

## Megaliths: A review

Dr. Shuchi Srivastava\*

\*Assistant Professor, Department of Anthropology, National Post Graduate College, Lucknow. An Autonomous College of University of Lucknow, Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh, India

### Abstract

Megalithic monuments are the structures of large and roughly dressed stones, erected as sepulchral monuments or as memorials of notable events. These monuments have been built up by the people from various parts of the world living in several different periods. Megaliths in India represent a widespread phenomenon. Its types and geographical significance varies from place to place. The present review article is an attempt to provide the detailed information regarding various aspects of megalithic monuments, with special reference to India. The work is based on the secondary sources of the data. The description is illustrated through pencil sketches drawn by the author herself. The article is an important contribution to Archaeology, History and Anthropology. The students as well as other interested readers may get benefit out of this study and this would stimulate interest among them to conduct research on the various aspects of the megalithic monuments and culture, required for preparing database for megaliths in India to provide collective information for further analysis.

**Key Terms:** Megalith, Monument, Sepulchral, Memorial, Archaeology, History, Anthropology

### Introduction

Megalithic monuments are the structures of large and roughly dressed stones. The etymology of the word 'megalith' comes from the Greek words: '*me-gas*' (large) and '*lithos*' (stone). Thus, megalith literally means 'built of large stones'. These are erected as sepulchral monuments or as memorials of notable events.

Megalithism is a worldwide phenomenon, as they are found from the shores of England to that of Japan. These monuments have fascinated the lay public, archaeologists and antiquarians alike for ages because of their curious and bold appearance on the surface of the earth.

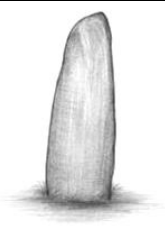



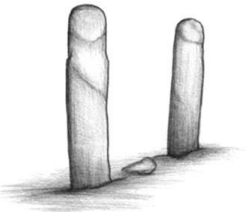
### Megaliths of the World






Almost throughout the old world, these ancient stone structures have been noticed. The areas of greatest abundance of megalithic monuments include the groups: the British Isles, western France, Belgium, Spain, Portugal, and the islands of the western Mediterranean; Scandinavia; North Africa; Crimea, the Caucasus, and the Middle East; the Iranian uplands; Japan, Myanmar and India, especially Peninsular India; and also the islands of the South Pacific Ocean, particularly Easter Island. According to Keane (1896), the worldwide megalithic structures can be divided into two categories: Monolithic type and Polyolithic type.

**1. Monolithic Type:** It includes the megaliths which are simple in their configuration. Different megalithic structure included in the category are: menhir - a large upright standing stone; alignment or stone row avenue - a linear arrangement of upright and parallel megalithic standing stones; cycolith or stone circle - a monument

of standing stones arranged in a circle; stantare - a structure consisting of two menhirs standing side-by-side; trilithon- a structure consisting of two large vertical stones supporting a third stone set horizontally across the top; orthostat - a large stone set upright that constitute part of larger structures; stone ship - a burial surrounded by slabs or stones in the outline of a ship; statue - a sculpture representing one or more persons or animals; and gateway- a gate or door like megalithic structure. (Table 1)(Srivastava, 2015; Laporte, et al., 2022)

**Table 1: Monolithic Monument Structure**


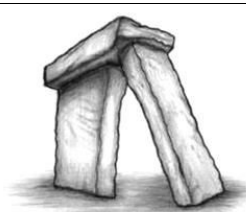



S. No.	Type	Example	
		Site	Sketch
1	Menhir	Menhir of Kerloas, Brittany, France	
2	Alignment or Stone Row Avenue	Alignment of Lagatjar, Brittany, France	
		Avenue at Rugen, Germany	
3	Stone Circle	Stone Circle at Swinsid, Lake, England	
4	Stantare	Stantare of Cauria, Corsica, France	






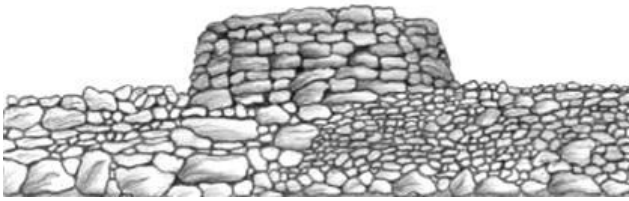
5	Trilithon	Trilithon in Stonehenge, Wiltshire, England	
6	Orthostats	Orthostats in Poul nabrone Dolmen in Burren, County Clare, Ireland	
7	Stone Ship	Stone Ship at Anund's Barrow, Vastmanland, Sweden	
9	Statues	Statues - Fifteen Moai at Ahu, Tongariki, Easter Island	
10	Gateway	Gateway - Doorway of Aramu Muru, Peru	

