Recent Discovery of Megalithic Sites in Chandrapur District of Maharashtra

Amit Sopan Bhagat[1]

[1]. 1402, J – Wing 11, Casa Fresco, Lodha Amara, Kolshet, Near Airforce Station, Thane, Maharashtra – 400 607, India *(Email: amit_264@yahoo.co.in)*

Received: 18 July 2019; Revised: 09 September 2019; Accepted: 14 October 2019
Heritage: Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies in Archaeology 7 (2019): 740-771

Abstract: *A century before the enigmatic discovery of Harappa and Mohenjodaro, significant archaeological discoveries were being made in various parts of the Indian subcontinent. Around three thousand sites were - in the course of a little more than one and a half century were discovered. The author of this paper has discovered four large megalithic burial sites and two corresponding habitat sites along with hundreds of other megaliths in Chandrapur district during his exploration. These explorations aim at creating a rich repository of documentation on megalithic culture in vidarbha region that is sure to revolutionize the archaeological discourse. It also tries to look into the important aspects of megalithism and sacredness of landscape and attempts to understand the relationship between the monuments and the landscape in the Vidarbhan Megalithic context.*

Keywords: Megaliths, Iron Age, Chandrapur, Menhirs, Maharashtra, Astronomy, Megalithism

Introduction

Megalithic culture is often claimed to be the most intriguing of all the enigmas of archaeology. It is regarded today by some scholars as the first worldwide movement, by others as a well-defined stage of civilization, while still others completely deny its existence as an identifiable meaningful culture entity. No other prehistoric remains are so startling and so evident even to the layman as the megalithic monuments-huge slabs of crude rock, menhirs pointing skywards, or huge boulders arranged symmetrically in alignments and circles (Iyer 1967).

According to Gordon Childe (1892-1957) the word "megalith" is derived from two Greek words: 'megathos' meaning huge and 'lithos' meaning stone. It was originally introduced by antiquarians to describe a fairly easily definable class of monuments in western and northern Europe, consisting of huge, undressed stones and termed as Celtic, dolmens, cromlech, and menhirs. It has subsequently been extended to cover a far more miscellaneous collection of erection and even excavation all over the world (Childe, 1947). The term 'megalith' may be explained as a grave or memorial erected in stone, whether dressed or in its natural forms containing, enclosing or erected over the

funerary assemblage. In 1994, U.S. Moorti classified the Indian megaliths into only two broad groups. They are: Sepulchral and Non-Sepulchral.

The sepulchral megaliths are used to store the remains of the dead in a variety of forms and are sub-classified into primary and secondary burials. Primary burials contain a complete skeleton with some additional material as homage to the dead, for the dead to use in their afterlife. Secondary burials contain the remains of the dead, essentially the bones or ashes, which are buried in the ground and a stone structure built either on top or surrounding it. While the non-sepulchral megaliths include those megaliths which are commemorative or memorial in nature (Moorti, 1994).

There is a large variety of megalithic complexes in the subcontinent related to varied temporal, spatial and cultural contexts. In many cases the megaliths represent the emergence of a specific burial practice among prehistoric nomadic pastoralists and/or moving bands of warrior communities. But in some identified specific cases they reveal the rise of new belief systems in sedentary cultures when the burials moved out of habitations to specifically demarcated sanctuaries.

The megalithic culture, predominantly known for its characteristic mode of burial construction and ritualistic offerings, is associated with the early use of iron in Peninsular India. The study in the megalithic culture of Vidarbha has been carried out for more than 150 years now. More than 100 megalithic burial sites have been reported in Maharashtra; and Vidarbha region accounts for nearly 95% of them. However, habitation sites belonging to megalithic culture are less in number compared to burial sites. Only 10 Megalithic habitation sites have been reported from the region so far. All of these habitation sites have been excavated (Thakuria, 2014). These excavations were significant in locating megalithic burials in different geo-ecological zones, understanding typological variations and distinctive material culture of megalithic people. Various issues like chronology and diffusion theory on the origin of the megalithic culture of peninsular India were also highlighted during this period (Mohanty, 2001; Darsana, 2006).

In Vidarbha, the common type of burials seen, are the stone circles filled with cairns. These are located mostly on unproductive barren land, hill slopes, and rocky surfaces. Menhirs, which are upright monolithic stones of varied height, are not common in Vidarbha. They are found scarcely at a few places like Nagbhid and Vilam (Chandrapur District) (Figure 1); Panchkheri and Umrer (Nagpur District); Malli, Gangla and Janva (Gondia District) (Mohanty and Vaidya, 2017).

The study of megalithism encompasses a territorial, social and ideological phenomenon, inscribed within the development of social complexity, in the course of prehistory. For the purpose of analysis, the study of megalithism could be articulated around three main dimensions. The first dealing with the territorial dimension (Presence), whereby megalithic constructions are viewed against the other variables that configure the economy and settlement patterns. The second dimension is the social

and symbolic-religious (Immanence), which explores the role of megalithic constructions as part of a system of ideological reproduction aimed at explaining and justifying the natural and social orders. The third dimension (Permanence), examines megalithism from the perspective of its own projection in time, that is to say, in its articulation with funerary and ritual landscape created by later, non-megalith-building societies (Sanjuán, 2000).

Figure 1: Maps showing location of explored area in Chandrapur District

Though megalithism is still practiced by some remote communities, we can consider 1500 BC to 300 BC as active megalithic period (Rao, K.P. 2018), as most of the megalithic sites fall within this bracket.

Previous Work

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, 1973; Deo and Jamkhedkar, 1982; Deglurkar and Lad, 1992; Mohanty 2002, 2003, 2005 ; IAR 1956-57, 1982-83, 1983-84, 1984-85, 2000-01.). The megalithic culture of Vidarbha mainly consists of cairn circle and stone circle type of megaliths (Deo, 1970a; Thakuria, 2009). In addition to these, a few occurrences of Menhir (Nath 2001-02), Dolmen (ASI 1928-29: 37), cists (Sontakke, 2004) and sarcophagus (IAR 2000-01; 97-107) are also noticed in Vidarbha especially in the Wainganga drainage system (Sontakke, V.G. 2014).

Dr. S.B. Deo had extensively explored Chandrapur (erstwhile Chanda district) to find out remains of megalithic culture and corresponding monuments in 1960's-70. Thereafter, Dr. G.K. Mane of ASI continued the same work and discovered few megalithic sites during his endeavour (Mane, 2012). Dr. R.R. Borkar of State Archaeology Department went further deep into the interiors of Chandrapur district and reported many megalithic sites (Borkar, 2009). Though several megalithic sites have been reported from Chandrapur, the typology of megaliths of majority of these sites was predominantly of Cairn circles, whereas Dolmens were reported from Hirapur and Kelzar only.

In further explorations, Dr. R.R. Borkar reported 1 menhir from Deulwada and 9 from Nagbhid; Mr. Ashok Singh Thakur reported 3 Menhirs from Vilam and 1 from Sawri; while Dr. Kanti Pawar reported 3 small menhirs from Hirapur. Altogether, not more than 20 menhirs (without any significant burial site) were reported from Chandrapur district. The author of this paper, during his recent exploration, found more than 125 menhirs primarily at Dongargaon (20° 35` 18`` N; 79° 38` 49`` E), Navkhala (20° 34` 51``N; 79° 38` 28``E), Korambi (20° 35` 36`` N; 79° 34` 39`` E) and Kasarla (20° 36` 03`` N; 79° 38` 08`` E) megalithic burial sites and in several other villages of Nagbhid, Bramhapuri and Chimur tehsil, along with two habitation sites (Figure 2, Tables 1-3).

Table 1 : Newly Discovered Megalithic Sites

Sr. No.	Site Name	Tehsil	District	Latitude	Longitude
1	Dongargaon	Nagbhid	Chandrapur	N 20° 35` 18`	E 79° 38` 49``
2	Navkhala	Nagbhid	Chandrapur	N 20° 34` 51``	E 79° 38` 28``
3	Korambi	Nagbhid	Chandrapur	N 20° 35` 36``	E 79° 34` 39``
4	Kasarla	Nagbhid	Chandrapur	N 20° 36` 03``	E 79° 38` 08``
5	Miscellaneous	Nagbhid Bramhapuri and Chimur	Chandrapur	–	–

Table 2: Megalithic Typology

Sr. No.	Site Name	Menhir	Cairn Circle	Slab Circle	Cists/Capstone
1	Dongargaon	50	Many	-	5
2	Navkhala	14	Many	-	-
3	Korambi	28	A few	-	A few
4	Kasarla	5	-	-	-
5	Miscellaneous	36	-	-	-

Geography of the Study Area

The region of Vidarbha (19° 26' N and 21° 47' N; 75° 56' and 79° 23' E) forms the eastern and northeastern part of the cultural and administrative division of the State of Maharashtra. It comprises nine districts, namely, Buldhana, Akola, Amravati, Yavatmal, Wardha, Nagpur, Bhandara, Chandrapur and Gadchiroli. Geomorphologically, it is characterized by the residual Satpura hill ranges and their detached members which enclose the undulating valleys predominantly composed of black soil. Geologically, the region is covered by three main formations, namely, Archeans, Gondwana and Deccan Trap. The topography is typically Deccan Trap having flat-topped and terraced features, buttressed sides and isolated knolls. Much of this undulating plateau is drained by the rivers Wainganga, Wardha, Tapi and their tributaries (Mohanty and Walimbe, 1993; Mohanty and Joshi, 1996). The megalithic culture in this region is found to have spread mostly over the six easternmost districts viz. Nagpur, Bhandara, Gondia, Chandrapur, Gadchiroli and Wardha - out of eleven districts of Vidarbha.

