A Review of Inner Layout of Megalithic Burials in Upper Wainganga Valley: A New Emergence in Vidarbha Megaliths

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Abstract*: The eastern part of Maharashtra or more specifically, Vidarbha is rich in terms of archeological vestiges relating to various times. Of these, megalithic structures constitute a specific category identified as "Vidarbha Megaliths". Number of megalithic burial sites have been explored and excavated since independence in central part of Vidarbha especially in Nagpur district. However, in comparison, eastern part of Vidarbha region significantly lags behind when it comes to the number of documented megalithic sites. Nevertheless, it must be admitted here that this was purely on account of less exploration in the area concerned. Therefore, not much information regarding megalithic culture of eastern Vidarbha was hitherto known. Present author undertook systematic explorations in this region particularly upper Wainganga valley and brought to light new megalithic sites. These newly found megaliths of the upper Wainganga valley are typologically different from rest of the Vidarbha. In light of aforesaid revelations, a study of typological features of the megaliths of upper Wainganga valley becomes an imperative exercise.This paper discusses in detail, the nature, type and variations in inner architecture of megaliths documented during the course of explorations and also draw from results of excavations at Malli as well since the latter is the only excavated megalithic site in upper Wainganga valley. Besides analytical insights from the author based upon the results of study, comparative study of megaliths of upper Wainganga valley and rest of the Vidarbha is also dealt with in this article in order to offer fruitful correlations.*

Keywords: Megaliths, Vidarbha, Cists, Menhirs, Stone Circles, Dolmens, Capstones

Introduction

A bewildering variety of burial types, with distinctive features, is noticed among the megaliths of India (Mohanty and Selvakumar 2000: 313-351). Typological differences varying from burial to burial, site to site and region to region are also observed in large scale studies carried out on megaliths in India. Since Independence, studies pertaining to typology of megaliths and their classification have been instigated in India by various scholars (Krishaswamy 1949: 35-45, Srinivasan and Banerjee 1953: 103-115, Dixit 1969:85-89, GururajaRao 1972: 234-253, Leshnik 1974, Sundara 1975, 1979b: 331-334, Narasimhaiah 1980: 111, Agrawal 1982: 257-261, Allchin and Allchin 1983: 331-333,

Rao 1988, Thakuria 2009: 35-41, Darshana 2010: 98-117). Apart from broad typological classification, megaliths have also been categorized in sepulchral and non- sepulchral categories as well (Moorti 1994).

Megalithic monuments in Vidarbha are generally found in and around Wardha-Wainganga river system. Huge concentration of the megalithic burials can be seen in Nagpur district where most of the Iron Age studies have been carried out (Deo 1970a, 1970b: 23-31, 1973, Deo and Jamkhedkar 1982, Deglurkar and Lad 1992, Mohanty 2002: 45-47, 2003:41-48, 2005b: 106-107; IAR 1956-57: 35; IAR 1984-85: 53-55; IAR 1982-83: 61-62; IAR 1983-84: 57-58; IAR 1984-85: 53-54; IAR 2000-01: 97-107). The megalithic culture of Vidarbha mainly consists of cairn circle and stone circle type of megaliths (Deo 1970a, Thakuria 2009: 35-41). Stone circle is the fossil type of megalith in Vidarbha megalithic culture. Stone circles with single and double row of circles are also found. In addition to these, a few occurrence of Menhir (Nath 2001-02: 81-82) and Dolmen (ASI 1928-29: 37) are also noticed in Vidarbha especially in the Wainganga drainage system. Wainganga is the mighty river of Vidarbha. The river originates from Seoni plateau of Madhya Pradesh, flows north –south and drains Gondia, Bhandara, Chandrapur and Gadchiroli districts thus mainly eastern part of Vidarbha. Intensive explorations carried out in upper Wainganga valley brought to light new early Iron Age habitation and burial sites. The important burial sites are namely Malli, Silli, Gangla, Satona, Vadegaon, Sarandi, Bharre tola, Navegaon, Datora and Janva. The newly discovered sites of the region brought to light new type of megaliths. Malli is only excavated site in upper Wainganga valley. Excavation of burials at Malli has also revealed hitherto unknown megalithic types in Vidarbha megalithic culture. Present article deals with the different burial architecture and regional perspective of early Iron Age culture of Upper Wainganga valley.

Malli

The megalithic burial-cum-habitation site Malli (21° 19′ 08″ N; 79° 54′ 15″ E) was discovered by the author during an intensive survey in Upper Wainganga valley. The site is located in Tiroda taluka of Gondia district and is situated on the left bank of Chorkhambara river which forms a part of Wainganga drainage system (Figs. 1a and 1b). Here large concentrations of burials, isolated in different localities spreading over a kilometer from each other, were documented. Megaliths at Malli were located in the south-eastern side of the present village surrounded by ponds and non-perennial rain gullies. The survey carried out at Malli brought to light 396 megalithic burials of different types for the proposed surveyed area can be divided into four localities. Main burial types at Malli and Upper Wainganga valley are stone circles, cairn circles, cists, menhirs, dolmens, cairn heap and capstones.