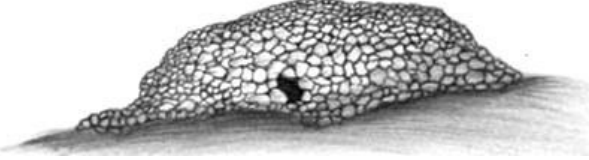





**2. Polyolithic Type:** In this category, comparatively complex megalithic structures have been included like: dolmen- a type of single-chamber megalithic tomb with a table like structure; taula - a T-shaped stone monument; cistvaen - a burial chamber consists of flat stone slabs in a box-like shape; passage grave- a structure consists of a narrow passage made of large stones and one or multiple burial chambers covered in earth or stone; tumulus - a mound of earth and stones raised over a grave or graves; punden - a step earth and stone pyramid; cairn - a man-made pile or stack of stones; cromlech - a stone structure with three or more stones placed as supports with one at top as a cover, having one side open; kurgan - a mound of earth and stones raised over a grave or graves; nuraghi – a structure with the shape of a truncated conical tower; talayot – a structure similar to nuraghis but not related; sessi – a reduced conical structures made up from stones like nuraghi but are not associated; round tower - a hollow-walled tower; marae – a structure consisted of an area of cleared land, roughly rectangular, bordered with stones or wooden posts with a central stone in some cases;

and ahu with moai and pukao - a stone platform with is a monolithic human figure carved from rock having the hat or topknot.(Table 2) (Srivastava, 2015, Laporte, et al., 2022)

**Table 2: Polyolithic Monument Structure**

S. No.	Type	Example	
		Site	Sketch
1	Dolmen	Dolmen from Caucasus, Russia	
2	Taula	Taula from Talatí de Dalt, Menorca, Spain	
3	Cistvaen	Cistvaen at Merrivale on Dartmoor, Devon, England	
4	Passage Grave	Passage Tomb in Carrowmore, Sligo, Ireland	
5	Tumulus or Barrow	Tumuli - Royal Mounds of Gamla Uppsala, Uppland, Sweden	

6	Punden	Punden Berundak, Pugung Raharjo in South Lampung, Sumatra	
7	Cairn	Cairns at Battlefield of Isandlwana, Kwazulu Nata, South Africa	
8	Cromlech	Cromlech at Dyffryn Ardudwy, Gwynedd, Wales	
9	Kurgan	Kurgan – Sarmatian Burial Mound, Fillipovka, South Urals, Russia	
10	Nuraghi	Nuraghi of Barumini, Sardinia, Italy	
11	Talayot	Talayot in Majorca, Spain	

12	Sessi	Sessi in Cunelie, Pantelleria, Italy	
13	Round Tower	Round Tower - Broch of Mousa in Shetland, Scotland	
14	Marae	Marae in Taputapuatea, Raiatea, Society Islands, French Polynesia	
15	Ahu With Moai And Pukao	Ahus at Hanga Rao, Easter Island	
		Moai at Rano Raraku, Easter Island	
		Moai with Pukao at Ahu Tahai, Easter Island	



The distribution, according to time and space, of these different forms of megalithic monuments is varying, as these have been built up by the people from various parts of the world living in several different periods. Megalithic monuments found in Western Europe date from prehistoric times, i.e., from Neolithic period and are considered as earliest in the chronological sequence. Those of India date from mainly Iron Age. The megaliths of Easter Island are probably contemporary with the Medieval Period in Europe. This custom is believed to have been long in prevalence – from Neolithic to the Bronze Age and its continuation even in the

Iron Age. Along with it, earlier Mesolithic examples are also found and megalithic monuments are still being built in parts of the south-east Asian countries like Myanmar (Burma), Indonesia, Thailand and India. Therefore, various theories have been propounded to account for the origin and spread of megaliths, which reveal that the megaliths found all over the world are associated in one way or another with the cult of dead, but not provide the sufficient ground to establish a common origin. (Srivastava, 2015; Laporte, et al., 2022)

**The Most Famous Megalithic Site: Stonehenge**

One of the most famous megalithic sites in the world, Stonehenge, is a monumental circular setting of large standing stones surrounded by a circular earthwork. (Table 3) It was built in prehistoric times beginning about 3100 B.C. and built over a period of more than 1500 years. It is located about 13 kilometres (8 miles) north of Salisbury, Wiltshire, England.(Srivastava, 2015; Laporte, et al., 2022; Pearson, 2023)

**Table 3: Stonehenge Site**

S. No.	Details	Sketch
1	Stonehenge, Wiltshire, England	
2	Aerial View of the Site	

**Megaliths in India**

In India, megalithic tombs at Malabar, called as ‘Pandoo Coolies’ attracted the attention of the scholars in 1823 (Babington, 1823). From that time, many scholars took interest in this direction and thousands of monuments were excavated in the country for study purpose. Of these, the megalithic sites in Peninsular India are the most impressive monuments. Moorti (1994) claims 2000 sites in south India alone and around 100 megalithic sites in remaining part of the subcontinent.





