

Stone Jars of North Cachar, Assam



सत्यमेव जयते

प्रलकीर्तिमपावृणु

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The North Cachar Hill district, presently known as Dima Hasao, is located to the south of Assam. It is rich in archaeological remains from prehistoric to medieval period. One of the most significant and fascinating prehistoric remains located in the district is the jars made of stones. At first, these jars were reported by J.P. Mills and J.H. Hutton



in 1932 at different localities of North Cachar district—known as Bolasan, Derebore, Molongpa, Kobak, Kartong and Ndulge. The jars were perhaps used as ancestral bone repository by an ancient tribe. Significantly, no such stone jars have been discovered from

anywhere else in the country except in North Cachar. However, evidences of such stone jars have been reported from Southeast Asian countries like Laos and Philippines. Madeleine Colani, who explored and excavated jars in Laos, proposed that the jars in Laos were made by some groups of people who spoke Mon-Khmer language and they had the knowledge of iron. Madeleine Colani further proposed that a group of Mon-Khmer people with the tradition of jars making entered in North Cachar following the trade route from Laos via Philippines and Vietnamese coast.

The jar localities in North Cachar are located on hill tops at 700 to 1200 m above the sea level. Bolasan, Molongpa, Kobak, Kartong and Ndulge are located in the Haflong sub-division whereas Derebore is located in Maibong subdivision of the district. Beside the unique stone jars, the appealing natural setting of these jars localities and ethnic cultures of the Dimas and Zemis inhabiting here is worth enjoying. All the localities are well connected by motorable road.



Bolasan (25° 13' 19.97" N and 92° 54' 42.48" E) is located around 45 km towards the north-west direction of Haflong town.

Bolasan is also known as Nuchubunglo which is a recently given name to the village by the Zemís that means "hill of stone jars". Molongpa (25° 13' 54.20" N and 92° 48' 25.28" E) is located around 100 km towards the north-west direction from the Haflong town. Molongpa is perhaps corruption of original Zemi word Melangeuram that means "area of an idiot man". Kobak, according to the Biates, is corrupt form of the original Biate word



Phobak. Phobak means "a kind of shield" that Biates used in war. Kobak (25° 16' 49.32" N and 92° 48' 55.55" E) is located around 60 km north-west of Haflong town. Kartong (25° 15' 4.06" N and 92° 48' 53.36" E) means an edible creeper and 'sip' means

hillock in Biate language. Therefore, Kartongsip denote a hillock of edible creeper named "kartong". The village is located around 10 km away from Kobak. Around 45 km away from Haflong town on the Haflong-Guwahati Road, Derebore (25° 21' 38" N and 92° 57' 7.53" E) is located. Derebore is corrupt form of the Dimasa word 'Di-bra; 'di' means water and 'bra' means joining of two streams. The area where jars are located at Derebore (Di-Bra) is presently known as Dubungling. 'Dubung' is the name of a variety of tall grass of which Dimasas make a musical instrument and 'ling' means plantation. Derebore (Di-Bra) is located around 3 km away from Dubungling on the bank of river Diyung. There was a British outpost at Dibra, remains of which are still seen here.



The jars area was named as 'Derebore' by J.P. Mills and J.H. Hutton as it fell within the British outpost at Derebore. Except Molongpa and Ndulge, rest of the jars localities were declared protected by

Archaeological Survey of India under the Ancient Monuments Preservation Act 1904. Unfortunately, those were declared untraceable in 1983. Recently, an exploration was conducted in this district by Guwahati Circle in collaboration of NEHU, Tura Campus and Nagaland University, Kohima Campus to relocate and record the jar sites.

The jars were made from the locally available sandstone in the Barail range. They were shaped using metal tools, perhaps iron chisels were used. Outer surface of the jars were polished to remove the chisel marks whereas chisel marks can be seen in the inner surface of the jars. Morphologically the jars can be classified into six types.

Type-I: Jars of this type are elongated bi-cone in shape. The edge is not in the exact centre. The edge is more towards the apex where cavity was curved out. The other apex is more pointed. Jars of this type are between 180 cm to 150 cm in length.