Megalithic Typology in Upper Wainganga Valley

Besides their outer layout, the megaliths of Upper Wainganga valley are also significant for numerous variations in their inner layout as well. They can be categorized on the basis of their different architectural variations viz. single cist inside

the circle, double cist inside the circle, multiple cists inside the circle, menhir inside the circle or independent, dolmen inside the circle or independent and capstone found independently or inside the stone circle. Such variations in inner layout of megaliths are not commonly met with in other parts of Vidarbha.

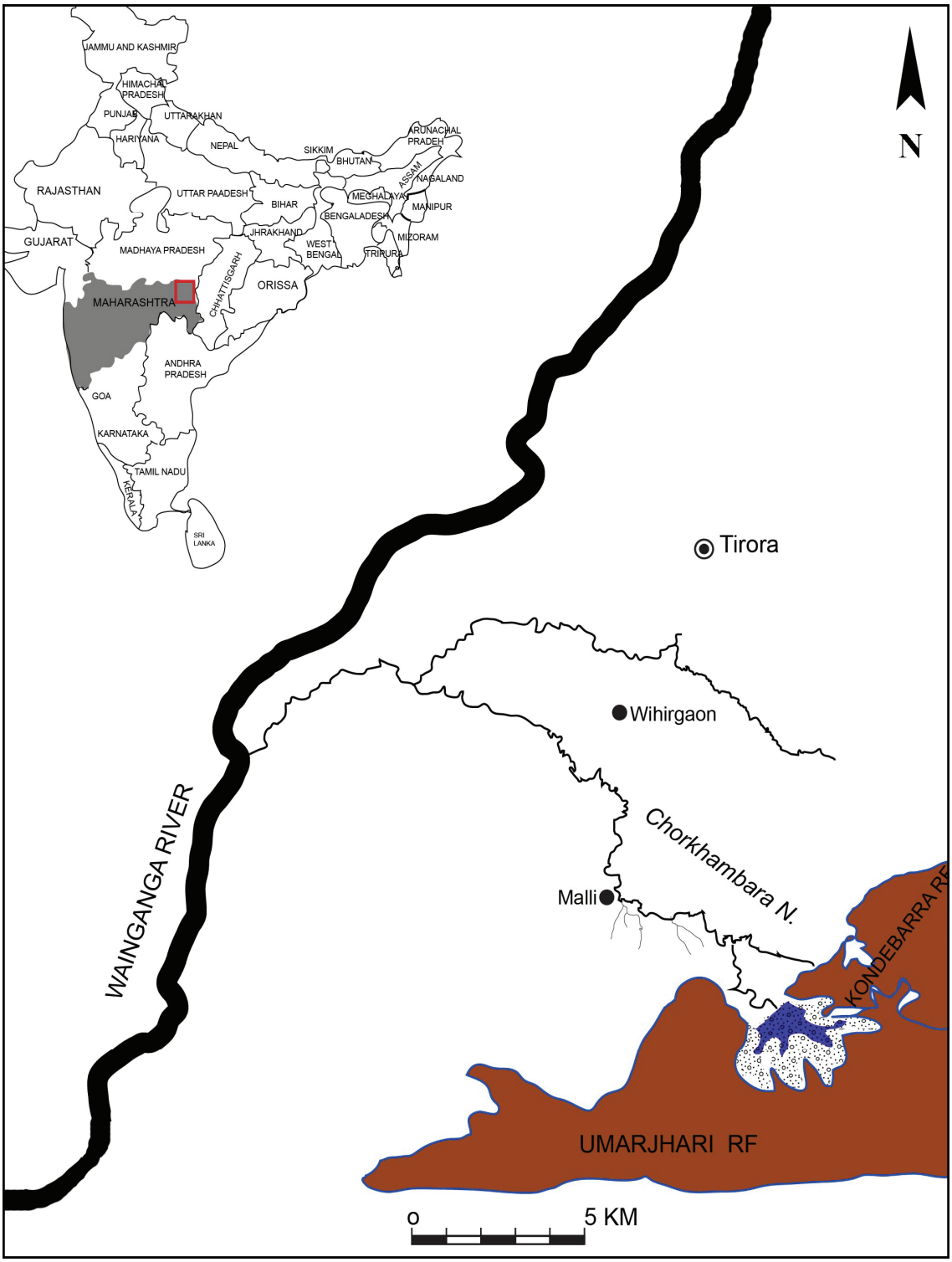


Figure 1a: Location Map of Malli

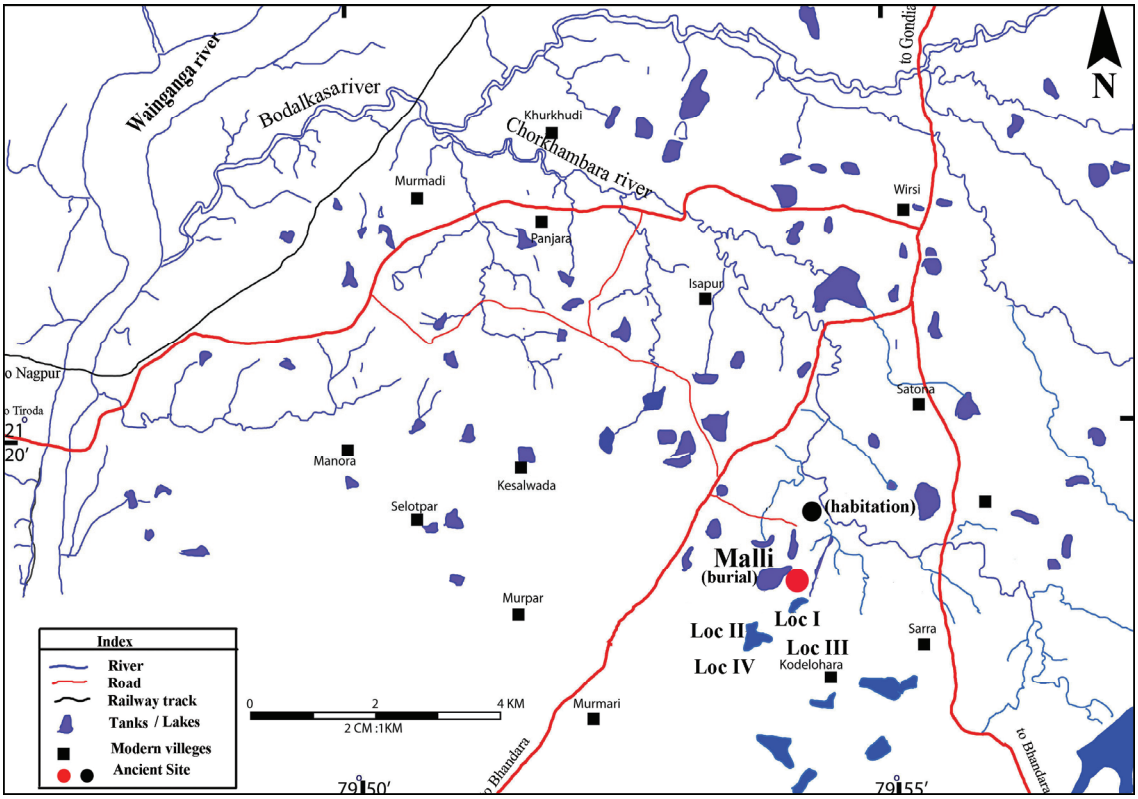


Figure 1b: Detailed Map of Malli

Stone Circles

Explorations carried out in upper Wainganga valley revealed that stone circles were the prominent megalith type of the region. Stone circles were noticed at many important sites of the region such as Silli, Gangla, Vadegaon, Satona, Navegaon and Janva. The characteristic feature of stone circles of upper Wainganga valley is that they have cist inside them (Fig. 2). Initially, a pit was dug out and then stone slabs were arranged to form cist. The burials are normally constructed over the natural soil or bed rock. In most of the places, peripheral stones are found placed at the ground level in half buried and half exposed condition. It is noticed that the stone circles in the upper Wainganga valley are situated close to one other and often form a cluster. Further, it is observed that normally, a cluster incorporates minimum five to maximum twenty stone circles, erected adjacent to each other. Generally they are single stone circle type but double and triple peripherals circles are also documented in the study area. Double and triple peripheral stone circle are made out of undressed lateritic stone. Remaining area in-between the two circles is generally filled with small stones. A solitary evidence of stone circle with four rows of peripheral boulders is also noticed at Malli.

Different shapes of megaliths are documented in the upper Wainganga valley. For instance, rectangular, elliptical, oval and square megaliths are reported from the region. Variation is also evident in the size of burial and also the size of stones used for the construction of burial. Navegaon and Gangla yielded stone circles with smallest diameters as compared to other sites while the largest stone circle was documented at

Malli. Few stone circles in Malli and Vadegaon have huge boulders as peripheral stones, while at other sites smaller stones are used in the periphery. Not a single burial is similar at least in its external architecture.