Table 3 : Miscellaneous Menhirs

Sr. No.	Village	Number of Menhirs	Tehsil
1	Mindala	6	Nagbhid
2	Sakhara Rith	4	Nagbhid
3	Kunghada Chak	4	Nagbhid
4	Kosambi Gavali	3	Nagbhid
5	Panholi	2	Nagbhid
6	Ran Parsodi	2	Nagbhid
7	Wasla Makta	2	Nagbhid
8	Wasla Mendha	1	Nagbhid
9	Mohadi Mokasa	1	Nagbhid
10	Salebhatti Rith	1	Nagbhid
11	Dongargaon-Korambi Road	1	Nagbhid
12	Adyal Jani	5	Bramhapuri
13	Bhagwanpur	1	Bramhapuri
14	Chorti	1	Bramhapuri
15	Tulan Mendha	1	Bramhapuri
16	Mahadwadi	1	Chimur

Figure 2: Middle Wainganga basin area showing the discovered megalithic sites

Chandrapur District is a district of the Eastern Vidarbha region. It is situated between 18° 4′ to 25° 5′ North latitude and 78° 5′ to 80° 6′ East longitude. It lies between Wainganga and Wardha rivers. It forms part of the Nagpur Division, and is bound on

the north by Wardha, Nagpur and Bhandara Districts of that Division, on the west by the Yavatmal District, on the south by Adilabad district of Telangana state and on the east by Gadchiroli District. Chandrapur district, was earlier a part of Chanda district, but was separated from it after 1981 census.

The Wainganga and Wardha rivers are separated by a watershed, composed of two main ranges, the Chimur and the Mul hills. East of and parallel to the Chimur hills runs a range known as the Palasgad-Nagbhid hills, running in a north-east to south-west direction, and forms part of the boundary between Chimur and Nagbhid tehsils. This range extends for 21 km with an average height of 600 feet above the plain, and terminates in a scarped cliff named Sat Bahini Dongar (Seven Sister Mountain), 1508 feet above sea-level, which is a conspicuous feature of the landscape for sixty five km southwards (Chanda District Gazetteer, 1909). This is almost a single ridge of a cuesta type, with an excellent cliff section facing west and in part, south; the dip slope faces eastwards and the ridge is flat-topped. This ridge is made up of almost horizontally bedded Lower Vindhyan sandstones which is underlain by limestone of the same age (Pawar, 2015).

Although this hill range is further divided into different elevated portions, it is locally referred to as Seven Sister Mountain (Sat Bahini Dongar). The study area is located between eastern part of this mountain and western part of Wainganga river basin. It basically lies northward to Ghodazari reservoir and on the outskirts of Ghodazari wildlife sanctuary.

Recent Exploration

The author conducted an extensive survey in the vicinity of Palasgad-Nagbhid range, part of middle Wainganga basin, which falls in the Chandrapur district. It yielded four large megalithic burial sites along with two habitation sites and several other menhirs scattered in the villages of Nagbhid, Brahmapuri and Chimur Tehsil of Chandrapur district. Their description is given below.

Stone Alignment near Nagbhid: The existence of Menhir site at the foothills of Mahadev Tekdi on the outskirts of Nagbhid city is very well known to archaeologists. Dr. R.R. Borkar of State Archaeology department reported 9 Menhirs from this site in the year 1997, which were uniquely arranged in a grid pattern. Thereafter this site has been visited by many researchers, scholars and academicians from India and abroad. It was a peculiar site owing to its unique alignment of Menhirs. The site offers excellent comparison with the Nilaskal group of sites for the archaeo-astronomical studies (Menon, 2012). Though such alignment is found in the Southern Indian states, it is rare in Vidarbha region, which boasts of having 100+ reported megalithic sites.

Dongargaon (20° 35` 18`` N; 79° 38` 49`` E): The author surveyed the adjoining region of Nagbhid for the existence of a probable habitation site and also for the possibility of finding similar megalithic structures. In his endeavour, the author went far from

Nagbhid, towards Seven Sister Mountain. There he came to know from a villager of Kasarla Village - Mr. Dhanraj Dhanvijay, about the existence of some random stones near forest area. Since that area is heavily infested by wild animals like tigers, leopards, sloth bears etc, it has remained deserted and devoid of any human settlement nearby. This forest region is a part of Ghodazari wildlife sanctuary. The author ventured into this region along with the villager and found this large megalithic burial site, which hitherto remained unreported.

Figure 3: Menhirs from Dongargaon

The site was noted at a distance of 4.5 km to the northwest of Nagbhid, 113 kms from district headquarter Chandrapur and 96 kms from divisional headquarter Nagpur. Several megalithic burials were located on a barren land, adjacent to a village known as Dongargaon Khurd that once existed and has since migrated 2 kms north of this site. Large concentration of burials in the same locality spread over an area of 0.15 sq km (~15 hectares), has been documented by the author. The predominant burial typologies at Dongargaon are - Menhirs, cairn circles, cairn heaps, capstones and cists (Table 4).

Megalithic Typology: Although the South Indian Iron Age culture displays a certain uniformity in the burial character, a significant diversity exists in the mode of construction culminating in different types of megalithic burials. The difficulty in creating an accurate typology lies in the variation between the surface indication and the excavated plan and content (Sudyka, 2011).

Table 4: Details of the Menhirs found at Dongargaon

Sr. No.	Latitude Longitude	Dimension LxWxB (Mts)	Orientation	Remarks
1	N 20° 35` 18.7116`` E 79° 38` 53.988``	2.29x0.8x0.2	NE-SW	Extreme Northeast
2	N 20° 35` 17.772`` E 79° 38` 53.556``	3.05x0.8x0.28	N-S	Tallest, erect Menhir
3	N 20° 35` 17.5128`` E 79° 38` 54.0456``	1.3x1.43x0.15	N-S	Medium size, oval shaped
4	N 20° 35` 17.4768`` E 79° 38` 54.024``	0.54x0.74x0.13	SE-NW	Inside cairn circle, small
5	N 20° 35` 16.854`` E 79° 38` 54.564``	2.1x1.53x0.15	N-S	Large and broad
6	N 20° 35` 16.692`` E 79° 38` 53.88``	0.76x1.17x0.18	N-S	Small, rested on tree bark
7	N 20° 35` 19.644`` E 79° 38` 53.826``	2.16x1.07x0.18	-	Fallen Menhir, large
8	N 20° 35` 16.4184`` E 79° 38` 53.7144``	1.93x0.94x0.23	SW-NE	Anthropomorphic
9	N 20° 35` 16.4328`` E 79° 38` 53.826``	1.55x0.92x0.23	N-S	Medium size
10	N 20° 35` 15.7344`` E 79° 38` 53.952``	1.6x0.99x0.38	N-S	Upright, irregular border
11	N 20° 35` 15.9036`` E 79° 38` 54.186``	0.94x0.26x0.15	S-N	Small, almost burried
12	N 20° 35` 15.6012`` E 79° 38` 53.448``	2.01x1.45x0.28	NE-SW	Anthropomorphic
13	N 20° 35` 15.2952`` E 79° 38` 53.484``	1.25x0.38x0.15	SW-NE	Inside cairn circle, broken
14	N 20° 35` 15.2376`` E 79° 38` 53.0016``	0.51x0.59x0.18	S-N	Small, broken
15	N 20° 35` 15.5832`` E 79° 38` 52.944``	0.99x0.49x0.18	-	Capstone like
16	N 20° 35` 16.6128`` E 79° 38` 53.016``	2.57x1.43x0.18	NW-SE	Large and broad
17	N 20° 35` 16.3248`` E 79° 38` 51.936``	1.48x1.27x0.23	N-S	Medium size
18	N 20° 35` 15.7884`` E 79° 38` 51.576``	1.04x1.04x0.21	N-S	Small,almost fallen
19	N 20° 35` 15.6228`` E 79° 38` 51.648``	1.17x0.71x0.28	S-N	Medium size, 140° tilted
20	N 20° 35` 15.5256``	1.58x0.71x0.13	-	Fallen Menhir