Type-II: Jars of this type are bi-cone in shape. The edge is almost in the centre and the apex where cavity was curved is broader than the other apex. Jars of this type are between 70 cm to 40 cm in length.



Type-III: This type is represented by cylindrical shaped jars. The base is narrower than the top end. They are 130 cm to 70 cm in length.



Type-IV: This type is represented by convex bi-cone shaped jars. In this shape the height of the jar is smaller than its diameter. The edge of facets is so low that the jars look like almost spherical. However, in some cases the edge is little sharp.



Type-V: Jars of this type are almost barrel shaped.

Type-VI: In this type the shape of the jars are almost globular having bulbous cavity. The biggest jar is around 120 cm in height from the surface and around 200 cm in diameter.

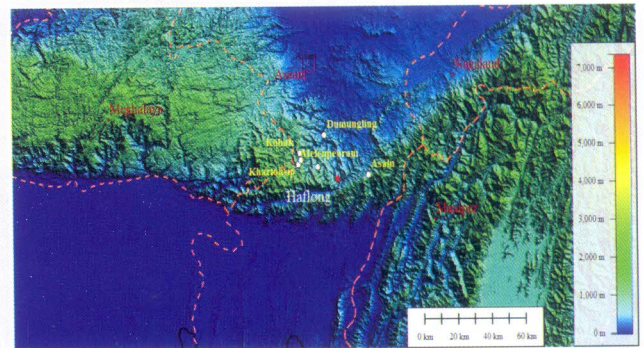


According to J.P. Mills and J.H. Hutton, the jars were used as ancestral bone repository. A bone piece was found by J.P. Mills and J.H. Hutton in one of the jars, which Mr. Calvert identified as remain of human bone. Based on the identification of the bone piece by Mr. Calvert, Mills and Hutton proposed that these jars were perhaps used as repository by an unknown tribe. Their postulation was also based on ethnographic analogy from Khasi burial practice. The Khasis presently inhabit the Khasi hills of Meghalaya and in small pockets in North Cachar hills. They practice the tradition of collecting and re-depositing ancestral bones in a clan repository. The bones and ashes of the cremated body are collected in a pot and kept in small dolmens or cists known as *Mawshieng* in Khasi language. From the small dolmens or cists, the pot containing the bones is removed to a larger bone repository, known as *Mawphew*. However, local villagers believe that the jars were used to brew rice beer by the ancient kings.

Considering parallel with Laos and Philippines, it seems logical to infer that the jars in that North Cachar were too used as bone repository. The jars are indeed, significant archaeological evidence to understand the migration of people and culture from South-east Asia to North-east India. It is now established fact that there were waves of migrations of Austro-Asiatic speaking people to India. Among which the early wave is from India to South-east Asia and the latter is from South-east Asia to India. There is no doubt that there were migrations of Austro-Asiatic people through the North-east Indian corridor, but their relation with stone jars need further scientific investigations. In understanding the introduction and spread of iron using culture in North-east India, the jar sites in North Cachar may play a vital role in yielding archaeological evidence.

Source

1. Mills, J. P. and J. H. Hutton 1932. Ancient Monoliths of North Cachar, *Journal and Proceeding of the Asiatic Society of Bengal XXV:285-300*,(NewSeries)
2. Thakuria, T. 2014 *Hollowed Monoliths of North Cachar; Assam: Prospect for archaeology and Ethno-history*, In After 51 Years of Excavation at DaojaliHading: Prospects of Archaeology in North East India (Eds. T. Jamir and M. Hazarika), Pp: 243-249, Research India Press: New Delhi.
3. Thakuria, T., T. Jamir and M.K. Chauley 2014. Report on Archaeological Investigation in North Cachar District (Dima Hasoa) of Assam. Manuscript submitted to ASI, Guwahati Circle.



Map. 2. Location map of explored sites.

Text : Dr. Tilok Thakuria

Published by
Archaeological Survey of India,
Guwahati Circle,
G.N.B. Road, Ambari,
Guwahati-781001, Assam

Email: circleguw.asi@gmail.com
Website: www.asiguwahati.circle.gov.in
Ph: 0361-2634427, Fax- 0361-2634428