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# Newly Discovered Megalithic Burials at Kalambha, Nagpur District, Vidarbha Region, Maharashtra: Victims of Public Apathy

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**Abstract:** *The Vidarbha region of Maharashtra, known for its rich Megalithic culture, has recently revealed significant archaeological findings at Kalambha in Nagpur District. This study explores four newly discovered Megalithic Stone Circles featuring cup marks, a characteristic element of such sites in Vidarbha. Located near Kalambha village, these burials highlight diverse orientations and preservation statuses. While three circles exhibit visible cup marks on basalt boulders, the fourth is entirely destroyed, with stones repurposed for agricultural boundaries. The investigation provides insights into the geomorphology, burial practices, and cultural significance of these features, drawing parallels with similar Megalithic sites in Central and Southern India. Observations suggest that cup marks, often interpreted as part of ritualistic or symbolic practices, offer a glimpse into the socio-cultural and spiritual life of the Megalithic communities. However, threats from agricultural expansion, urban development, and neglect endanger these heritage sites. The study emphasizes the urgent need for conservation efforts to protect this fragile legacy while calling for collaborative research to deepen our understanding of Vidarbha's Megalithic heritage.*

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**Keywords:** Megalithic Burials, Vidarbha Region, Kalambha, Stone Circles, Cup Marks, Ritual Practices, Cultural Heritage

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## Introduction

The Vidarbha region of Central India is renowned for its rich Megalithic and Iron Age heritage, complemented by abundant mineral resources and fertile agricultural land (Vaidya, 2014, 720). It is one of the regions with the highest concentration of Megalithic sites, featuring prominent types such as Stone Circles, Dolmens, Menhirs, and Cists. Recent explorations by the author in Kalambha (Figure 1), Katol Tahsil, Nagpur District, Maharashtra, have uncovered five Megalithic Stone Circles, notable for their distinct cup marks. Of these, four remain in relatively good condition, while one has suffered partial damage.



Figure 1: Geographical Map of Nagpur District Showing Kalambha

## Vidarbha Megalithic Culture

The Vidarbha region of Maharashtra, located between 19°26'–21°47'N and 75°56'–79°23'E, is renowned for its rich Megalithic heritage. This region encompasses eleven districts: Akola, Amravati, Buldhana, Washim, Yeotmal, Bhandara, Chandrapur, Gadchiroli, Gondia, Nagpur, and Wardha. Vidarbha is particularly significant for its widespread Megalithic culture, with over a hundred burial sites recorded, especially in and around Nagpur District.

The eastern part of Vidarbha, within the Wardha and Wainganga basins, has yielded substantial evidence of Megalithic culture. This includes six distinct types of burials: Stone Circles, Cairn Circles, Cists, Dolmens, Menhirs, and Dolmenoid Cists. Among these, Stone Circles are the most commonly encountered type in Central India. Typically, the peripheral stones of these circles are partially buried, with sections exposed above ground. Many incorporate features such as pits, cists, or dolmens within their confines. These megalithic structures provide invaluable insights into the region's Iron Age communities and their funerary practices. (Pawar, 2012, 179; Maharashtra State Gazetteer, 1973, 12). This rich cultural landscape underscores Vidarbha's importance as a hub of Megalithic activity in Central India.

## Description of the Site

The Megalithic burial site is situated approximately 300 meters east of the village bus stop in Kalambha. The site's precise geographical coordinates are 21.3620197°N latitude and 78.5678596°E longitude. Kalambha village is located 20 kilometers from Katol Tahsil by road, strategically positioned between the two prominent tahsils of

Katol and Narkhed in Nagpur District, Maharashtra. During recent explorations, four Megalithic stone circles were identified at the site. Among these, one has collapsed, while another has been partially destroyed. A seasonal nala flows roughly 80 meters to the east of Kalambha, while the river "Lendagi" (a local name) is situated about 2 kilometers to the north of the village. This site offers significant insights into the Megalithic culture of the Vidarbha region and highlights the need for preservation amidst the threats posed by modern activities.



Figure 2: Stone Circle 1, Kalambha

## Characteristics of the Site

The site at Kalambha features four distinct Megalithic stone circles, each with unique characteristics.

