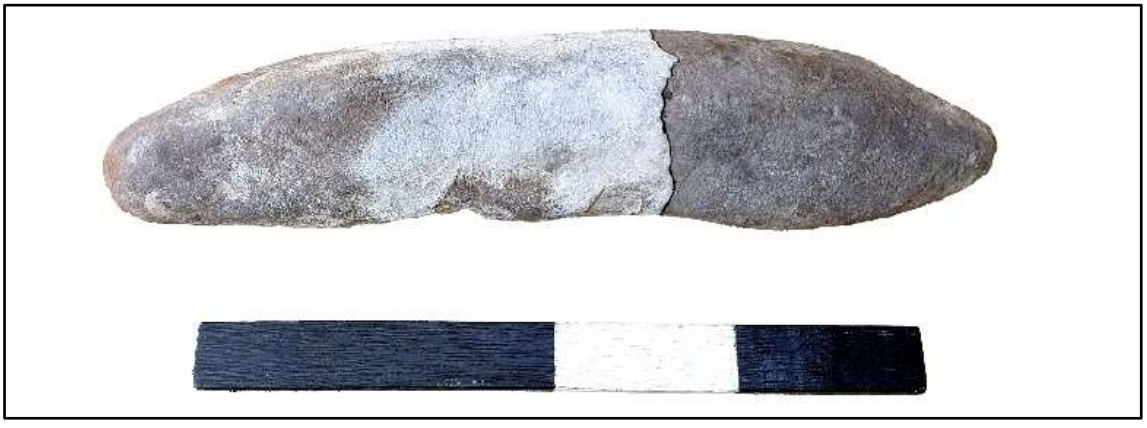

Figure 13: Pestle (Lianpui village)

Pestle*:* Lianpui village which was reported for findings of polished stones along with pestle and mortars were also visited for documenting those artefacts and recording their primary locations. To our surprise we could not locate the polishing stone as according to the owner it was sent to Aizawl Museum. However, he still has the pestle (Figure 13) that he found along with the polishing stone. At present he is using that pestle as a clay andiron for firewood. It is broken into two halves because of regular

heating and one half has also developed some cracks. Nonetheless we documented it. The length of the pestle is 26 cm and breadth are 5.5cm the owner also recalled finding cord impressed potsherds, more pestle and mortars and pipes in the area in earlier days.

Another pestle was found at the village of Sazep similar to the previous one although they mentioned they it's a surface collection. At present day they are using it as a pounding stone to smash garlic and other vegetables. The length was measured as 16.5cm at the broader end the circumference is 19cm and at the tapering end is it 12 cm. We found another interesting pestle with a family in the shape of a phallus (Figure 14). The length of this pestle was 16.2cm. They locally call it *chirawtlung* meaning salt grinding stone. Although phallus shaped stone objects are not uncommon in global perspectives and have been reported from the early Neolithic of Southern Levant (Mithen et al 2005), Roman culture (Moser 2006) and Native American Culture (Koerper and Evans, 2008), however they are meagre. Considering that one of the earliest representations of male sexuality in the form of stone phallus comes from Gravettian culture (Upper palaeolithic) in Germany (Conard, 2006) and is contemporary to Venus figurines, male sexual imagery is comparatively rare among the figurative representations from prehistoric context. This finding is intriguing from this perspective.

Figure 14: Pestle (Sazep village)

Present Day Garden Tools: In Lianpui village we also recorded present day garden tools (Fig 15) having exact shape like Neolithic celts and axes but made out of iron. One tool was bended into the shape of a hoe but made out of a thin sheet of metal.

Figure 15: Present day garden tools (Lianpui village)

Carinated Metal Cooking Vessel: In Bulfekzawl village we were shown a big carinated cooking vessel similar to handi made out of pure copper (Figure 16). This belonged to Mrs. Zosangi an octogenarian, who inherited it from her father and her mother was a village Chief's sister. She comes from a socio-economically advantaged background. The vessel is still being used to cook rice and meat and sometime even borrowed by neighbours to cook feasts. At a time 8kg of rice can be cooked in this vessel. The maximum circumference of the body is 140.5 cm. The outer rim diameter is 38cm and inner rim diameter is 29cm.

Figure 16: Carinated Copper Vessel (Bulfekzawl village)

Theoretical Perspective

Neolithic for the state of Mizoram has not been established from a stratigraphic context till date. There are findings of Neolithic markers such as celt, cord-impressed ware, and megalithic erections (if one considers them as culturally similar in practice to those of Europe). However, all these findings come from surface level except for some sherds from Vangchhia excavation. The lack of extensive explorations to find undisturbed areas and excavations are factors as to why till date, no proper Neolithic site can be established. This factor is heightened by the mountainous nature where erosion occurs and also due to the quasi-sedentary nature of the people in the past moving from one place to another periodically. Their movement depended on the fertility of the soil and most likely even due to game animals. With lesser intensive farming and periodic migrations, understanding Neolithic may require a different approach.