	E 79° 38` 50.892``			
21	N 20° 35` 17.1672`` E 79° 38` 48.84``	1.76x0.76x0.18	SW-NE	Medium size, broad
22	N 20° 35` 17.0664`` E 79° 38` 49.2936``	1.4x0.84x0.21	N-S	Medium size, broken
23	N 20° 35` 16.5012`` E 79° 38` 49.884``	0.99x0.77x0.23	N-S	Small,almost flat
24	N 20° 35` 16.4472`` E 79° 38` 49.65``	0.46x0.54x0.16	S-N	Small stump
25	N 20° 35` 17.2932`` E 79° 38` 50.0064``	0.4x0.97x0.18	N-S	Small broken stump
26	N 20° 35` 17.6496`` E 79° 38` 49.236``	0.89x0.71x0.13	NE-SW	Small, amidst bushes
27	N 20° 35` 17.3112`` E 79° 38` 52.764``	0.83x1.25x0.16	N-S	Hidden in dense bushes
28	N 20° 35` 18.1968`` E 79° 38` 52.692``	1.43x0.99x0.23	S-N	Medium, amidst bushes
29	N 20° 35` 18.5064`` E 79° 38` 52.836``	3.56x1.04x0.16	-	Fallen Menhir,Biggest
30	N 20° 35` 18.888`` E 79° 38` 52.512``	2.8x1.15x0.26	-	Fallen Menhir
31	N 20° 35` 18.204`` E 79° 38` 50.0064``	1.63x0.83x0.11	-	Fallen Menhir
32	N 20° 35` 18.3228`` E 79° 38` 49.542``	1.2x0.82x0.21	S-N	Medium size
33	N 20° 35` 18.7872`` E 79° 38` 49.632``	2.55x0.71x0.21	N-S	Upright and Tapering tip
34	N 20° 35` 17.6352`` E 79° 38` 49.2``	1.88x1.1x0.21	N-S	Fallen Menhir at tree base
35	N 20° 35` 17.8008`` E 79° 38` 48.372``	2.36x0.89x0.21	-	Fallen Menhir
36	N 20° 35` 21.2748`` E 79° 38` 45.7224``	0.82x1.09x0.25	S-N	Twins in cairn circle at quarry site
37	N 20° 35` 21.2748`` E 79° 38` 45.7224``	1.2x0.79x0.18	S-N	
38	N 20° 35` 20.9184`` E 79° 38` 45.5856``	0.66x0.82x0.64	-	Twins in cairn circle disturbed by theft
39	N 20° 35` 20.9184`` E 79° 38` 45.5856``	0.71x0.28x0.97	-	
40	N 20° 35` 21.6456`` E 79° 38` 45.168``	1.96x0.79x0.33	S-N	On top of quarry site
41	N 20° 35` 21.9696`` E 79° 38` 45.492``	2.42x0.84x0.28	N-S	Far north at quarry site

42	N 20° 35` 21.66`` E 79° 38` 45.744``	1.27x1.15x0.23	NE-SW	Triplets in cairn circle disturbed by theft
43	N 20° 35` 21.66`` E 79° 38` 45.744``	0.61x1.05x0.33	SE-NW	
44	N 20° 35` 21.66`` E 79° 38` 45.744``	0.46x0.74x0.38	SW-NE	
45	N 20° 35` 22.6968`` E 79° 38` 44.4336``	1.73x0.74x0.25	N-S	Northwest to quarry site on downhill
46	N 20° 35` 22.8876`` E 79° 38` 44.196``	2.62x1.15x0.28	-	Extreme Northwest
47	N 20° 35' 19.014" E 79° 39' 3.42"	1.07 x 0.44 x 0.18	-	On the border of a field
48	N 20° 35' 22.3656" E 79° 38' 42.9396"	4.68 x 1.1 x 0.36	-	Largest Fallen Menhir at far Northwest point
49	N 20° 35' 20.616" E 79° 38' 43.584"	-	N-S	Medium sized,slanted, broken
50	N 20° 35' 20.5656" E 79° 38' 43.692"	-	N-S	Medium size, upright, broken

Dongargaon, the area where these megaliths are situated, is a flat plain, with scrub forest and agricultural land nearby. There are hills on eastern and southeastern side. This site consists of several Cairn Circles and 50 Menhirs (Figures 3 and 4) (made up of sandstones and conglomerates) of varying dimensions ranging from 0.5 meters to 3.5 meters in height and 0.5 meters to 1.5 meters in width. Two Menhirs resemble anthropomorphic figures. At Least 7 Menhirs have fallen on the ground, of which 3 look like capstone burials. Apart from these 3 capstone-like megaliths, there are 6 capstone/cist burials. Few menhirs are in the form of broken stumps. Few others seem to have been erected inside small cairn circles or cairn heaps. Some menhirs towards northwest side are found to be disturbed, showing fresh signs of looting by treasure seekers. The most intriguing find here is the presence of twin menhirs inside a small cairn heap, of which one which was made up of yellow sandstone was finely chiselled out and another in granular grey sandstone was chiselled out in somewhat irregular fashion.

Apart from these typologies, several mini cairn circles, which are unique to Vidarbha region, were also located everywhere on the site. There is a small rocky mound towards the northwest side, which could possibly be a quarry site that supplied stones, cairns, boulders and pebbles for these megalithic burials. There is a large water body (lake) to the north of this site barely 100 meters away. Adjacent to this water body lies an extensive habitation site. The site yielded micaceous black, red as well as designed pottery (Figure 5) along with fragments of terracotta objects, skin scraper stone and grinding stone. Interestingly, under a huge banyan tree, which is still worshipped by the local community, innumerable pieces of iron slags (Figure 6) were found on surface exploration indicating a probable iron smelting site at this place.

Figure 4: Various Types of Menhirs from Dongargaon

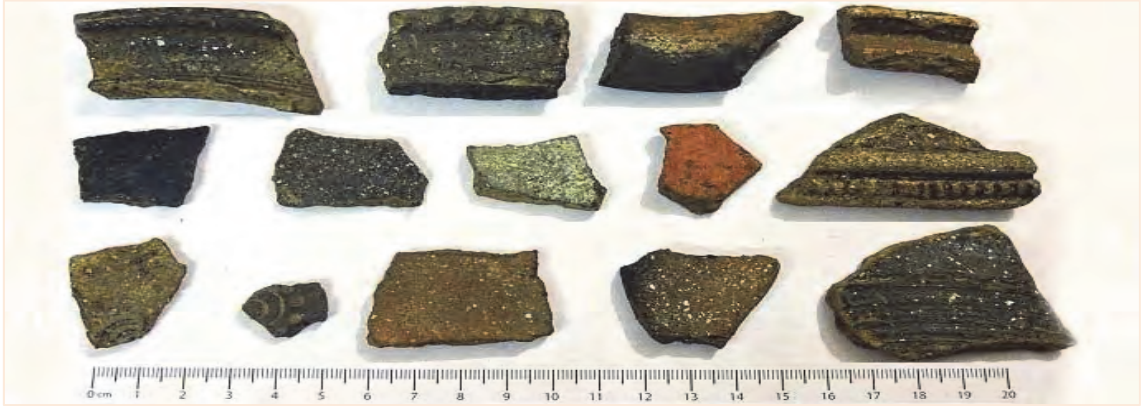

Figure 5: Potsherds from Dongargaon Habitation site

Figure 6: Iron slags from Dongargaon Habitation site

Figure 7: Navkhala site showing heaps of cairns with vacant places for the erection of menhirs

Figure 8: Menhir, known as 'Rakas Gota' (Devil's Stone) at Navkhala

Navkhala (20° 34` 51``N; 79° 38` 28``E): The site is around 1.5 km southward of Dongargaon site, towards Ghodazari reservoir and situated on flat, barren, open land inside Navkhala forest bit. There is a vast mound of cairns, of around 3-4 feet height, spread over around two-acre area (Figure 7). At some points amidst those packed heaps of cairns, circular places are kept vacant for erection of Menhirs. This arrangement has intentionally been made to make a megalithic burial. Few large menhirs are standing at the centre of these concentric circles. Among them the largest and massive menhir is locally known as Rakas/Rakshas Gota (Devil's Stone) owing to its huge size (Figure 8 and Table 5).

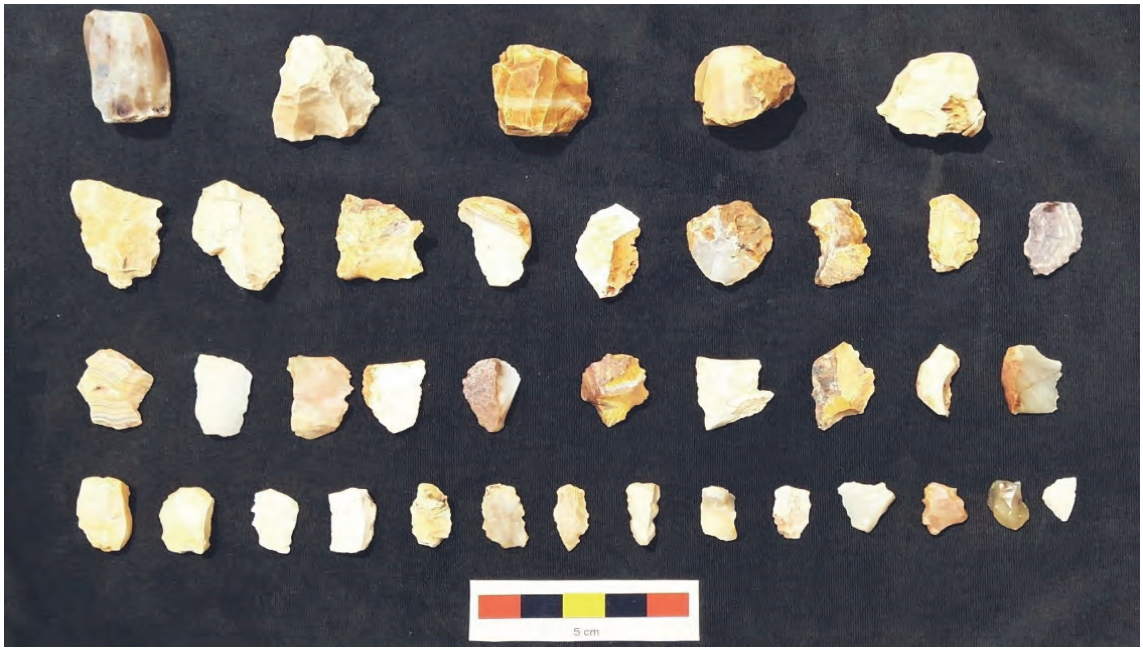

Figure 9: Microlithic tools from Navkhala

Several microliths have been obtained from this site, indicating the existence of a microlithic factory site (Figure 9). Microlithic tools found here include flake and blade cores, raw material nodules, blades, scrapers and points made up of chert and chalcedony. This site is devoid of any surface pottery or artefacts. The corresponding habitat site is yet to be found.