Megaliths in India represent a widespread phenomenon. Its types and geographical significance varies from place to place. Interrelationship between the areas and social customs are not an easy one. The beginning and end of this culture on the Indian soil, is an unsolved problem. Since eighteenth century, many scholars took interest and thousands of monuments were excavated for their studies.

Several scholars have described and classified the Indian megaliths in their studies, like M. Meadow Tylor gave the earliest classification in 1853 without using the term Megaliths (Taylor, 1853); the first scientific classification was given by V.D. Krishnaswami in 1949 (Krishnaswami, 1949); A. Sundara classified on the basis of characteristics and distribution in 1979 (Sundara, 1979); while, U. S Moorti had given classification in 1994 on the basis of the nature of the structure (Moorti, 1994). The classification given by eminent scholars

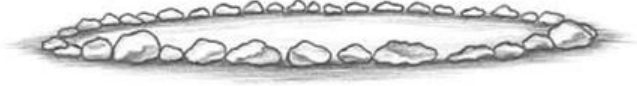
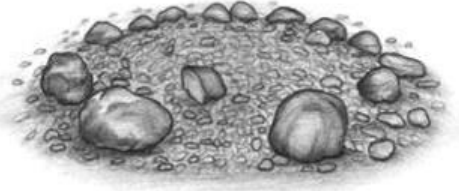


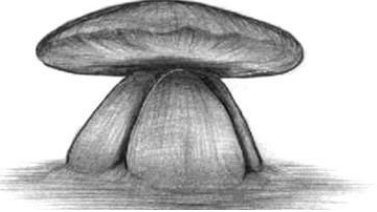
reveal the megalithic varieties in India which are based on origin, characteristic, distribution and nature. On the basis of the description given by all of them, the structure of Indian megaliths can be broadly divided into categories - simple megalithic structure and complex megalithic structure.

**1. Simple Megalithic Structures:** The megaliths, simple in configuration and not further divided into sub-categories, are included in the category of simple megalithic structures. The structures comprise this group are: Menhir - a monolithic wide, large and tall laterite or granite slab, planted as a memorial stone; alignment - a series of menhirs placed in line; avenue - two or more alignments parallel to each other; cairn - a mound of heaped up stone rubble; stone circle - a monument consists of boulders arranged in circular or oval structure; cairn circle - a structure comprises of a stone circle surrounding a cairn; hood stone - a dome shaped burial with dressed lateritic stone; multiple hood stone - a big circle of clinostatic laterite stones varying from 5 to 12; and umbrella stone - a circular laterite capstone with a domical profile rests on four quadrantal clinostatic orthostats.(Table 4) (Krishnaswami, 1949; Sundara, 1975, 1979; Moorti, 1994, Srivastava, 2015)

**Table 4: Simple Megalithic Structures**







S. No.	Type	Example	
		Site	Sketch
1	Menhir	Menhir at Burzahom, district Srinagar, Jammu and Kashmir	
2	Alignment	Alignment at Nilurallu, district Mahbubnagar, Andhra Pradesh	
3	Avenue	Avenue of Vibhuthihalli, district Yadgir, Karnataka	
4	Cairn	Cairn in Noongaon, district Chatra, Jharkhand	



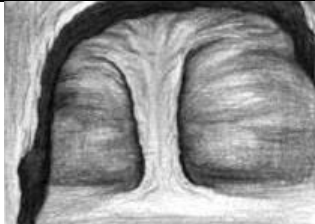
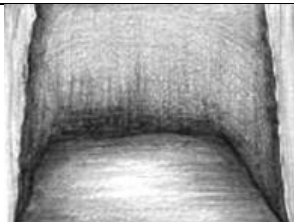



5	Stone Circle	Stone Circle at Junapani, district Nagpur, Maharashtra	
6	Cairn-Circle	Cairn-Circles, Veeranam, district Tiruvannamalai, Tamil Nadu	
7	Hood Stone	Hood Stone at Cheramangadu, district Thrissur, Kerala	
8	Multiple Hood Stone	Multiple Hood Stone, Cheramangadu, district Thrissur, Kerala	
9	Umbrella Stone	Umbrella Stone at Cheramangadu, district Thrissur, Kerala	

**2. Complex Megalithic Structures:** The megalithic monuments, which are constructed in complicated pattern in comparison to simple megalithic structures, are included in the category of complex megalithic structures. These configurations are further divided into subcategories. The structures are included in this group are: Dolmen – a structure with mostly four orthostatic boulders or slabs and one cap stone (two types: dolmen without opening and dolmen with port hole); cist a box like grave or burial chamber, built of stone slabs (four types: dolmenoid cist, cist with port hole, transepted cist and encircled cist); and rock-cut cave – a caves structure made by scooping out a pit in the laterite rock approached by rock cut steps with one or more doorways cut in the sides of the pit (five types: multi chambered cave, cave with a top opening, cave with central pillar, cave without central pillar and benched cave). (Table 5)(Krishnaswami, 1949; Sundara, 1975, 1979; Moorti, 1994, Srivastava, 2015)