Looking into the nature and method of production, ethnographic history has shown that competitive feastings were practiced. The idea or concept of feast can be found in many cultures. Feast may be defined as sharing of any special food, either in quality, preparation, or quantity by two or more people not on a daily basis but on special occasions or events (Hayden & Villeneuve 2011). Studies related to food from the perspective of archaeology are built upon the assumptions that food material culture can create social relations and groups; food preferences are not always determined by calories but traditions and cultural constitutions; food as a transformative agent; and the agency nature of meals and dishes in social processes. Feasts has been classified into three broad categories – celebratory, patron-client, and status/display, each with their own meanings within societies (Hastorf 2008). Of the kind that is dealt here is the last category, i.e. status/display feasts called as feast of merit. The Neolithic feasting

model asserts that the desire for ostentatious display of power was the driving force of agriculture (Hayden 2009). To display power through harvest requires more income which also automatically drove development of production tools.

Figure 17: Hranghleia's memorial erection mentioning 82 communal feasts

Among the Chins, certain feasts were considered to have connection that would enhance the fertility of the host (Stevenson 1943; Hayden & Villeneuve 2011). The feast

of merit among the Mizos eventually end up in what is locally termed as *Thangchhuah*, a status of an all achiever who succeeded in gaining all the requirements to climb up the open social ladder. This status was achieved through two processes – *Inlam Thangchhuah* (within the village) and *Ramlam Thangchhuah* (through hunting of specific animals). *Thangchhuah* involves series of steps necessarily incorporating feasts multiple times. Outside the research area but within a proximal distance, feasts were also important among the Nagas for transferring fertility from the host to monuments through which fellow villagers can access for their own benefit (Simoons 1968; Hayden & Villeneuve 2011).

For the Chins or Mizos, the idea of feast was entwined with religion where production played a key role in their understanding of the afterlife. The fact that communal feastings can be given by anyone capable shows the nature of ideological platform in which society was built. For illustration, Hranghleia (1854-1942 CE), a warrior belonging to Hmar Pulun clan gave communal feasts for 82 times who finally rests in Chawngtlai village (Figure 17). Similar case was also recorded from Sazep village where in the past communal feastings were practiced (C. Vanlalvunga, personal communication, 2018). *Thangchhuah* feasts is possible only with a good harvest and successful hunting. Consistent efforts were given to host feasts showing their power and achievements which would eventually lead to attainment of *Thangchhuah*. The practice of feasting also implies necessarily a stratified society.

However, what must also be kept in mind is the nature of the society regarding habitation deposit as they were not permanently tied down to one single area. Their continuous periodic migrations probably did not allow for much cultural deposits. Celts were probably discarded at the place of their use after being worn out. It is from this perspective that Neolithic in Mizoram may be glanced, at least to begin.

Discussion and Conclusion

Currently, the scenario of Neolithic research is meagre and extensive works are required to have an idea of pan-Neolithic in the state. Based on the field survey, ethnography, and written sources, it is clear that neolithic was practiced until some hundred years or so as evident based on the practice of feasting. In fact, shifting cultivation is still practiced today. The mountainous nature of the terrain perhaps did not allow for prolonged settlement as compared to the plain areas where source of agricultural income based on fertile soil are regularly deposited. The transferring of soil fertility from the mountains carried by rains and rivers only allowed for periodic cultivations until the potency of the soil is regained in the hilly areas. This is a factor for periodic migrations in the past. The tools required for cultivation based on ethnohistory is animal horns while archaeology is that of celt shows the probable status of society where some may have struggled in their cultivations. The sporadic nature of celt findings requires further work, especially those that are in collection. With the establishment of their provenance, a better view of Neolithic may be derived for the state.

The historic pattern may be given a similar consideration based on the evidence of surface findings in other states of the Northeast, which are also geographically belonging to the same Himalayan range. The tools that have been documented and those that have been reported from other states are more or less similar in design, material, and intended functions. Observation of the documented materials shows that few celts were most likely made out of petrified woods which is readily available in the state in places such as Zawlnuam, Buhchang, and Tuipang. In fact, Zawlnuam and Buhchang are located close to Tripura border with Mizoram; and those celts in Tripura mentioned by B. Lalthangliana could have their origin from these places. Moreover, the similar practice of slash-burn cultivation, the close affinity of aspects such as language and cultural practices etc. shows that Neolithic of Northeast India do not diverge in extreme manner, but rather tend to show similar bases and foundations.

The practice and nature of feasting can shed light on the nature of Neolithism, especially of the past. This would allow the entire Neolithism to be considered at par with those of Southeast Asia and Oceania where feastings were also practiced by different cultures. It also further establishes the geographical extent of feasting and its significance in the formation of society.

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