Figure 2: A Stone Circle in Upper Wainganga Valley

Most significant trait of the stone circles in the region is the placement of single/double/multiple cist inside the peripheral boulders. Cists are generally located in center of the circle. Orthostats of the cist are half buried and half exposed. It is also observed that many cists consist of *in situ* capstones. Size of the capstones depended upon the size of orthostats of the cist which varies from burials to burial. Cists are erected inside the circle by digging a pit into the natural soil. Vertical stone slabs identified as menhirs are also found at Malli but they are less in number as compared to cists. Dolmen, generally considered a megalithic type of south India, too figures at Malli. It is reported from inside a stone circle at Malli. Though it represents solitary evidence but it may be taken to indicate some sort of contact between south India and Upper Wainganga valley.

Cairn Circle

A cairn is a barrow made of heaped-up stone usually enclosed within the circle of boulders (Krishnaswamy 1949: 35-45). Cairn circles constitute the second most popular type of megalith after stone circle in upper Wainganga valley (Fig. 3). This type of megalith is reported from Malli, Silli, Satona, Navegaon and Bharretola. Generally

medium boulders (20 to 40 cm) are used for outer circle. Small pebbles of laterite, schist, sand stones, quartz, chert and pieces of stone slab along with soil form the main filling component of the cairn. Clusters of cairn circles are noticed in Locality III at Malli, where big cairns with big diameter are found adjacent to one another. Cairns with single/double peripheral encircling stones are also documented at Malli and Satona.



Figure 3: A Cairn Circle in Upper Wainganga Valley

Heavy concentration of cairns was observed at habitation-cum-burial site Sarandi where out of thirty six documented megaliths, thirty five were cairn heap. This variation is significant since Sarandi is located only eight km. away from Malli. So one expects typological similarity between Malli and Sarandi but Sarandi incorporates totally different type of megaliths. The cairns of Sarandi do not possess the ring of outer peripheral boulders noticed at other sites. These cairns represent just a heap of stone and soil. It is important to note that here too; locally available stones such as chert and quartz are used for construction of heap. Besides Sarandi, Bharretola also yielded three megaliths all of which were cairn circles.

Cists

Hitherto, it was believed that cist was not the familiar burial type in Vidarbha region (Deo 1970a). Sparse evidence of cist was noticed at Hirapur (Pawar 2012: 173-197). Excavations at Raipur (Deglulkar and Lad 1992) gave evidence of cist and an irregular chamber type of inner architecture inside the stone circle which was not visible from the surface. Few occurrences of cists indicate that cist was not a common type of megalith architecture in Vidarbha region this may be attributed to non-availability of raw material in the close proximity. However, recent explorations carried out in upper Wainganga valley brought to light many cists. Cists are dominantly reported from

Malli (Fig. 4). Solitary evidence of cist is also found from Janva. The cists of upper Wainganga valley can be divided into two categories: first type constitutes of cists located inside the stone circle or cairn circle and latter type includes cist found independently. Moreover, single, double and even triple and four cists within a stone circle were also documented during the course of explorations by the author in upper Wainganga valley.



Figure 4: Cist Burials in Upper Wainganga Valley

Cists found inside the circle are usually situated in center of the circle. These cists are half buried and half exposed. Usually dressed lateritic stone is used for orthostats and slabs of schist, gneiss, sandstone and conglomerate were used as capstones. No porthole was observed in any of the documented cists in the upper Wainganga valley. Generally, cists are rectangular in size and their orientation is east-west. Besides stone circle, few cairn circles also incorporate cist inside the periphery. In case of cairns, the orthostats of the cist were found almost buried inside the deposit.

Independent cists found were situated without periphery of stone circle. They are generally big in size and are located close to each other and their occurrence is often recognized in form of clusters. Huge capstones were used as the roof of the cist. According to Newbold, capstones were carved out by two methods. One, by firing and another, by making a series of holes in slab's surface by an iron chisel with highly tempered steel points (Newbold 1851: 90-95). It seems that predominantly second method was employed in case of upper Wainganga cists as cutting marks are visible on a few capstones. It also appears that the people who preferred cist burial used separate place to bury their beloved as majority of cist are found in Locality III in Malli, which is located away from remaining localities and habitation. This may be taken to suggest that perhaps different burial types and cemeteries were belongs to different communities or economic group of the society.

Menhirs

Menhirs are monolithic pillars erected vertically into the ground (Rao 1972). In Vidarbha, menhirs are reported from Pachkhedi (Nath 2001-02:81-82) Bhiwapur and Tilota Khairi (ASI 1930-31: 141). Just as cists, occurrence of menhir is restricted to few examples in Vidarbha region. In contrast to this evidence, recent explorations carried out in the upper Wainganga valley brought to light number of menhirs at Janva, Silli, Satona, Malli and Gangla (Figs. 5a and 5b). Menhirs of upper Wainganga valley can be divided into two categories; first independent menhirs and second menhirs inside a stone circle. Independent menhirs are reported from Janva, Gangla and Vadegaon while menhirs inside the stone circle are only reported from Malli. Numerous menhirs are identified at Janva where life-size menhirs made of various stone are noticed. Menhirs at the Gangla and Satona were smaller as compared to those at Janva. A few vertical stone slabs found in Malli were also safely identified as menhirs. Menhirs located inside the stone circle are reported from Silli, Gangla and Satona.