**Table 5: Complex Megalithic Structures**

S. No.	Type		Example	
			Site	Sketch
1	Dolmen	Dolmen without Opening	Dolmen without Opening of Marayur, district Idukki, Kerala	
		Dolmen with Porthole	Dolmen with Porthole at Hirebenakal, district Koppal, Karnataka	
2	Cist	Dolmenoid Cist	Dolmenoid Cist in Mundur, district Palakkad, Kerala	
		Cist with Port Hole	Cist with Port Hole, Hirebenakal, district Koppal, Karnataka	
		Transepted Cist	Transepted Cist, Hirebenakal, district Koppal, Karnataka	
		Encircled Cist	Cairn Circle enclosing Cist, Sittannavasal, district Pudukkottai, Tamil Nadu	

3	Rock-cut Caves	Multi Chambered Cave	Multi Chambered Cave, Chirakkal, district Kannur, Kerala	
		Cave with a Top Opening	Burial Cave with a Top Opening, Kandanassery, district Thrissur, Kerala	
		Cave with Central Pillar	Cave with Central Pillar, Kudol, district Kasaragod, Kerala	
		Cave without Central Pillar	Cave without Central Pillar, Chembena, district Kasaragod, Kerala	
		Benched Cave	Benches with Three Legs Cut-Out of the Rock, Burial Cave, Kandanassery, district Thrissur, Kerala	



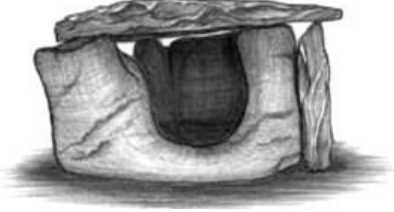
Some other significant terms used in the classification and description of the megaliths are: pit burial - a pit in the ground which is roughly circular, square or oblong on plan; urn burial - a pit with the urn (an earthen pot) containing ashes, bone remains and associated grave assemblages; chamber burial - a chamber like structure lined with stone slabs and covered by a capstone; sarcophagus - a terracotta coffin used as a depository for skeleton remains; and hero stone – a stone with an engraving on it either of a warrior or of god. (Table 6) (Krishnaswami, 1949; Sundara, 1975, 1979; Moorti, 1994, Sudyka, 2011)

**Table 6: Other Significant Megalithic Structures**

S. No.	Type	Example	
		Site	Sketch
1	Pit Burial	Pit Burial, Brahmagiri, district Chitradurga, Karnataka	
2	Urn Burial	Urn from Mottamalai, district Pudukkottai, Tamil Nadu	
3	Chamber Burial	An Excavated Chamber Burial with Boulder Circle and Passage Brahmagiri, district Chitradurga, Karnataka	
3	Sarcophagus	Sarcophagus from a Megalithic Tomb, Souttoukeny, Pondicherry	
4	Hero Stone	Hero Stone in Devikapuram, district Tiruvannamalai, Tamil Nadu	

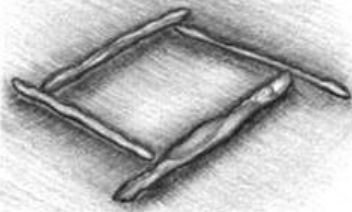
The materials of construction of the megaliths vary according to the type and the availability depending on the geographical region. (Table 7) Quartzite, sandstone, granite, laterite and Deccan trap are the principal rock material, variously used for their construction of the megaliths. Besides, pegmatite or white quartz fragments, river-worn pebbles of quartz and conglomerates were also used, though not on a large scale.(Srivastava, 2015)


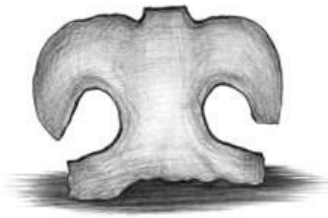
**Table 7: Variation in Material Used for Construction of Dolmen at Different Sites**

S. No.	Megalithic Structure	Material Used	Example	
			Site	Sketch
1	Dolmen	Sandstone	Dolmen from Aihole, district Bagalkot, Karnataka	
		Granite	Dolmen from Hirebenakal, district Koppal, Karnataka	
		Scooped Laterite and Granite Slab	Dolmens of Marayur, district Idukki, Kerala	

The skill in using the stones in construction of megaliths, varies from site to site, suggests a chronological sequence in techniques. Sometimes, different typologies within a single site seem to indicate that the site was in use over a long period of time and that techniques evolved in that span of time. At every stage, from the selecting and quarrying of stones to the actual construction, the megalith builders displayed considerable skill. Even they constructed the megalithic structures in some unique patterns like *Swastika* and Anthropomorphic pattern. (Table 8) (Rao, 2000; Sudyka, 2011; Srivastava, 2015)