At a distance of about a kilometer from this site, the author has found another microlithic factory site (20°34'22.6"N; 79°39'07.4"E) with blade-bladelet industry (Figure 10). Long sized, finely sharpened microliths such as - simple and retouched blades, bladelets, scrapers, borers, points (End points and tanged points), lunates, trapezes etc made up of chert, chalcedony and agate were recovered from that site.

Figure 10: Microliths from newly discovered factory site

The author also found out twelve lower paleolithic tools made up of pale red sandstone at another locality (20°34'25.9"N; 79°39'10.2"E) very close to it. Those acheulian tools primarily include 9 simple hand-axes, 3 bifacial hand-axes and 2 cleavers (Figure 11).

Figure 11: Paleolithic tools recovered from new locality near Navkhala

Table 5: Details of the Menhirs found at Navkhala

Sl. No.	Latitude/Longitude	Dimensions (M)	Orientation	Comments
1	N 20° 34` 51.4344`` E 79° 38` 28.3992``	3.56 x 1.78 x 0.26	NE-SW	Rakas Gota, Largest Menhir
2	N 20° 34` 51.4812`` E 79° 38` 27.6``	2.37 x 1.93 x 0.23	N-S	Medium size, Oval shaped
3	N 20° 34` 50.7936`` E 79° 38` 26.16``	2.80 x 1.65 x 0.23	N-S	Large, Irregular shaped
4	N 20° 34` 51.474`` E 79° 38` 25.764``	2.65 x 1.07 x 0.28	SE-NW	Fallen, Large sized
5	N 20° 34` 48.198` E 79° 38` 28.9968``	1.65 x 1.05 x 0.26	N-S	Slanted
6	N 20° 34` 56.1144`` E 79° 38` 37.644``	0.31 x 0.56 x 0.11	N-S	Broken stump
7	N 20° 34` 57.5292`` E 79° 38` 38.436``	0.46 x 0.87 x 0.23	-	Small Sized
8	N 20° 34` 59.664`` E 79° 38` 46.6728``	0.51 x 0.56 x 0.16	SW-NE	Small Sized
9	N 20° 35` 3.1344`` E 79° 38` 42.8136``	0.49 x 0.64 x 0.21	N-S	Small Stump
10	N 20° 35` 3.2856`` E 79° 38` 42.504``	0.54 x 0.44 x 0.16	N-S	Small Stump
11	N 20° 35` 1.5828`` E 79° 38` 46.986``	0.56 x 0.56 x 0.26	S-N	Small Sized with ripple marks
12	N 20° 35` 2.8392`` E 79° 38` 45.9168``	0.90 x 1.50 x 0.27	N-S	Medium Sized with ripple marks
13	N 20° 35` 2.3712`` E 79° 38` 45.7512``	0.48 x 0.60 x 0.22	N-S	Small Sized with ripple marks
14	N 20° 35` 2.3712`` E 79° 38` 45.7512``	0.62 x 0.65 x 0.22	N-S	Small Sized with triangular tip

Korambi (20° 35` 36`` N; 79° 34` 39`` E): Korambi Village is located at a distance of 13 km northwest from tehsil place Nagbhid. It lies at the eastern foothills of Palasgad-Nagbhid range, surrounded by highly dense and untouched forest. The nearby village, Dongargaon is 8 kms away from Korambi. Villagers of Korambi have adapted themselves to live in such a remote place, amidst wild animals. The burial site is situated 200-300 meters southward of the village, along the kaccha road that connects Korambi to Ghodazari and that passes through terribly dense forest. Microlithic

assemblage was recovered from this site too (Figure 12). The tools are even more advanced and finely sharpened than those found at Navkhala.

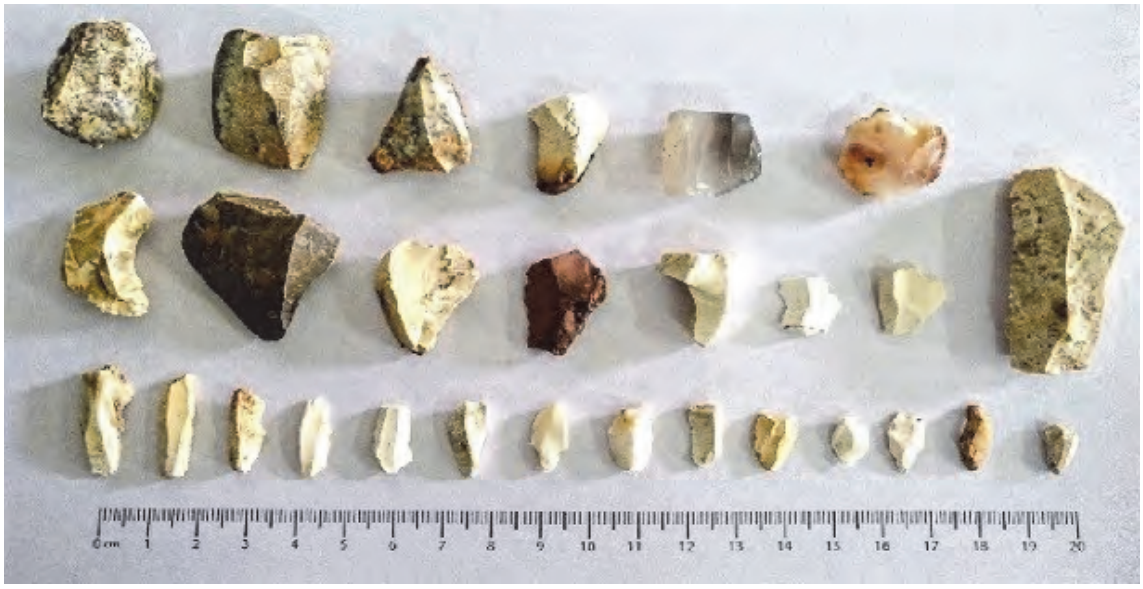

Figure 12: Microliths from Korambi

Figure 13: Menhirs from Korambi

Total 28 menhirs were reported from this site (Table 6, Figure 13). Most of the menhirs are either fallen or broken. The site is highly disturbed by human activities since a kaccha road connecting Korambi to Ghodazari cuts across this site. Elders from the Korambi village recollected that they have unearthed some pottery filled with rusted iron tools and artifacts, from this site, which got exposed during the construction of a road. This suggests the sepulchral characteristic of the site.

A habitation site spread over approximately 10 acres of area has also been found around 500m westward of the megalithic site. It is located along a small stream on the highly fertile alluvial plains. The site yielded a large quantity of micaceous potsherds of black, grey and red colour with designed slipped and polished wares. It also yielded

terracotta figurines of bull and horse, along with large quantity of iron slags both in surface and stratigraphical context (Figure 14). The most peculiar finding here is of some reddish black coloured heavy rocks of iron ore with powerful magnetic properties along with partially smelted blocks of iron. Thus, this site presents a strong case for excavation, to find out the iron-age antiquities in stratigraphic context.

Figure 14: Iron Slags from Korambi

Immediately adjacent to this habitat site, four hero stones of medieval period have been found out during exploration (Figure 15). On one of the hero stones, a warrior leader mounted on horse and accompanied by two barefoot warrior attendees is shown. Subsequently, three other herostones depicted each of these three warriors separately with their weapons. The important thing to note here is a depiction of horse and iron weapons, which was also a characteristic element of megalithic/Iron age culture. Thus this finding highlights the continuing tradition in the region.

Figure 15: General View of the Site and Hero stones from Korambi

Table 6. Details of the menhirs found at Korambi

Sl. No.	Latitude/Longitude	Dimensions (Meter)	Comments
1	N 20° 35` 42.468`` E 79° 34` 37.0632``	2.75 x 1.12 x 0.28	Largest, Fallen Menhir
2	N 20° 35` 42.4572`` E 79° 34` 37.1352``	0.87 x 1.15 x 0.18	Small Sized Menhir
3	N 20° 35` 39.9228`` E 79° 34` 37.398``	1.66 x 1.07 x 0.41	Medium Sized,well chiselled Menhir
4	N 20° 35` 39.2712`` E 79° 34` 37.74``	0.51 x 0.69 x 0.18	Small broken stump
5	N 20° 35` 38.9868`` E 79° 34` 37.2072``	1.93 x 0.49 x 0.31	Slanted long
6	N 20° 35` 37.41`` E 79° 34` 36.7572``	0.59 x 1.07 x 0.21	Capstone like
7	N 20° 35` 34.4256`` E 79° 34` 36.624``	0.64 x 0.64 x 0.23	Small Sized Slanted Menhir
8	N 20° 35` 32.154`` E 79° 34` 34.5``	0.84 x 0.49 x 0.31	Broken, right side of the road
9	N 20° 35` 29.6808`` E 79° 34` 35.7024``	0.56 x 0.64 x 0.13	Small broken stump
10	N 20° 35` 34.7064`` E 79° 34` 39.5184``	0.77 x 1.65 x 0.23	Fallen capstone like
11	N 20° 35` 35.0952`` E 79° 34` 37.1352``	0.51 x 0.46 x 0.21	Broken stump
12	N 20° 35` 36.1392`` E 79° 34` 39.576``	0.49 x 1.00 x 0.31	Both together
13	N 20° 35` 36.3948`` E 79° 34` 38.172``	2.87 x 0.59 x 0.31	Fallen long
14	N 20° 35` 36.3048`` E 79° 34` 37.3224``	0.51 x 0.54 x 0.18	Small broken stump
15	N 20° 35` 36.276`` E 79° 34` 37.704``	0.36 x 0.84 x 0.13	Small broken stump
16	N 20° 35` 36.222`` E 79° 34` 37.884``	0.64 x 1.15 x 0.31	Photo with tree
17	N 20° 35` 36.9024`` E 79° 34` 37.128``	0.61 x 0.54 x 0.18	Under the tree

