Ph.D Synopsis

Topic: Megalithic Culture in Chhattisgarh: Insight from the Ethnographic Tradition

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Introduction

Archaeology in recent times has become a generic term that appears in different fields of enquiry ranging from the social sciences to humanities to physical sciences like geomorphology. It acts as a bridge between humanities and science insofar as it deals with all the activities of man in the past and traces his progress in fields of science, technology, religion, arts and social life. Schliemann’s excavation of Troy marked the beginning of Archaeology. It is said that an Archaeologist does not dig as things; he digs up man and more so his ideas which enabled him to make progress in all fields of human endeavours. Archaeology is now concerned not only with man as a social being, artist and craftsman but also as a scientist, technologist, philosopher and thinker.

Research on the monuments and burials referred to as “megalith” or “pandukuls” or “pandukulis” in India was initiated in the beginning of the nineteenth century when Banbinton unearthed an interesting group of Burial monuments at Bangala Motta Paramba in the Northern part of Kerala in 1823. The term “Megalith” was originally introduced by antiquarians to describe a fairly easily definable class of monuments in Europe, consisting of huge undressed stone and termed as Celtic Dolmens, cromlechs and Menhirs.

Significance of the Study:

Chhattisgarh is rich with potential archaeological sites, the inaccessible terrain along with the socio-political conditions prohibit detailed exploration and though the region is rich with archaeological, not much work has been carried out to study the Megalithic evidences from this region. The antiquities recovered from these monuments reveal that the Megalithic culture in this region is coeval with similar culture in other
parts of India. But, so far no comprehensive study of these archaeological sites has been carried out.

Another interesting aspect that prevails among the existing tribal groups is the practices of erecting Megalithic monuments even to the present day. My project proposes to study both the ancient Megalithic monuments as well as the present megalithic among the tribal groups in this region. In the absence of large-scale exploration/excavation of the Megalithic sites in Chhattisgarh region, their antiquity is not properly understood. The present work makes an attempt to find out information from the ethnographical and archaeological fieldwork.

**Objectives of the Present Work:**

(i) To reconstruct the history of Megalithic culture in Chhattisgarh region.

(ii) To elaborate present mortuary (death) practices with the help of ethnographical data.

(iii) To compare the tradition of megalithic culture with other parts of India.

**Hypothesis:**

Megalithic practices were prevalent in Chhatisgarh region for a long time. The present day memorial practices may have their origins in the past practices. These practices may be used to understand the belief behind some of the enigmatic aspects of the megalithic culture. The isolation of the tribal communities in the forest region helped them in preserving the ancient monuments to a large extent.

**Geographical Area:**

The geographical area covered in the present study are Raipur, Mahasamund, Bilaspur, Raigarh, Sarguja, Bastar, Dantewada, Durg and Rajnandgaon districts of Chhattisgarh. The regions were known as *Daksina Kosal* in ancient time. The choice of
the field area as “Chhattisgarh” is guided by two major factors: (1) The region is
geographically very important because of their dense forest and hilly tract areas,
providing scope for investigating the relationship between forest tribes and their ways of
life. (2). Archaeologically, this region has a high potential that helps us to explore and re-
construct the ancient past, which in turn provides us with information, that would help us
in understanding the present scenario.

**Brief History of the Region:**

Chhattisgarh is a state with intimate connections between various strata of
civilization which has grown in course of the past thousands of years, and which has left
behind various shades in its course of development, is still visible and is a matter of study
for historians and anthropologists. The attempt is been made to give the information of
brief history of the Chhattisgarh.

**Review of Literature:**

Here an attempt is made to give a broad review of literature that deals with the
megalithic culture in Chhattisgarh region. The review is done to know what sort of
important literature are available on the subject, and then to identify the gaps in order to
carry out the present research.

**Sources of the Present Work:**

A social scientist is expected to understand the past in order to know the present
properly and thus has the ability to predict for the future. Sources are very important in
writing the history of any region. The sources available for the study of Megalithic
culture in Chhattisgarh are: Archaeological. 2. Ethnological. 3. Secondary sources.
Adopted Methods:

Field archaeology is the basic discipline of archaeology in which we study an archaeological site through application of various methods of exploration and excavation. In this present work the researcher followed the method of exploration using various techniques.

Standard anthropological tools and techniques have been applied for collection of empirical data. An interview schedules were designed for the collection of qualitative information from respondent and obtaining information from the Gonds people to understand their perception regarding the memorial stone, belief and practices and their death culture.

The first chapter deals with the geology and environment of the Chhattisgarh region. The Chattisgarh region situated between 19°45’-23°15’ North latitude and 80°25’-84°20’ East longitudes. When the study of a particular zone is done, its physical features have to be studied first. Because of this reason, geographical introduction has been put forth, with details of natural division, flora and fauna, soil condition, environment, mountains, rivers, and so on. The study of prevailing environmental set up in an area is essential to understand the earlier setting of the region. The geological formation of an area plays a major role in shaping the landscape. It was also the source of raw material in the manufacture of stone and iron took in different ages.

The physical features of Chhattisgarh have considerable influence on its history. There are a large number of mountains, rivers, and forests in Chhattisgarh. Early man favored the habitation on foothills and open plateaus for raw material in order to manufacture stone tools and implements. On the river banks for availability of water and
on edge of forest for game and edible roots of animals have been discovered at different sites in Chhattisgarh. The physical features such as mountains, rivers, valley and climate are responsible for promoting regional variation in Chhattisgarh. Regionalism became the characteristics of manifold cultural diversity from time to time.

The second chapter gives information of ethnographic profile of the gonds tribe. Here an attempt is made to understand the day to life of the gonds people. Ethnography is an in-depth description of a culture or group of people sharing a culture. It is the study of people in a conduct, a detailed study of a group of people while being immersed in the culture of that group. Bastar region is the melting pot of cultural behaviors for a long period. The original inhabitants of the region are tribal like, the muria, the abhuj maria, the bison-horn maria, the halba, the bhatra, the dhorla, and the dhurva and so on. One can divide these tribal groups in their specific regions.

The third chapter deals with the past megalithic culture of the Chhattisgarh. The archaeological research on megalithic has been going on in Chhattisgarh for more then forty five years. Recent discoveries indicate that some interesting results for solving some of the enigmatic problems. The region of Chhattisgarh is distinct from both it’s of geographical and physiographical aspects. Prolific social scientific investigation into the Chhattisgarh region has been conduct from the 20th century A.D. The first documentation of megalithic culture around Chhattisgarh is by J. D. Begler in his report on a tour in central provinces, which he undertook in 1873-74. There is a details study of typology of megalithic monuments, there nature, characteristic, similarity with others part of India, details of plan and elevation drawing.
The fourth chapter gives the details information on present day megalithic practices amongst the gonds tribe. This chapter takes up a study of the death practices of the Gond (maria, muria and dandami maria) their beliefs and rituals in relation to the memorial stone and how they stand up to these patterns of life even in the 21st century. The custom of erecting memorial stone in different parts of the world on a large scale among the diverse communities from the Neolithic times. But in central India mainly in Bastar region, the erection of memorial stone in the memory of an ancestor is still in practice among different Gonds tribes. One can say the living megalithic practices amongst the gonds of Bastar region.

In conclusion there is a summary of the present thesis and the bibliography brings lists of referred books and journals. At the end there are three appendixes, photos, plan and elevation drawing, figures and some maps.