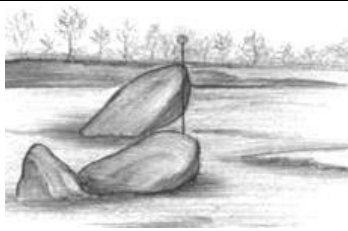
**Table 8: Unique Patterns of Megalithic Structure**

S. No.	Unique Patterns	Example	
		Site	Sketch
1	<i>Swastika</i> Pattern	<i>Swastika</i> Pattern of Interlocking Orthostats in Burial Chamber, Pudukkottai, Tamil Nadu	

2	Anthropomorphic Pattern	Anthropomorphic Statue at Kumati, district Bellary, Karnataka	
		Headless Anthropomorphic Statue at Mottur, district Tiruvannamalai, Tamil Nadu	


Megalithic structures may be having some ritual or astronomical importance. The orientations of these can provide clues to the directional symbolism that megalithic man believed in. Sometimes, the intentional orientation of several pairs of menhirs to the solstice sunrises and sunsets suggests that may be these were the some calendar devices. (Table 9) According to another opinion it is also possible that may be megaliths were the direction and location markers. (Vahia, et al., 2011; Das, 2017)




**Table 9: Directional Alignment of Megaliths**

S. No.	Site	Sketch
1	The Sunset on the Winter Solstice Day in Chano (Rola), district Hazaribagh, Jharkhand (These two Stone are Aligned towards 300 deg North of West)	

The megaliths were of both types: sepulchral and non-sepulchral. Sepulchral megaliths stored the remains of the dead in a variety of forms and even many of them contained preserved human skeletal remains. In some cases, the dead body was kept in the sarcophagus. In secondary burials, which were also common, the skeletal remains of the dead were put in urns or pits. The megalithic burials have yielded a variety of objects, i.e., the grave goods. (Table 10) (Kennedy, 2002; Sudyka, 2011; Srivastava, 2015)

**Table 10: Material found in Sepulchral Megaliths**

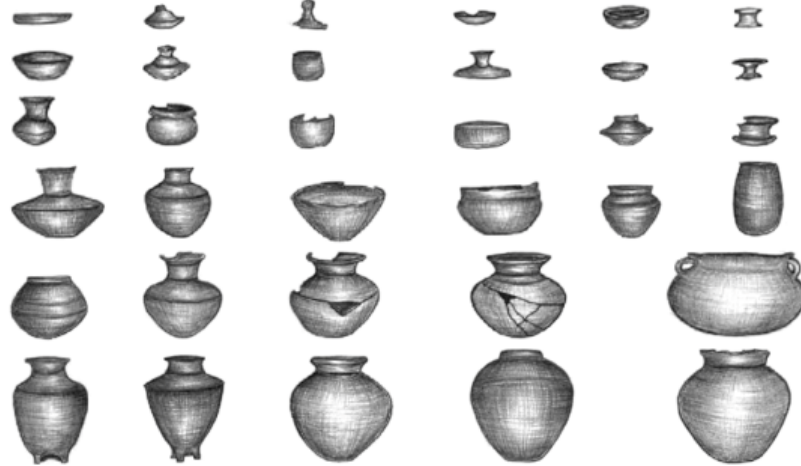
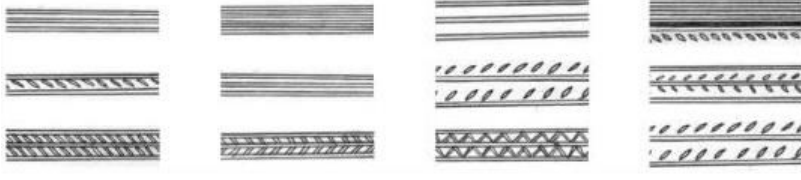

S. No.	Material Found	Example	
		Site	Sketch
1	Human Skeleton	A Skeleton, Buried in the Padmasana Posture, in a Pit Burial, Kodumanal, district Erode, Tamil Nadu	

3	Sarcophagus	Zoomorphic Ram Sarcophagus to keep Dead Body from Sankavaram, district Cuddapah, Andhra Pradesh	
3	Urn	Urn Containing Skeletons, Covered with Another Urn (Twin-Pot System), Adichanallur, district Tirunelveli, Tamil Nadu	
4	Grave Goods	Grave Goods in a Chamber Burial, Brahmagiri, district Chitradurga, Karnataka	

From excavations, it is found that the domestic architecture of the megalith builders were circular, oval or oblong in plan. These were probably made of perishable materials like wattle, daub and thatched or reed roofs, as evident from post-holes, parts of floors etc. The material remains of the megalithic Iron Age people are represented by mainly pottery with certain specificities, and iron and other metal objects. Other objects like beads, woodcrafts, domestic stone artefacts, terracotta toys, cotton clothes and remains of art have also been gathered from megalithic sites. (Sudyka, 2011; Srivastava, 2015)