18	N 20° 35` 36.9384`` E 79° 34` 38.172``	3.33 x 1.17 x 0.26	Largest fallen
19	N 20° 35` 36.9636`` E 79° 34` 38.028``	2.04 x 0.97 x 0.36	Medium Sized, Slanted Menhir
20	N 20° 35` 37.7412`` E 79° 34` 38.8668``	1.20 x 1.20 x 0.26	Medium Sized, Slanted Menhir
21	N 20° 35` 38.6124`` E 79° 34` 39.738``	0.82 x 0.92 x 0.18	Medium Sized,Slanted Menhir
22	N 20° 35` 39.1488`` E 79° 34` 39.054``	2.34 x 0.79 x 0.18	Large Sized, Fallen Menhir
23	N 20° 35` 39.552`` E 79° 34` 39.18``	0.56 x 0.77 x 0.41	Small broken stump
24	N 20° 35` 39.5808`` E 79° 34` 39.036``	0.51 x 0.46 x 0.28	Small Sized Menhir
25	N 20° 35` 43.53`` E 79° 34` 37.02``	2.37 x 1.43 x 0.28	Fallen, extreme northward
26	N 20° 35` 43.4796`` E 79° 34` 37.056``	1.17 x 1.00 x 0.23	Fallen, extreme northward
27	N 20° 35` 43.5696`` E 79° 34` 37.38``	2.11 x 1.1 x 0.26	Fallen, Under tree
28	N 20° 35` 43.35`` E 79° 34` 38.9424``	1.1 x 0.49 x 0.16	Slanted with ripple marks

Figure 16: Menhirs from Kasarla

Kasarla (20° 36` 03`` N; 79° 38` 08`` E): The site is located towards the northwest of Dongargaon megalithic site and Naghid city, at around 1.5 km and 5 km distance respectively. The site lies towards south of Kasarla village on top of a hillock on barren land. A large sized water reservoir which acts as a source of water not only for the villagers but also to wild animals of the adjoining forest is very close to this site. Though only five menhirs were reported from this site, they are very significant owing to their large size and their peculiar alignment with the nearby hills and mountains. These large sized menhirs (Figure 16) appear to have been quarried from the same hillock due to the presence of large slabs of stones with chisel marks, lying around. This site is devoid of any pottery and material artefacts. The corresponding habitat site of this burial site is yet to be found.

Other Megalithic Localities: Apart from the above mentioned megalithic burial sites, the author has also found several Megalithic structures mainly Menhirs at various localities in Nagbhid, Brahmapuri and Chimur tehsils of Chandrapur district. The main difference here is, unlike previous three sites, which have strong evidence of being sepulchral or actual burial sites, the remaining sites are probably non-sepulchral sites devoid of any burials. The reason being their separate and isolated occurrence. They are situated on the fringes of present village settlements or on the borders of deserted habitat sites. Following localities are prominent among them.

Mindala (20°33'07"N; 79°44'20"E): Here small menhirs in the form of broken stumps (Figure 17) are found on a barren land on the outskirts of the village, as if, the menhirs, altogether marking the boundary of the village.

Sakhara Rith (20°33'35"N; 79°46'49"E): 'Rith' in the local terminology refers to a deserted and evacuated habitat site. Nearby villages identify such localities as settlements of their forefathers. People have migrated from these old localities to new ones a few centuries ago. These migrations took place primarily due to natural calamities (like flood, drought etc) and epidemics, which are considered as a bad omen and a curse of gods/goddesses. So it's very obvious to find antiquities of past, which includes pottery, terracotta figurines, metal objects and other material remains. Four menhirs were found on the periphery of this locality.

Kunghada Chak (20°37'59"N; 79°37'57"E): The site is located southward of the village Kunghada Chak, very close to a water tank. Here, Menhirs are found surrounding a large cairn circle locally known as Shikardev (Hunter God). Microlithic tools too have been collected from this site along with micaceous potsherds having designs on them. The corresponding habitation site is located near this site.

Adyal Jani (20°34'45"N; 79°48'54"E): Five menhirs (Figure 18) have been found in this village at various locations like courtyard of house, village centre, near drainage gutter etc. indicating that the once barren land later underwent settlement and presents the current spread of village. A microlithic factory site was found near to the forest route joining this village to Hattilendha village.

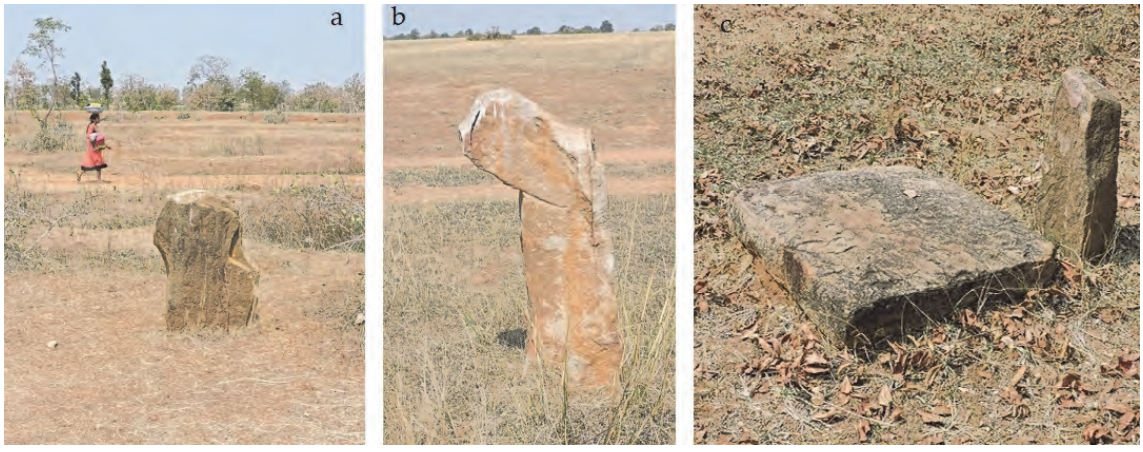

Figure 17: Menhirs from Mindala

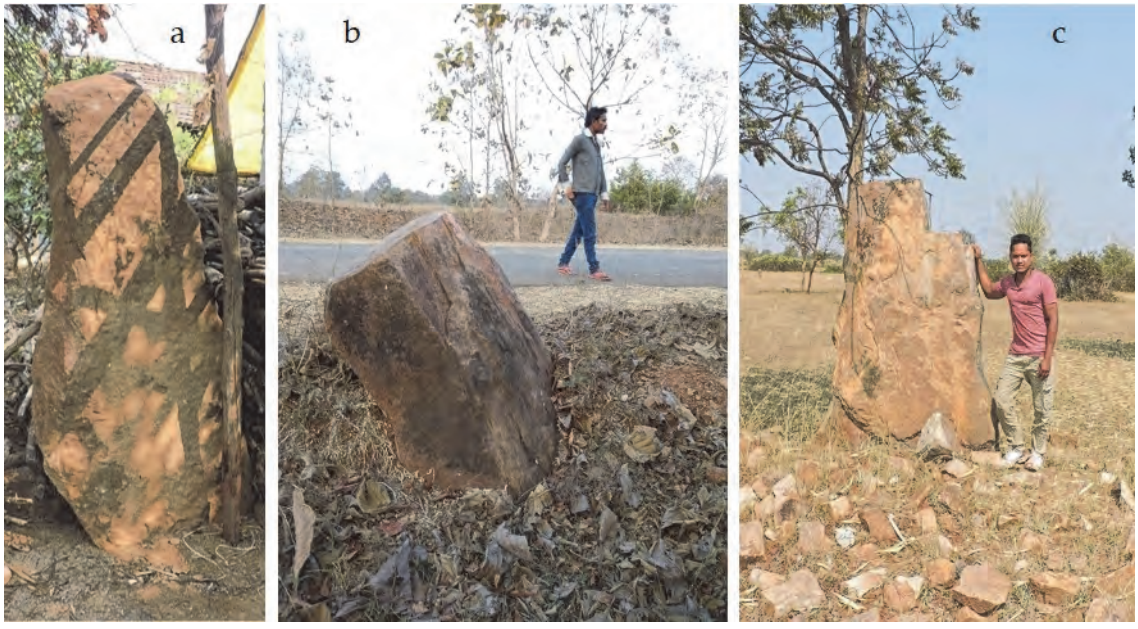

Figure 18: Menhirs from Adyal Jani (a), Panholi (b) and Ran Parsodi (c)

Panholi (20°37'30"N; 79°46'42"E): Panholi was part of an ancient city of Chikambari along with present day Chikmara and Deotek, as mentioned in Deotek Inscription of Mauryan King Ashoka. Occurrence of two Menhirs both on the borders of the Panholi village (Figure 18) adds significant value to it, as late Iron age period of Vidarbha was almost contemporary to the Mauryan period.