Dolmens

Generally speaking, dolmens represent uncommon megalithic type in Vidarbha and are mostly reported from south India. Evidence of dolmen in Vidarbha is found at Pimpalgaon (ASI 1928-29: 37), Tilota Khairi (ASI 1930-31: 141) and Hirapur (Pawar 2012: 173-197). Recent explorations carried out in upper Wainganga valley led to the discovery of few new dolmens. The distribution of dolmen type of burial revealed that they are usually found in lateritic belt along Wainganga drainage system. Two specimens of dolmen were documented in Malli. Amongst them, one stood erect in good condition while, another was in dilapidated condition (Fig 6). The well preserved dolmen at Malli was small in size as compared to other existing dolmens in eastern Vidarbha. It was located inside a double stone circle and measures 2.87x 2.00 x 0.12 m. dressed lateritic stones were used as orthostats of the dolmen and a thick schist stone slab was employed for capstone. This dolmen was located on agricultural land and was saved from human vandalism as it is rendered as a holy shrine by the local people. This dolmen is currently worshiped by local villagers for agricultural fertility and harvest.



Figure 5a: Menhir from Gangla



Figure 5b: Menhir from Janva



Figure 6: A Dolmen in Upper Wainganga Valley

Capstones

In Upper Wainganga Valley capstones constitutes an independent burial type. They are generally found laid horizontally. These are either directly placed inside the stone or cairn circle or figure independently (Fig. 7). This type of burial architecture is noticed only at Malli. Capstones at Malli are numerically few as compared to other megalithic types at the site. Concentration of the cap stone was observed in locality II. Unfortunately excavation of this type of megalith was not carried out at Malli. Hence it is not clear if these capstones entombed an urn or full burial. Nevertheless, it was observed that capstones at Malli were generally made of schist, gneiss and sand stone with varying thickness. Source of raw material of capstone was located within a range of 800 meters to 2 km from Malli.



Figure 7: Capstone Burials of Upper Wainganga Valley

It is also important to note that most of the excavated megaliths in Malli did not reveal any skeleton remains. Out of eight megaliths, only one megalith yielded human skeleton remains in form of pot burial. Two megaliths yielded fragments of animal bones inside a cist. This sporadic evidence probably represents the secondary, symbolic or commemorative nature of burial practice in Malli. Besides, paucity of skeleton remains, very little occurrence of pottery was noticed in burials. Though the pots of the coarse red ware and micaceous red ware with gritty surface were found inside the circle, however, their number was very few as compared to other Vidarbha megalithic burials (Deo 1970a). Furthermore, paucity of metal objects besides terracotta and stone objects was noticed in the excavations at Malli.

Inner Layout of Megaliths in Upper Wainganga Valley

Recent explorations carried out in upper Wainganga valley aptly demonstrate the potentiality of the region for a variety of burial architecture with a wide range of typological variations amongst them. Recent excavations at Malli have also brought to light new type of inner layout and lesser known types inside the stone circle like cist inside the stone circle, double chambered cist inside the stone circle, multiple cists inside the circle and menhir inside the stone circle. Such bewildering variety and novel burial types are not reported from the region adjacent to upper Wainganga valley. Therefore, upper Wainganga valley assumes a special significance in terms of megalithic remains in Vidarbha. Variations in terms of inner layout along with detailed architectural features inside the megaliths of upper Wainganga valley are described here.

Cist in Center of Stone Circle/Cairn Circle

This category constitutes of cists located inside stone/cairn circle. Cists are found in single, double and rarely in triple peripheral stone circles. Such cists are generally found in the center of the circle and are rectangular in shape. They usually have east-west orientation i.e. they have opening from the east and are closed from the west. Dressed lateritic stones were used for the construction of cists (Fig. 8). Since the stone circles in Malli do not possess any deposit inside the stone circle hence; the cists were easily visible from ground. Generally one third portion of the cists was buried inside the ground and remaining portion was visible above the ground.

Excavations revealed that the cists were erected directly upon the natural soil. Orthostats of the cist were prepared by two or three dressed stones which were erected vertically in a pit on each side. No buttressing or stone support was noticed at the base of the cist. An interesting feature of the cists at Malli was their opening/entrance architecture. Two pillars like lateritic stones were erected in front of the cist. These stones were cut from the top up to the half portion in form of "L" shape which makes stone thin in its upper part and broad at the base. Both the entrance pillars of the cist had similar craftsmanship. A similar type of evidence in form of entrance pillars was found from megalith 2, 3 and 4 at Malli. In case of cairn circles, cists were found buried under the cairn filling and only the capstone of cist was visible from the surface.

Normally, a single stone was kept on each side as orthostats, though usage of multiple stone was also identified at Malli.