The characteristic ceramic repertoire of the megalithic sites of India are the black-and-red ware (plain and white painted varieties); all black ware, all red ware, russet-coated and painted ware; and micaceous-red wares. Regional variation in the distribution of ceramics is also recognized. These ceramics were also of various shapes and design. (Table 11)

**Table 11: Pottery found in Megaliths**

















S. No.	Details	Sketch
	Various Shapes of Megalithic Pottery	
	Decoration Pattern on Megalithic Pottery	
	Dish Inscription, Sulur, district Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu	

There are many megalithic sites which were probably the production sites of metals like iron, copper, gold, silver etc. The available archaeological evidence in the form of crucibles, smelting-furnaces and clay tuyeres; presence of material like iron ore pieces, iron slag and copper slag; and traces of ancient copper and gold mines or the mineral resources at or near to these sites are suggestive of metal work and metallurgy. (Table 12)

**Table 12: Metal Implements from Megaliths**






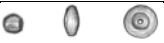
S. No.	Metal Implements Found	Sketch					
1	Iron Implements	 <p data-bbox="483 1822 617 1850">Arrowhead</p>	 <p data-bbox="673 1822 764 1850">Daggers</p>	 <p data-bbox="836 1822 885 1850">Sword</p>	 <p data-bbox="954 1822 1084 1850">Spear Head</p>	 <p data-bbox="1144 1822 1226 1850">Trident</p>	 <p data-bbox="1266 1822 1396 1850">Battle Axe</p>










					
		Hoes	Plough Share	Sickle	
					
		Stirrup	Ladles	Tripod	Lamp
2	Iron with Copper				
		Iron Dagger with Copper Hilt from Mahurjhari, district Nagpur, Maharashtra			
3	Copper Objects				
		Horse Ornaments	Bell	Rings	
4	Gold Object				
		Gold Wire from Kodumanal, district Erode, Tamil Nadu			
5	Bronze Weapons				
6	Bronze with Beads				
		Bronze Tiger with Carnelian Bead's Eye from Kodumanal, district Erode, Tamil Nadu			

A number of objects ranging from single terracotta beads to very finely manufactured gold ornaments were used by the megalithic folk for their personal decoration. Therefore, beads and ornaments made by terracotta semiprecious stone, shell, bone, horn, ivory, glass and even precious metal like gold have been obtained from the megalithic burials. (Table 13)



**Table 13: Ornaments from Megalith**

S. No.	Ornaments Found	Sketches		
1	Various Types of Beads			
		Carnelian Beads	Black Onyx Beads	Copper Bead
				
		Terracotta Beads	Gold Beads	Steatite Beads

					
		Ivory Beads	Magnesite Beads	Jasper Bead	Shell Beads
2	Shell Objects				
		Shell Ornaments	Remains of Bangles Cut from Conch Shells		Decorated Shell



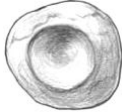

A wide variety of techno-economic items viz., those related to woodcraft, indicates another skilled profession of carpentry practised by megalithic people. The evidences show that the axes, chisels, wedges, adzes, anvil, borers, hammer stones, etc., formed the main tool-kit for working on the wood. (Table 14)

**Table 14: Evidences of Woodcraft in Megalithic Culture**

S. No.	Evidences Found	Sketch	
1	Tools for Woodcraft		
		Axe	Chisel


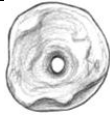
The activity of stone-cutting of megalithic people is attested by the excellent laterite cutting evidences and chisel impressions on the chamber burials and rock-cut caves. The domestic stone artefacts, such as pestles, mortars, saddle querns, etc., found at many megalithic sites were the result of it. (Table 15)

**Table 15: Domestic Stone Artefacts from Megalithic Culture**

S. No.	Site	Sketch of Domestic Stone Artefacts			
1	Domestic Stone Artefacts from Sanur, district Chingleput, Tamil Nadu				
		Pestle	Pestle	Pestle	Pestle



Terracotta discs, figurines, gamesman, miniature pottery vessels found from graves attest their use as toys for entertainment of children. Of these, the most remarkable is the terracotta disc, resembling spindle-whorls, which was probably used in hop-scotch game. (Table 16)

**Table 16: Terracotta Toys in Megalithic Culture**

S. No.	Terracotta Toys Found	Sketch	
1	Terracotta Animal Figurine and Terracotta Dish from Sanur, district Chingleput, Tamil Nadu		
		Terracotta Animal Figurine	Terracotta Dish


Findings of cotton pieces and spindle whorls indicate the presence of cotton clothes in megalithic culture.(Table 17)