**Megalith - Stone Circle 1** (Figure 2) is the most intact among them, measuring 73 feet along the north-south axis and 68 feet along the east-west axis. It consists of twelve basalt stone boulders, eight of which are positioned along the east-south-west direction, while the remaining four lie towards the north. The northern boulders are notable for their dimensions: Boulder 1 measures 50 × 35 cm, Boulder 2 measures 57 × 17 cm, Boulder 3 measures 57 × 19 cm, and Boulder 4 measures 69 × 47 cm. All four northern boulders exhibit visible cup marks and cupules, a significant feature of this circle.

**Megalith - Stone Circle 2** (Figure 3) is located 60 meters south of Megalith 1 and is partially intact, with nine basalt stone boulders remaining. This circle measures 65 feet



along the north-south axis and 58 feet along the east-west axis. The arrangement includes one boulder on the south-facing side, two on the north-facing side, and three each on the east and west-facing sides. Notably, cup marks are visible only on the south-facing boulder, making it a distinct feature of this circle.



Figure 3: Stone Circle 2, Kalambha



Figure 4: Stone Circle 3, Kalambha





Figure 5: Stone Circle 4, Kalambha

**Megalith - Stone Circle 3** (Figure 4) lies 40 meters southeast of Megalith 2 and has six basalt stone boulders remaining. It measures 50 feet along the north-south axis and 43 feet along the east-west axis. The composition includes three east-facing boulders, while the west, south, and north-facing sides each have one boulder. Cup marks are visible on only one of the east-facing boulders, with no such features on the remaining stones, distinguishing it from the other circles.

**Megalith - Stone Circle 4** (Figure 5) is located 120 meters west of Megalith 1 but is entirely destroyed. The boulders from this circle have been repurposed as farm boundary markers by local farmers, reflecting the challenges of preserving such archaeological sites. This loss highlights the need for measures to protect and conserve these significant cultural monuments.

## Cup Marks

Cup marks, also known as cupules, are among the most intriguing features observed at this site. These markings are predominantly found on the peripheral boulders of the stone circles. Archaeological interpretations of cupules suggest various possible functions or symbolic meanings. They may have been associated with unspecified or specific cultic or magical rituals, the pounding of medicines (derived from minerals or plants), pigments, or spices. Additionally, they might have served as locations for placing offerings, including symbolic substances such as human blood or semen. Other interpretations propose that they could represent star constellations, topographical maps of nearby landscapes, or a form of symbolism whose meaning is no longer recoverable (Abbas, 2014, 733).





Figure 6: Megalithic Basalt Stone with Cup Marks, Kalambha



Figure 7: Cup Marks and Cupules from Kalambha

## **Observations**

Cup marks are a prominent feature of the Kalambha site (Figures 6 and 7) and form its primary characteristic. Similar cup marks have been reported from other notable Megalithic sites in Vidarbha, including Junapani, Mahurzari, Nagalwadi, and Takalghaat Khapa. Beyond Vidarbha, similar markings have been discovered in the

southern regions, with "Mudumal" in Telangana standing out as a remarkable Megalithic site known for its unique pattern of cup marks. The cup marks observed at Kalambha and other Megalithic burial sites in Vidarbha exhibit distinctive patterns. (Bednarik R.G., 2008, 61). At the Kalambha Megalithic burial site, four basalt stone circles were identified, three of which display cup marks in different orientations. Megalith-1 contains both cup marks and cupules. The cup marks measure approximately 4 cm in diameter with a shallow depth of 0.5 cm. Megalith-2 exhibits cup marks visible on the western side, arranged in a distinct pattern, and similarly measure 4 cm in diameter with a depth of 0.5 cm. Megalith-3 features cup marks oriented in the eastern direction, maintaining the same size and depth. These variations in placement and patterning underscore the uniqueness of the site.

## Conclusion

During my second exploration of the Kalambha site in 2022, it became evident that the Megalithic stone circles are in a deteriorating state. Several stone circles have been damaged or destroyed, primarily due to agricultural activities by the local villagers. Some of the stones are now missing, while others have been repurposed as farm boundary markers. Urban expansion further exacerbates the threats to this heritage, with activities such as road construction, the development of modern housing, and land acquisition encroaching upon the site. These developments not only jeopardize the Megalithic heritage of the region but also impact the cultural practices of local tribal communities who continue to engage with these traditions. In conclusion, I urge researchers and scholars in Indian archaeology and history to collaborate in preserving this invaluable heritage. Collective efforts are essential to ensure the protection and survival of these sites for future generations.

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