Ran Parsodi (20°33'36"N; 79°46'22"E): Two menhirs were found located outside the village on barren land near the forest area in a peculiar fashion. The larger one is playfully referred to as Mama (Uncle) (Figure 18) and the shorter stump like menhir is known as Bhanja (Nephew). This Mama-Bhanja pair is famous among locals and revered by them occasionally.

Mahadwadi (20°24'44"N; 79°29'16"E): A large sized Menhir was found erected at the backside of an early medieval temple of Mahadwadi in a farmland. Most importantly,

three habitation sites are found close to it. These sites are locally known as Gosai Rith, Mangli Rith and Chinchecha Rith . Out of these sites, the former two are located on the bank of a river. All these sites yielded iron age- black -on- red pottery along with micaceous and polished ones. Terracotta figurines, hopscotches, grinding stones and copper coins of Bahamani period are among the other findings. Reminiscences of iron smelting along with iron slags and iron ore bears testimony of iron smelting at these sites. Thus, these three sites too present a strong case for excavation to find out cultural sequence of this region.

Salebhatti Rith (20°30'43"N; 79°51'05"E): A middle sized menhir stands very close to the old cultural habitat site. Pottery of micaceous black and red, polished black and red wares were recovered from the site, along with few microlithic cores and flint blades.

Sacred Landscape of Seven Sister Mountain

To revere hills as pahadi or dongar is a custom that has emerged from the fecundity cults of antiquity, when all the hills were deemed mother deities or goddesses. It was an ancient convention, observed by primitive tribes across the prehistoric world (Including India) - to view hills with specific contours as pregnant, recumbent Great Goddesses (Cope, 1998). It is to such hills that many megaliths have been found to be aligned (Das, 2009 and 2017). Seven sister mountain (locally known as Sat Bahini Dongar) represents an ideal case of this phenomenon.

Megaliths are not randomly located. Hills were a necessity for the establishment of a megalithic site, a dolmen, or even a single menhir so that the stones may be coupled to the hills in the landscape by way of alignments. The ancient megalithic builders thus opted for open and circular landscapes with hills in the opposite horizons and where an inter-sectional point could be created by way of alignments with these hills. The intersection points were held as places of sacred prominence and it is at such consecrated locations that the prehistoric megaliths have been found positioned (Das, 2009). Surprisingly, among this colossal hoard of megaliths across both sides of seven sister mountain, typological variation of megaliths is quite evident. An extensive swath of landmass towards west of this mountain has dolmen and cairn circles as a dominant megalithic typology (as evident from Hirapur site). Quite contrastingly, towards eastern part of mountain this megalithic typology changes to menhirs. The modes of treating the dead, rituals, funerary goods, burial architecture and past human-nature interactions together are covered under the ambit of landscape archaeology. For the Iron Age societies, landscape was both sacred and profane. In comparison to monuments, the Iron Age settlements and landscape have been largely ignored in previous studies. Landscape studies by C. Tilley and others and the Post- Processual school have attempted studies of landscape in Iron Age Europe and have given new interpretations to the Iron Age burial monuments as geographic markers or as signifiers or as astronomical observatories (Peter, 2018). The hills along with the landscape thus form the outer precincts of an ancient megalithic burial-temple and the temple is incomplete without them (Das, 2019).

According to one legend, deities on Sat Bahini Dongar are seven Goddess of Telugu country i.e. Pochamma (goddess of small-pox), Mariamma (goddess of cholera) , Muttiyallamma (goddess that protects against madhura), Duggalamma (goddess of cough), Bangaramma (goddess of gold), Mahisamma (goddess of buffaloes) and Illamma (the protectress) (Chanda District Gazetteer, 1909). All these goddesses are revered to ward off diseases and evils. Therefore, this mountain is still considered most sacred and profane by people of the region. Other parts of this range are also revered as sacred and abode of other deities such as- Ambai-Nimbai hill, Muktabai hill, Waghai hill and Perjagarh hill. Several holy places are located around Seven Sister Mountain, keeping it as a centre of divinity. It includes - Ranubai sacred grove, Local deities of Shikardev, Shivardev, Pahardev, Vanardev, Waghaboa, Nagargota, Nangargota etc. Shiv tekdi near Nagbhid also attests the sacredness of the landscape.

Landscape Monumentalization

The megaliths had been viewed by the different interpretive trends as the highest expression of a new socioeconomic frame, replacing the ancient hunter-gatherer model with the one based on land cultivation. This was exactly the farmers' lifestyle which would have allowed an individual to be more aware of his power to control nature, his ability to alter it and to create reality´s order established through the artificial models. This way, the natural environment, which had been kept as sacred, entered the process of "nature culturalization" (Criado and *Vaquero*, 1991). In this context, megalithic constructions would have been responsible for the first phenomenon of the landscape´s monumentalization, a great way of investing human efforts, a way which transforms the given natural order to have it fit to the group's needs. They would reflect an important change in the relationship between the world of the 'living' and the one of the 'dead'. At this moment, the ancestors acquire a renewed importance as keepers of tradition and guarantors of the group memory and identity (Criado, 1989; Holtorf, 1996).

There is a large variety of megalithic complexes in the subcontinent related to varied temporal, spatial and cultural contexts. In many cases the megaliths represent the emergence of a specific burial practice among prehistoric nomadic pastoralists and/or moving bands of warrior communities. But in some identified specific cases they reveal the rise of new belief systems in sedentary cultures when the burials moved out of habitations to specifically demarcated sanctuaries. The reconceptualization of space and architecture within archaeology has instigated a renewed interest in the meaning of the megalithic monument (Lalhminghlua and Sarkar, 2017). "Megalithic monuments" fulfill a social function, they are territorial symbols that regulate the adaptation to the environment of the megalithic communities. (Criado, 1989).

Burial grounds are often considered to be territorial markers of a particular community (Renfrew, 1984). They may also serve as territorial markers in the pastoral lands, visible at their significant localities in the landscape, and focal points along pathways in order to protect resources of each community (Moorti, 1994; Darsana, 1998). The role

of megalithic landmarks as visual signals (spatial indicators) of the community's territoriality is reinforced by other material expressions. (Sanjuán, 2000). Presently, indigenous Gond tribe of Vidarbha region are residing in close vicinity of the sites explored by the author. These tribes still continue to worship the megaliths on various occasions and ceremonies honouring their ancestors. These burial grounds indeed mark their territorial lineage. Quite often these burial sites are located in the south direction of their settlement, creating a stark boundary between their dwellings and the dense forest.

Living Megalithic Practices

The living megalithic culture in India provides strong hints regarding the belief systems of prehistoric megalithic people. The practices of the tribes who still include megaliths in their religious beliefs, for example, the Gadabas, Gonds, Kurumbas, Marias, Mundas, Savaras, Garos, Khasis, Nagas, Karbis, Tiwas, and Marams. These groups still construct megalithic monuments for the dead. The author has witnessed the continuing living tradition of Megalithism among forest dwelling Madia Gond community in the villages of Sironcha tehsil of Gadchiroli district in Maharashtra, which lies across Pranhita River. Their megaliths include Menhirs made up of wood and stones, having close resemblance with the Menhirs discovered by author near Ghodazari area, only difference here was that of size. Megalithic people erected large and massive sized menhirs erected at a considerable distance from each other, while Menhirs of Madia Gond tribe are smaller in size and shape and placed very close to each other.

Observations and Discussions

While erecting stone memorials may be a worldwide phenomenon, each of these practices is distinct, and must be understood in relation to their regional and chronological settings (Rachel, 2019). Regional variations amongst the burial practices are considerably governed by the regional topography and 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). For instance, rock cut caves are found in Kerala region where lateritic rock is available (Sontakke, 2014).

The study area though has menhirs as a prevalent megalithic typology, it changes drastically when one moves northward. Cairn circles becomes a dominant typology when we move northwards toward Nagpur. Kunghada can be seen as a best connecting link with one large cairn circle on megalithic burial site, locally known as Shikardev (Hunter God). And as we move northeastward towards Pauni, typology changes to include slab circle, cairn circle, cists and dolmens. Mangli, Banwahi and Chandi sites discovered by this author along with already known sites of Shirsala, Tilota Khairi and Pimpalgaon bear testimony to this transition. One of the main reasons for this change in typology is availability of raw material. In the Ghodazari area, Sandstone and Conglomerate are the widely occurring stone types. Slabs of such

stone can be easily quarried in this region. While one moves toward Wainganga or Kanhan River, laterite and quartz become the dominant stone type. Another possible reason for this typological variation of megaliths could be that - they might have been built or erected during different chronological time frame.

It was noticed that the location of a settlement was generally conditioned by the availability of resources, especially water, minerals and arable land. It may be said that the settlements were the reflection of the allocation of resources, and on a smaller scale of social relationship to the geographical features. The difference between burial and village landscapes is affirmed. The habitation sites are located in the vicinity of perennial water supply, which is not necessary for cemeteries (Deo, 1990). The habitation site of Dongargaon is located close to a large natural water tank, whereas that of Korambi lies on the bank of a water stream, both being fertile alluvial land.