**Table 17: Evidences of Cotton Clothes in Megalithic Culture**

S. No.	Evidences Found	Sketch	
1	Cotton Piece and Terracotta Spindle Whorls found at Kodumanal, district Erode, Tamil Nadu		
		Cotton Piece	Terracotta Spindle Whorls


On the basis of the engravings and paintings on the rock-shelters in peninsular India, some scholars argue that these megalith builders were the authors of these rock paintings. (Table 18)

**Table 18: Megalithic Rock Art**

S. No.	Site	Sketch
1	Rock Art at Hirebenakal, district Koppal, Karnataka	

The evaluation of the material data of the megalithic period indicates a combination of specialized strategies, i.e. agriculture and cattle pastoralism which was adopted by megalithic builders at the societal scale of production. Thus, their subsistence base was a specialized agro-pastoral economy. (Table 19)

**Table 19: Megaliths near Modified Rock Pool**

S. No.	Site	Sketch
1	Large Dolmens on the Quarried Banks of a Modified Rock Pool at Hirebenakal, district Koppal, Karnataka	

The Megalithic Age in India is corresponding to the Iron Age of the prehistoric world. The variations observed in the external and internal features of the burials reflect that the Iron Age society of the megalithic people was not a homogenous entity. Differences in the types and contents of the burials suggest that there was some sort of disparity in the attributes of the buried individuals. (Srivastava, 2015)


Indian megalithic monuments show some resemblance with megaliths in other parts of the world. Several explanations have been given by traditional European migrationist/ diffusionist regarding foreign origin of Indian megaliths, framed in terms of superficial similarities among the megaliths all over the world. (Taylor, 1841; Fergusson, 1872; Dubreuil, 1922; Perry, 1923; Elliot-Smith, et al., 1927; Wheeler, 1948; Moorti, 1994) An alternative perception of an indigenous origin to explain the south Indian megalithic complex was also there. (Fürer-Haimendorf, 1953) But, according to later views, Iron Age burial indicates a combination of indigenous and foreign influences. (Sundara, 1975; Allchins & Allchins, 1983; Thapar, 2002)

It was cautiously put forward on the basis of the available dates that the megalithic culture mainly existed from about 1500 B.C. to about 300 AD in India. (Wheeler, 1948; Srinivansan & Banerjee, 1953; Brubaker, 2001; Nagaraja Rao, 1971; Singhvi, et al., 1991; Mohanthy & Selva Kumar, 2001; Moorti, 2008) But, earlier and later evidences have also been found. Even the living tradition of megalithism has been identified among various communities.

Except for the plains of Punjab, the Indo-Ganga divide, the Ganga basin, the deserts of Rajasthan and parts of northern Gujarat, megaliths are located practically all over India. However, they are concentrated in peninsular India, in the states of Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. Maharashtra comes next, followed by Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, north-eastern Rajasthan, the Kashmir valley and Ladakh. (Brubaker, 2001; Srivastava, 2015)

The sepulchral and other architecture of the megalithic period had enormous bearing in the subsequent development of indigenous architecture in several regions. (Table 20) (Longhurst (1979; Kramrisch, 1976; Vahia, et al., 2011)





**Table 20: Hero Stone**


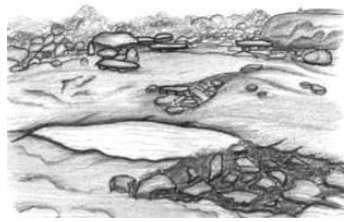

S. No.	Site	Sketch
1	Hero Stone, Kodumudi, district Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu	

**The Largest Megalithic Site in India: Hirebenakal**

Hirebenakal is reported to be the largest necropolis among the megalithic monuments of India. (Table 21) It is located in Karnataka, 10 kilometres west of Gangavati town in Koppal district. It is close to the left bank of the river Tungabhadra, and is covered with thorny bushes and slippery scattered boulders. The construction of this megalithic site was started in the transition phase between Neolithic and the Iron Age periods. The monuments were built over more than 1,000 years. This time span includes south Indian Iron Age (1200 - 500 B.C.) and Early Historic (500 B.C. - 500 AD) periods. (Tylor, 1953; Sayeed, 2013; Sundara, 1975; Srivastava, 2015)

**Table 21: Dimensions of Megalithic Culture at Hirebenakal Site**



S. No.	Details	Sketch
1	The Slab-Supported Dolmens at Hirebenakal	
2	Smaller Dolmen at Hirebenakal	
3	Larger Dolmen at Hirebenakal	
4	Passage Chamber at Hirebenakal	