Figure 8: Cist in Center of a Stone Circle

Double Cist at the Center of Stone Circle/Cairn Circle

Double chambered cist is reported from megalith no. 2 at Malli. This double chambered cist was located at the center of the circle. It was made out of lateritic stone and had an east-west orientation. Depth of the cist was 90 cm and it was erected over the natural lateritic soil. A common middle stone was laid in-between which divided the cist into two partitions. These chambers were named as cist-1-a (southern) and cist 1-b (northern).Cist (1a) was rectangular on plan and its entrance stones were purposely cut from top. Northern cist (1b) was relatively bigger than (1a) and was square in shape (Fig. 9). A pit with a depth of 30 cm was dug out for the erection of orthostats. A huge capstone was used to cover the either chamber. Two horizontally placed flat stones were also found in front of the cist. This solitary double chambered cist at Malli was found empty and no antiquarian remains were noticed inside. Loose brownish soil was used for the filling of the cist.

Central Cist and Multiple Sub-cists Inside the Circle

Cist in the center of the stone circle was a typical trait of megaliths at Malli. Excavation of megalith no.4 revealed a stone circle embedding three associate sub-cists along with

a central cist inside its periphery. The central cist had the usual east-west orientation. Nevertheless, this main cist was architecturally different from the rest of cists at Malli. Though, the complete plan of the cist could not be traced inside the circle however, a horizontal laterite slab was found resting on the natural soil. Two "L" shaped entrance stones were also found at the entrance of the cist. Besides central cist, three sub-cists were also found inside the stone circle in north-south axis (Fig. 10).



Figure 9: Double Cist (Chamber) in Center of Circle

Sub cist 1 was located towards the north of the main cist adjacent to the peripheral boulders. A schist stone slab was found in front of the cist which was probably meant for closing the opening of seemingly box like cist. Sub cist 2 was located 40 cm south from sub cist 1. Just like sub cist 1, here too a horizontally placed stone slab was found in front of the cist. Sub cist no. 3 was located to the south of the main cist adjacent to the southern peripheral boulders. The architecture of this sub cist was similar to other excavated sub-cists of the circle. All these cists had east-west orientation and they all were made of dressed laterite stone.

Stone Circle without Central Cist but Sub-cists

In this category, stone circles which do not encompass a central cist but incorporates sub cist inside the periphery of circle are documented. This type of feature was noticed during the excavations of megalith 1 and megalith 7 at Malli (Fig. 11). Cist found in megalith 1 was rectangular and was made out of schist slab which was exposed in the



Figure 10: Central Cist and Multiple Cists Inside the Circle



Figure 11: Stone Circle without Central Cist (Chamber) but Sub-cists

north-east quadrant of the circle during the excavations. Upper edge of this cist was found 3 cm below the top surface of the stone circle. Loose brownish soil was used as filling material of the cist. No skeleton or antiquity remains were found inside the cist. Similar evidence was also noticed in megalith no. 7. Here, the cist was found inside the stone circle near the southern peripheral boulders. Single stone orthostats were erected vertically in the natural soil. This cist was made out of schist, conglomerate and sand stone slabs. Arrangement of a slab in front of the cist suggests a deliberate attempt to close the cist.

Horizontally Placed Slabs in Front of the Cist

Slabs of schist, gneiss, conglomerate and sand stone placed horizontally in front of central cist or sub-cist were found inside the stone circles at Malli. Excavations in megalith 2 revealed horizontal stone slabs in front of cist 1a and 1b (Fig. 12). The slab on the southern side measured 120 cm x 90 cm x 10 cm while, the northern slab measured 90 cm x 100 cm x 7 cm Both the slabs were properly placed at the same depth and rested on a well prepared surface. Another horizontally placed slab which was relatively smaller and measured 70 cm x 30 cm x 7 cm was also found in the same circle. This slab was situated 25 cm below the surface. Similar type of evidence was also noticed in megalithic no 3 and at megalithic no. 7. Horizontally placed slab found in front of megalithic no. 7 had fragments of pottery placed over it. It appears that these stone slabs probably acted as an offering platform. This architectural feature is unique as it is not reported from any excavated site in Vidarbha megalithic complex.



Figure 12: Horizontally Placed Slabs in Front of the Cist (Chamber)

Stone Rubble Deposit Inside the Cairn Circle

Stone rubble arrangement was found inside the cairn circle in megalith no. 6 at Malli. Megalith no.6 was the biggest stone circle encountered in upper Wainganga valley having diameter of 27 meters and filling deposit of 1.5 meters. It incorporated a cairn circle inside it in which stone rubble alignment in form of a rectangular stone platform was found at a depth of 50 cm. This arrangement appears to run north-south in S-E quadrant and east-west in N-E quadrant. In south-east quadrant, this rubble feature covered most of the area. In N-E quadrant, it ran east-west and then turned sharply towards north thus making a 'V' shaped plan (Fig. 13). A variety of stones such as schist, sand stone and laterite were used in making this stone rubble. Average size of these stones was 20 cm. Such an occurrence is very significant as this type of rubble feature were not reported from any other excavated burial in Malli.