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. Ethnoarchaeological 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 (Devi, Binodini. 1993). For example, ethno archaeological studies in Vidarbha region showed that menhirs were erected for a person who met a natural death. Archaeological studies also suggest that burial was not for all people, but it seems that select few from society who died an unnatural death were given ceremonial burials (Mohanty and Walimbe, 1996). 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 (Sontakke, 2014).

Iron Age Culture: The Stone Age men were living primarily on hills and mountain fastnesses, and on the fringes of rich forests. Only after the discovery of iron ore, it is reasonable to suppose that primeval man took to the forest and made it his habitat. It was iron culture that permitted the people of the hills to pass on to forest life (Iyer, Krishna L.A. 1967). In fact this development did not take place suddenly but involved a gradual and slow process of discovering ores, smelting and steeling (Rao, 1970). The evidence of Iron has helped us to understand that India was indeed an independent centre for the development of the working of Iron (Tewari, 2003).

We have very few habitation sites belonging to this period. The iron smelting sites in the study area have provided sufficient material evidence to us. It includes a large quantity of iron slags both in surface and stratigraphical context, along with iron ores and partially smelted iron blocks with powerful magnetic properties. At Korambi, reminiscents of iron furnace site is also visible in the cross section near megalithic habitation site. It will be helpful to frame an outline of the technological progress in

this region. Iron was also instrumental in digging wells and irrigation tanks in hard rock terrain and also in quarrying rock for building megalithic monuments. Chisel marks on Menhirs and on the rocks at quarry site at Dongargaon and Korambi bears testimony to it. However, these sites need to be studied from a multidisciplinary perspective to understand foraging/agro-pastoral subsistence system in the region. Subsequent investigation in Nagbhid region will throw light on incursion and development of Iron Age culture in the middle Wainganga valley region of Maharashtra.

Megaliths and Astronomy: Another intriguing find at all these sites, is the stone alignment and avenues, that consist of a large number of menhirs arranged in some kind of pattern, like a grid, aligned to the cardinal directions with the long axis of the cross-section of the slabs having a north-south orientation. The surface positioning of prehistoric megalithic complexes reveal that many of them are consciously established employing mathematical principles. These site offers an excellent case for comparison with the Nilaskal and Byse group of sites, where such megaliths were intentionally set up, so as to have multiple sightlines to the sunrise and sunset points on the local horizon. Menhirs at Nagbhid is already considered as one such site (Menon and Vahia, 2011). Many tribal groups practice megalithism to this day. The traditions and practices of these groups suggest veneration of the sun and the moon.

The Todas and Koyas of South India worship the sun (Bahadur, 1978). Similarly, the Gonds worship the sun, the moon, and the stars (Dutt, 1984). The different groups among the Gonds worship the sun with different names, such as Burra Deo, Boda Deo, Baum Deo, or Bodeel Peer (Bahadur, 1978). Orientation of megalithic structures towards celestial objects seems to be a world-wide phenomenon. The megaliths at Brahmagiri, Karnataka, India are oriented towards the stars Vega, Capella and β-UMi along with equinoctial and solstice sun movements (Rao, 1993). Stone rows at Murardoddi, Andhra Pradesh, India are distinctly aligned to the sunrises and sunsets during both the equinoxes and solstices (Rao et al, 2011). The stone alignments at these sites seem to hold some promise of astronomical sightlines incorporated as part of their design and layout, which probably suggest intentional orientation of several megalith typologies towards points of celestial significance on the local horizon. A detailed survey and analysis of these sites could hence pave the way for a better understanding of megalithic astronomy in the Indian Subcontinent.

The Problem: The most enigmatic question about Megalithic populations is the paucity of habitational sites. While there are a large number of burial sites, only a few habitational sites have been reported. This has prompted several scholars to postulate that the Megalithic people were pastoral nomads or semi-settled agriculturalists (Deo, 1985). The habitation sites found at Dongargaon and Korambi need to be excavated in order to understand the subsistence pattern of the contemporary megalithic society. This would shed light on their mode of production, socio-cultural organization and belief system in particular.

Figure 19: Habitation site of Dongargaon near a Banyan tree

Figure 20: Menhirs at Dongargaon vandalized by treasure hunters

Conclusion

This is the first report of megalithic monuments from the Ghodazari region. This region is of interest since it is geographically close to the megalithic dolmen of the Hirapur (Tah. - Chimur, Dist.- Chandrapur) and the dolmens of Shirsala, Pimpalgaon

and Tilota Khairi (Tah.- Pauni, Dist.- Bhandara) and would offer interesting comparisons with this dichotomous megalithic typology. It is also very close to the painted rock shelters of Palasgarh-Nagbhid Mountain, viz. Pandubara, Nagargota and Navtala (all in Chimur Tehsil of Chandrapur district). This recent discovery of Megaliths (125+ Menhirs, Capstone/Cist burials and several mini cairn circles) further attests the archaeological potential of this area. Ethno-archaeological studies should be conducted to understand the intangible aspects behind these monuments and its associated relics. These megalithic finds could be paralleled against the beliefs and practices of present-day communities in order to draw broad based postulations; as we find some tribal communities in nearby Gadchiroli district, who still retain traits of megalithic traditions. Although this attempt is limited in nature, the megalithic findings in this region have raised a few questions regarding the nature, pattern and function of these burials. They could help us reflect upon the diverse aspects of megalithic society and make a systematic study thereby.

The large menhirs, which are intact, need to be protected. Several of these, including the largest Menhir (Rakas Gota) with the cairn heaps all around, are on forest land and need to be notified and protected. Dongargaon and Korambi are the most important megalithic burial sites of Chandrapur district, owing to its peculiar stone alignment that would definitely help scholars and researchers to study archeo-astronomy of contemporary times and their possible connections with present day tribal knowledge of astronomy. Since these sites are very close to human settlements, hence need to be protected from vandals and those looking for easy material for construction. Another major problem that the site faces is the marauding threat of treasure hunters.

The vagaries of both man and nature are equally contributing to the fast destruction of these monuments. Local people have painfully observed some of these monuments being destroyed and plundered for their stone, in road-laying and house-building activities (Figure 20). This paper aims at highlighting the archaeological significance of these megaliths with a view to drawing the attention of the archaeologists to these unique monuments before they completely disappear from the scene.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to express his heartfelt gratitude towards Dr. R. R. Borkar, Dr. Virag Sontakke and Prof. Suresh Chopane for guiding and helping him throughout his work. The author is very much grateful to Bhushan Deshmukh Sir and Dr. Sanjay Chilbule for their constant encouragement and help during his research. He would also like to thank his friends Chinmay Patil, Mrityunjay Saini, Nikita Dherange and Vishal Korade for their valuable help and support. The author is indebted to Mr. Dhanraj Dhanvijay, Mr. Sanjay Thakare, Mr. Sampat, Mr. Jagdish and Mr. Pise for accompanying him in his tireless exploration. The author is immensely thankful to the members of 'Zep Nisargamitra', a local NGO of Nagbhid, especially its active members - Mr. Amit Deshmukh, Mr. Sameer Bhoyar and Mr. Viru Gajbhiye for all the support and help that they provided him with, during his exploration, without which, it would

have been very difficult to venture into the dense forests to discover such remotely located sites.

References

ASI, 1928-29. *Annual Report of the Archaeological Survey of India*. New Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India. pp. 37.

Bahadur, K. P. 1978. *Castes, Tribes and Cultures of India* (4). New Delhi: Ess Publications.

Borkar, R. R. 2009. *Chandrapur-Gadchiroli Jilhyache Puratattva* (In Marathi). Nagpur: Suyash Prakashan.

Chanda District Gazetteer. 1909. Bombay: Gazetteer Department, Government of Maharashtra.

Childe, V. G. 1947. *History.* London: Cobbett Press.

Cope, J. 1998. *The Modern Antiquarian: A Pre-millennial Odyssey Through Megalithic Britain.* London: Thorsons.

Criado, B. F. and L. Vaquero. 1991. Various forms of monumental past. In F. C. Boado, M. V. G. Quintela and A. M. Cortizas (eds.*). The Archeology of Landscape in Galicia. The Bocelo-Furelos area from the Late Upper Paleolithic to the Medieval Era. (Campaigns 1987, 1988 and 1989). Arqueoloxía-Investigación, 6.* Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Cientificas, Instituto de Ciencias del Patrimonio.

Criado, F. 1989. Megalitos, espacio, pensami ento. *Trabajos de Prehistoria* 46 (1), pp. 75-98.

Darsana, S. B. 1998. Megaliths of the Upper Palar Basin, Tamilnadu – a New Perspective. *Man and Environment* 23(2), pp. 51–64.

Darsana, S. B. 2006. Antiquarian Research on the Megaliths of Kerala. *Adharam* 1. pp. 37-44.

Das, S. 2009. *Sacred Stones in Indian Civilization: With Special Reference to Megaliths*. New Delhi: Kaveri Books.

Das, S. 2017. *The Archaeoastronomy of a Few Megalithic Sites of Jharkhand*. New Delhi: Niyogi books publication.

Deglurkar, G. B. and G. Lad. 1992. *Megalithic Raipur (1985-1990).* Pune: Deccan College Postgraduate and Research Institute.

Deo, S. B. 1970a. *Excavation at Takalghat and Khapa (1968-69).* Nagpur: Nagpur University.