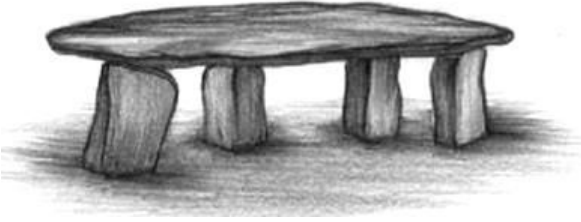

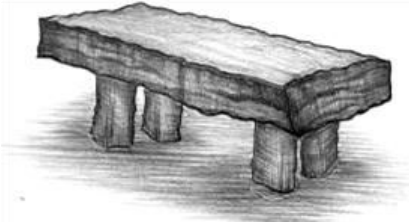
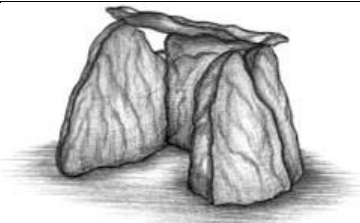

5	Broken Anthropomorph	
6	Modified Rock Pool	
7	Figures Depicted in Rock Art	

### Living Indian Tradition

The living tradition of megalithism has been identified among various tribal communities living in north-eastern, eastern, central and south India like the Khasis and the Garos and the Syntengs of Meghalaya, the Tiwas and the Karbis of Assam, the Nagas of Manipur and Nagaland, the Hos and the Mundas of Chota Nagpur, the Gonds and the Morias of Chattisgarh, the Kurumbas of Kerala, the Bondos and the Gadabas of Orissa, and the Savaras of Andhra Pradesh and Orissa.(Table 22) (Marak, 2012, Shekhar, et. al., 2014; Srivastava, 2015, Bora & Bezbaruah, 2018)

**Table 22: Living Tradition of Megalithism in Various Indian Tribes**

S. No.	Tribe	Type	Sketch
1	Khasi	Menhir	
2	Naga	Menhir	

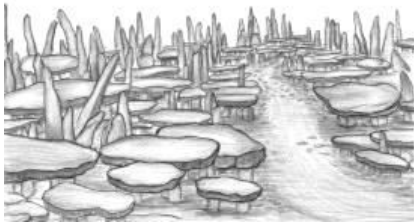

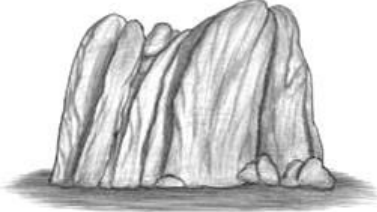
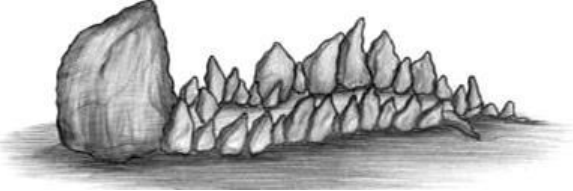

3	Garo	Wooden Post	
4	Munda	Dolmen	
5	Gond	Wooden Pillar	
6	Bondo	Dolmen	
7	Kurumba	Dolmen	
8	Savara	Menhir	

Though there are some observable similarities between the megaliths of the past and those of the living tribes, yet it is very difficult to bridge the gap between the past and the present continuum of the traditions. (Fürer-Haimendorf, 1945; Wheeler, 1959; McIntosh; 1985)

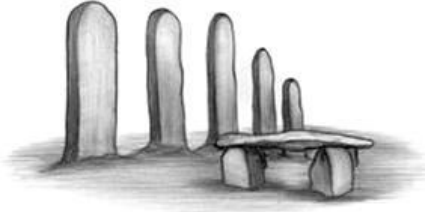
**A Significant Site with Living Megalithic Tradition: Khasi Jayantia Hills**

Khasi and Jayantia hills are situated in the state of Meghalaya in India. A dominant Indian tribe, Khasi, is living in this area. One of the striking features of the Khasis is the erection of megaliths. Large and small upright stones, horizontal table stones, and cists are to be seen all over the Khasi and Jaiantia hills.(Table 23) (Roy, 1963; Marak, 2012; Srivastava, 2015)

**Table 23: Living Megaliths at Khasi Tribe**

S. No.	Details	Sketch
1	A View of Khasi Megaliths at Jaintia Hills	
2	A Group of Cists	
3	Cist	
4	Sacred Enclosure	
5	Menhirs and Flat Stones	



6	Memorial Stones	
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In the present scenario, it is required to develop a database for megaliths in India. But, before incorporating the data in the database, it is needed to spend more time in collecting the data and arranging it in suitable format including four records related to a particular project: Information regarding the site; Details of artefacts; Size of the burial site, amount of habitational deposit and estimated population; and Published references. (Rao & Marathe, 1989)

### Conclusion

Megaliths are great stone memorials erected by man to bid farewell to their departed kin or chiefs with utmost regard and care. These are erected by people from various corners of the world and from different periods of the time in the past and present. Yet their shape, size and ground plan differ from place to place and community to community. However, much work has been done in the field so far and the students and researchers of Archaeology, History and Anthropology as well as interested readers from other sections of the society are getting benefitted from available information, but still it is required to develop a database for megaliths in India in proper format to provide collective information for further analysis to know about the different aspects of the megaliths and related culture.

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