Observations

The remains of early Iron Age in upper Wainganga region are closely associated with Megalithic period. Upper Wainganga valley has a very crucial location where its boundary touches with Madhya Pradesh in the north and Chhattisgarh in the east. Though presently, upper Wainganga valley in Gondia district comes under Maharashtra administrative division; however, its cultural affiliations with the adjoining regions like Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Vidarbha cannot be altogether ignored neither in the past nor in the present.



Figure 13: Stone Rubble Deposit Inside the Cairn Circle in Malli

In order to identify regionality and commonality of megalithic tradition of upper Wainganga valley with that of megalithic remains from rest of India, it is an imperative exercise to undertake a study of megalithic remains of neighboring regions as well. In absence of such a study, it will be rather difficult to identify the regionalistic peculiarities of early Iron Age in Upper Wainganga valley. Moreover, the commonality of megalithic remains of Upper Wainganga valley with megaliths of Vidarbha needs to be taken into account for the present study.

Though it may appear at first that stone circles and cairn are the main burial type prevalent in Indian megalithic culture in general, on a closer look we see that regional variation is clearly visible in terms of typology and inner architecture of megaliths in Upper Wainganga valley, Vidarbha, Chhattisgarh and south India. Types like rock cut caves, umbrella stones and hood stones which are typical to south India are not found in the region even though the raw material like lateritic rock is available. Menhirs inside the stone circles and cairns constitute the popular megalith type in Durg district of Chhattisgarh. In Vidarbha, stone circles and cairn circles are predominantly found. Cists inside the stone circle are first time found in Maharashtra from upper Wainganga valley.

However, rarely visible inner architectural variations have been noticed in Vidarbha megalithic complex (Deglurkar and Lad 1992). It is well known that the construction of a megalith is a community act that requires labor, time and money (Mohanty and Walimbe 1993: 93-103). Other than ordinary megaliths, more labor effort was needed

while creating inner architecture. Thus, it can be considered that the megaliths which yielded inner architecture probably belonged to the important or wealthy people of the megalithic society. Inner architectural variations and burial furniture throws light on socio-economic status of the deceased and his society as well. It also helps in collecting information regarding social organization, economic condition and subsistence patterns (Binford 1972: 208-239, Brown 1981: 25-38; Pebbles 1971; Peebles and Kus 1977; Saxe 1970; Stickle 1978; Orton and Hodson 1981; Alekshin 1983: 146).

It is also significant to note that regional variation is so pervasive that even the common megalith type seen in each region have remarkable differences which can be identified as 'regional megalithic trait'. For example, though stone circles are reported from Chhattisgarh, Vidarbha, south India and upper Wainganga valley, nonetheless regional variation amongst them can be easily identified. Stone circles and cairns of Chhattisgarh especially of Durg district are without big peripheral boulders whereas huge peripheral boulders are a prominent feature of the Vidarbha megalithic culture. The regionalism amidst megaliths becomes more evident in terms of type of raw material and its usage for burial construction. Undressed basalt boulders were mainly employed by Vidarbha megalithians for the construction of megaliths. As against Vidarbha, in upper Wainganga valley use of both dressed and undressed lateritic stones is documented. In south India, along with undressed boulders, stone slabs were also employed in the periphery of the circle.

Evidence suggests that, environmental adaptation certainly plays a vital role in megalithic society. Regional variations amongst the burial practices are considerably governed by the availability of raw material at the place of erection of burial. It has been pointed out that geological features also influenced the burial type prevalent in a particular region (Krishnaswamy 1949: 35-45). For instance, rock cut caves are found in Kerala region where lateritic rock is available. However, in few cases, evidence of carrying of a particular stone type from far in order to construct a megalith is also seen as in Raipur (Deglurkar and Lad 1992). The megalithic burial sites in upper Wainganga valley are situated near the source of raw material which was probably used for construction of megalithic monuments. Locational analysis carried out in and around Malli revealed that the site is situated close to the source of raw material which was very essential for construction of the megalith. Similar evidence is observed in case of Karkabhat (Chhattisgarh) where menhirs were brought from a quarry located near the burial ground (Sharma 2000).