Deo, S. B. 1970b. The Personality of Vidarbha Megaliths. *New Indian Antiquary 3rd Series.* pp. 23-31.

Deo, S. B. 1973. *Mahurjhari Excavations (1970-72).* Nagpur: Nagpur University.

Deo, S. B. 1985. The Megaliths: their Culture, Ecology, Economy and Technology, in *Recent Advances in Indian Archaeology.* S. B. Deo and K. Paddayya (Eds.). pp. 89-99. Pune: Deccan College Research Institute.

Deo, S. B. 1990. The Megalithic Economy in Vidarbha. In A. Ray and S. Mukherjee (eds.), *Historical Archaeology of India. A Dialogue Between Archaeologists and Historians*. pp. 73–76. New Delhi: Books and Books Publication.

Deo, S. B. 2002. Maharashtracha Itihas. *Pragaitihasik Maharashtra*. Vol. 1, Part 1, Mumbai: Maharashtra Rajya Sahitya aani Sanskruti Mandal.

Deo, S. B. and A. P. Jamkhedkar. 1982. *Excavations at Naikund (1978-80).* Bombay: Department of archaeology and museum Government of Maharashtra.

Devi, B. 1993. *Studies on the Megalithic Remains of Manipur*, Unpublished PhD Thesis. Gauhati: Gauhati University.

Dutt, S. C. 1984. *The Wild Tribes of India*. New Delhi: Cosmo Publications.

Geetali, A. 1999. *Megalithic Practices among the Madia Gonds of the Bhamragad, District Gadchiroli, Maharashtra*. Unpublished M.A. Dissertation. Pune: University of Pune.

Holtorf, C. J. 1996. Towards a Chronology of Megaliths: Understanding Monumental Time and Cultural Memory. *Journal of European Archaeology*. 4:1, pp. 119-152.

Indian Archaeology- A Review 1956-57. New Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India. pp.35

Indian Archaeology- A Review 1982-83. New Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India. pp. 61-62.

Indian Archaeology- A Review 1983-84. New Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India. pp. 57-58.

Indian Archaeology- A Review 1984-85. New Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India. pp. 53-55.

Indian Archaeology- A Review 2000-01. New Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India. pp. 97-107.

Iyer, K. L. A. 1967. *Kerala Megaliths and their Builders*. Madras: University of Madras.

Krishnaswami, V. D. 1949. Megalithic Types of South India. *Ancient India* 5. pp. 35-45.

Lalhminghlua, and A. Sarkar. 2017. A Short Report on Megaliths and Petroglyphs on Natural Rock Surfaces from Farkawn and Khankawn Villages, Champhai District, Mizoram, India. *Ancient Asia 8.* pp. 1-13.

Mane, G. K. 2012. Megalithic Monuments and Early Rock Cut Architecture of Vidarbha (M.S.) - A Critical Study. *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress, Vol. 73*. pp. 1172-1178.

Menon, S. 2012. *Cosmic Considerations in Megalithic Architecture (An Investigation Into Possible Astronomical Intent In The Design And Layout Of Megalithic Monuments Of The Indian Subcontinent With A View To Understanding Megalithic Knowledge Systems).* Unpublished PhD Thesis. Manipal: Manipal University.

Menon, S. and M. N. Vahia. 2011. Megalithic Astronomy in South India, In Nakamura, T., Orchiston, W., Sôma, M., and Strom, R. (eds.). *Mapping the Oriental Sky. Proceedings of the Seventh International Conference on Oriental Astronomy*. Pp. 21-26. Tokyo: National Astronomical Observatory of Japan.

Mohanty R. K. 2002. *Excavation at Mahurjhari, Annual report* 2001-02. pp. 45-47. Pune: Deccan College.

Mohanty, R. K. 2001. *Major G. G. Pearseís Megalithic Excavation at Wurregaon in 1867: The Earliest Archaeological Excavation in Maharashtra*. In Twenty-Ninth Annual

Conference of the Indian Society for Quaternary Studies. Vadodara: M. S. University of Baroda.

Mohanty, R. K and P. S. Joshi. 1996. The Megalithic Problems of Vidarbha: Retrospect and Prospects, Spectrum of Indian Culture C. Margabandhu and K.S. Ramchandran (Eds.). Pp. 157-169. New Delhi: Agam Kala Prakashan.

Mohanty, R. K. 2003. A Preliminary Report on the Excavations at Mahurjhari, 2001-02: A Megalithic and Early Historic Site in Vidarbha, Maharashtra. *Pratnatattva* Vol. 9, pp. 41-48.

Mohanty, R. K. 2005. Some Important Observation: Excavations at Mahurjhari (2001-2004). *Man and Environment XXX* (1), pp. 106-107.

Mohanty, R. K. and S. R. Walimbe. (1996). An Investigation into the Mortuary Practices of Vidarbha Megalithic Culture. *Spectrum of Indian Culture.* C. Margabandhu and K. S. Ramchandran. (Eds.). pp. 136-149. New Delhi: Agam kala Prakashan.

Mohanty, R. K. and S. R. Walimbe. 1993. A Demographic Approach to the Vidarbha Megalithic Culture. *Man and Environment XVI* (2). pp. 93-103.

Mohanty, R. K. and S. Vaidya. 2017. An Investigation into The Dynamic Synergy Between Early Iron Age Settlement And Megalithism In Vidarbha. in *Rethinking the Past: A Tribute to Professor V. N. Misra*. S. G. Deo, Andre Baptista and Jayendra Joglekar. (Eds.). pp. 278-294. Pune: Deccan College.

Mohanty, R. K. and T. Thakuria. 2014. Early Iron Age Megalithic Culture of Peninsular and South India. In: Chakrabarti, D. K. and M. Lal. (eds.) *History of Ancient India: Vol-III: The Texts, Political History and Administration Till C. 200 B.C.* pp.343-378. New Delhi: Aryan Publisher and Vivekananda Centre.

Moorti, U. S. 1989. *Megalithic Culture of India: Socio-Economic Perspectives*. Unpublished PhD Thesis. Poona: University of Poona.

Moorti, U. S. 1994. *Megalithic Culture of South India: Socioeconomic Perspectives*. Varanasi: Ganga Kaveri Publishing House.

Nath, A. 2002. Excavations at Pachkhedi: A Megalithic Habitation Site. *Puratatva 32*. pp. 81-88.

Pawar, K. 2015. Rock Art of Maharashtra. *Rock Art: Recent Researches and New Perspectives. (Festschrift to Padma Shri. Dr. Yashodhar Mathpal*) Ajit Kumar (ed.). pp. 367-379. New Delhi: New Bharatiya Book Corporation.

Peter, J. 2018. Social Hierarchy and Mortuary Variability: The Iron Age Culture of Peninsular India with Special Reference to Kerala. *Heritage: Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies in Archaeology* 6, pp. 515-528.

Rachel, A. V. 2019. Megaliths of Kerala: Commemorating Death through Monuments in Stone. *Sahapedia website.*

Rao, G. 1970. Development of Iron Technology During the Iron Age in South India. *Indian journal of the history of Science*. Vol. 5, No. 2.

Rao, N. K. 1993. Astronomical orientations of the megalithic stone circles of Brahmagiri. *Journal of Astronomical Society of India*. vol. 21, no. 1, pp. 67-77.

Rao, N. K., P. Thakur. and Y. Mallinathpur. 2011. The Astronomical Significance of 'Nilurallu', The Megalithic Stone Alignment at Muradoddiin Andhra Pradesh, India. *Journal of Astronomical History and Heritage*, 14(3), pp. 211–220.

Rao. K. P. 2018. Iron Age Culture in South India: Telangana and Andhra Pradesh. *South Asian Archaeology Series 2, Iron Age in South Asia.* Akinori Uesugi (Ed.). pp. 129-144. Kansai: Research group for South Asian archaeology Archaeological Research Institute Kansai University.

Renfrew, C. 1984. *Approach to Social Archaeology*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Sanjuán, L. G. 2000. Large stones, sacred landscapes. Inserting Megalithism within and analysis of Social Complexity in the Recent Prehistory of SW Iberia. *Era Arqueologia 1*, pp. 122-135.

Sontakke, V. G. 2014. A Review of Inner Layout of Megalithic Burials in Upper Wainganga Valley: A New Emergence in Vidarbha Megaliths. *Heritage: Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies in Archaeology* 2, pp. 493-515.

Sudyka, J. 2011. The "Megalithic" Iron Age Culture in South India – Some General Remarks. *Analecta Archaeologica Ressoviensia* 5, pp. 359–401.

Tewari, R. 2003. The origins of ironworking in India: new evidence from the Central Ganga Plain and the Eastern Vindhyas. *Antiquity*. Vol. 77 (297).

Thakural, G. 2005. Socio – Economic Aspects of Mortuary Practices among Korku of Melghat, Maharashtra. Unpublished M.A. Dissertation. Pune: Deccan College Postgraduate and Research Institute.

Thakuria, T. 2009. Architectural Variations of the Vidarbha Megalithic Burials, Maharashtra. Abhijnan: Studies in South Asian Archaeology and Art History of Artefacts. *Shanaj Husne Jahan*. (Ed.). pp. 35-41. London: BAR series 1974.

Thakuria, T. 2014. Chronology of Vidarbha Megalithic Culture: An Appraisal, *Heritage: Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies in Archaeology 2*. pp. 651-657.