Another peculiar feature of megaliths is that they consist of a variety of burial furniture and ceramics inside them. Micaceous red ware, black on red ware, painted black on red ware pottery and a variety of metal objects are found from megalithic burials. Ceramics like red ware with coarse surface and micaceous red ware were typically used in burial as evidenced from excavations. Iron antiquities from burials comprises of agricultural, hunting, household and carpentry items while copper and gold objects were mainly found in form of ornaments. Vessels and pots of the copper are also found in

megaliths. Variety of beads of semi-precious stones is also found from many of these burial monuments. Nevertheless, regional variation is observed in burial furniture found in megaliths of south India, Chhattisgarh, Vidarbha and upper Wainganga valley. Occurrence of early Iron Age pottery without any stone objects like beads, pounders, muller and pendants is seen in upper Wainganga valley. Stone circles with number of antiquities include semi precious stone beads; metal objects and ceramics are found in Nagpur district.

Inner architectural variations of megaliths probably relate to people who practice or believe in different customs or belong to different clan or band of megalithic community. Construction of a variety of megaliths within the same site can also be attributed to people practicing different beliefs and customs in the same society. Ethno-archaeological studies have also proven that every megalithic constructing tribe has its own processions and persuasions related to burial construction and appendages and that the variety of megaliths basically depends upon the social customs and beliefs of the society (Binodini 1993). For example, ethno archaeological studies in Vidarbha region showed that menhirs were erected for a person who met a natural death. Archaeological also suggests that burial was not for all people but it seems that select few from society who died unnatural death were given ceremonial burials (Mohanty and Walimbe 1996a: 136-49).On the other hand, different type of megalith was made in case of death of a child and women during pregnancy (Geetali 1999, Thakural 2005).Such evidence suggests that the architectural variation in megaliths is probably because of socio-religious aspect of the early Iron Age people.

Micro surface survey carried out at Malli revealed that the fragments of pottery were placed at various places within the cemetery. These fragments of pottery over surface perhaps represent a different type of burial tradition of the lower strata of the society which cannot afford to construct a megalith. Multiple usages of megaliths are also documented from some sites of Vidarbha like Takalghat Khapa (Deo 1970a), Mahurjhari (Deo 1973a, Mohanty 2002:45-47), Raipur (Deglurkar and Lad 1992) and Dhamnalinga (IAR 2001-02: 97-107). It is agreed that the construction of megaliths represents a collective effort on the part of society and requires a heavy input of labor, time and money (Mohanty and Walimbe 1996: 136-49). Multiple usages of megaliths may be taken to denote an effort towards economizing the cost, labor and time and can also attributed to the disposal of member of family or blood relatives of the deceased.

Aforesaid observations aptly demonstrate that the megaliths of upper Wainganga valley are architecturally and construction wise different from rest of Vidarbha. The inner architecture of megaliths, placement of ceramics, nature of disposing the skeleton remains, filling material clearly shows marked difference with respect to Vidarbha megalith. Moreover, resemblance of Megalithic tradition of upper Wainganga valley with neighboring Chhattisgarh megalithic complex cannot be altogether ignored. In Karkabhat over ten megaliths were excavated but not a single contained any skeleton remains just as Malli where out of eight megaliths, skeleton remains were found in

only one megalith. Excavations also reveal that megaliths of both the region incorporate lesser burial furniture such as ceramics, iron and other antiquities. These similarities can be accounted to the similarity in the geophysical setting of both the regions. This is a preliminary hypothesis as it is based upon the results of the little work carried out in both the regions. Future endeavors are bound to shed more light on this hypothesis. However, as of now, it appears that the area between Mahanadi and Wainganga River represents a different set of megalithic community different from Vidarbha and south India.

Cultural contact and influence of one megalithic community over the other may have played important role in development of megalithic type and respective inner architecture. Predominantly stone circles and cairn without much inner architecture is found in Vidarbha region. Though a few megaliths of Raipur incorporated cist and crude chamber, still it appears that cist was not the characteristic megalithic type of Vidarbha. The geophysical conditions, unavailability of raw material and social ideological beliefs restrained the Vidarbha megalithic community from constructing inner architecture. Therefore, it is possible that Raipur cist was erected for a person who had connections or relation with south India or upper Wainganga valley or that it was a result of cultural contact with megalithic society of south India or upper Wainganga valley. This hypothesis becomes significant in light of Moorti's work (1994) which pointed out that major megalithic sites were situated on trade routes. Another interesting fact is that megalith 1of Raipur yielded a cist of white micaceous schist. This raw material is not found around Raipur. On the other hand, a number of cists of upper Wainganga valley are made out of white micaceous schist. Therefore, possibility of cultural contact of Vidarbha with upper Wainganga valley cannot be altogether ignored. This contact is more evident on account of closeness of Vidarbha and upper Wainganga region. Study pertaining to iron objects of Vidarbha revealed that the iron implement manufactured at Naikund were found at other megalithic sites of the region (Gogte 1982a; 1982b). Semi-precious beads from Mahurjhari were also reported from various sites of Vidarbha (Takuria 2010). If such scientific trace element analysis works relating to iron objects and beads are done at sites of upper Wainganga valley, fruitful correlations regarding regionalism and commonality may be derived.

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