

ARCHAEOLOGICAL FINDINGS IN MEGHALAYA

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A full-fledged statehood for Meghalaya was acclaimed by all as a remarkable event for socio-cultural regeneration of the land of the clouds. It is bounded on the north by the districts of Kamrup and Goalpara of Assam, on the south by Bangladesh. Its east is bounded by the Mikir and North Cachar Hill districts, while on its western border district Goalpara of Assam and the Bangladesh are standing. The area covered by this state is 22507 square kilometers and the population is just under one million. The name Meghalaya of this State is given after the name of the Meghalaya or Shillong Plateau. This is the oldest plateau in this region and is comparatively lowering towards Garo Hills. Shillong peak is the highest peak in the Meghalaya plateau which is 6,600 ft. high. On this peak there lies a number of Megaliths, which are yet to get touch by the hand of archaeologists.

Geologically, Meghalaya constitutes the Assam plateau, and the Garo Hills is represented by the oldest archaean.

Undivided Assam, which includes Meghalaya, Manipur, Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh, Tripura and Mizoram, is the corridor through which cultures of Southeast Asia and continental India passed and met each other.

Meghalaya played a very prominent role so far as the archaeological remains of Northeastern India are concerned. Most noteworthy among them is the district of Garo Hills. Archaeologically, this is the most prosperous district in this region. This district yielded hundreds and thousands of Stone Age human remains of neolithic as well as palaeolithic periods. In Garo Hills many stratified palaeolithic sites have been discovered for the first time in the valleys of the river Rongram, Simsang and their tribu-

taries. In this paper an attempt has been made to describe all of them.

NEOLITHIC PERIOD :—

The relics of the neolithic period of Garo Hills which are the products of consistent and labourious investigations of Professor M.C. Goswami, Head of the Department of Anthropology, Gauhati University, have been comprehensively studied by Dr. T. C. Sharma for his Ph.D thesis (Sharma : 1966). The chief neolithic implements of the Garo Hills are the axes and hoes. On the basis of the techniques employed in the manufacturing of the tools these are divided into three major groups viz: i) Chipped Stone Implements, ii) Chipped and Ground Stone Implements and iii) Fully Ground implements.

The chipped stone implements are the tools which are made exactly like that of the palaeolithic tools. The second group of tools of this phase are the chipped and ground stone implements. These implements are first of all shaped by chipping or flaking. But the final shape of the tools is given by grinding. As

both the techniques have been used in manufacturing the tools, the term "chipped and ground stone implements" is applied to designate these tools. The third group of tools is represented by the fully ground tools. These tools are thoroughly ground and the sign of chipping or flaking is not visible over the surface of the tools.

PALAEOLITHIC PERIOD :—

The palaeolithic period of Garo Hills is a noteworthy one. The palaeolithic remains of man which are unearthed from the above mentioned river valleys as well as from the surface of some other sites, such as Thebbrongiri, Mokbolgiri, Selbagiri, Michimagiri etc., are of special interest to us. These are studied by the present author (Sharma : 1972).

The entire palaeolithic period of Garo Hills has been divided into as many as four series. These are as follows:

SERIES I :

The tools belonging to this series are hand-axes, cleavers, choppers, chopping tools, diacids pointed tools

etc. Almost all the prehistoric sites of Garo Hills more or less yielded these tools. At Rongram, Rombhagiri and Chibragiri these tools are associated with the cemented coarse gravel; these tool yielding coarse gravels of the Garo Hills are rested directly over the bedrock which is sandstone and shale. The average thickness of these gravels is two meters. These gravels are rounded, sub rounded pedalfert type and are not well sorted. However, at Rongram and Rombhagiri some above-mentioned tools have been found *in situ*. and many of them are found in mint condition.

SERIES II:—

So far as their raw-material and technique of manufacturing are concerned, an abrupt change has been observed among the other Indian Stone Age tools when they enter into this phase of their cultural development. On the other hand, in Garo Hills the same type of raw material has been in vogue throughout the Stone Age period of the district. All the tools belonging to this cultural phase are made out of flakes. The majority of these flakes

shows the prepared multifaceted striking platform with a prominent bulb of percussion. Retouchings present on the upper surface as well as on the other necessary parts of the tool.

The regular tool types of this series are the different varieties of scrapers, points and borers. All these types are further divided into various sub-types and sub-varieties. These tools might have been used for scraping, piercing and boring.

SERIES III.

This group is represented by the blades and the tools, made on blade. The representative tool types of this series are scrapers, points, blades and burins. All of them are made of blade flakes. These tools were very recently discovered in Garo Hills. But their firm stratigraphic sequence is yet to be established. Most of these are collected from the eroded surfaces of the river terraces. Hence their classification is purely typological.

SERIES IV :

This industry is represented by the tools of miniature variety—the

microliths. The main difference between the microlithic tools of Garo Hills and that of the rest of India is the raw material. Instead or in the absence of any other crypto-crystalline rock, these tools are made on fine grained dolerite. These tools were also collected from the eroded surfaces of the terraces. The main tool-types of this series are different types of points, scrapers, borers, blade and bladelets and arrowheads.

MISCELLANEOUS TYPES :

A large number of specimens are there which are classified as miscellaneous types. There are cores, broken tools and waste flakes. The cores are again further subdivided. For the rarity of spaces these are not discussed here in detail.

Another historically important site of the district is Bhaitbari. Bhaitbari is located at a distance of about 45 kms to the north of Tura on the southern bank of the river Jinjiram, in between $90^{\circ}-90^{\circ}15'$ E, long. and $25^{\circ}45'-26^{\circ}$ N. lat. This site is a very extensive one and is surrounded by an earthen rampart. It extends on either side of the Tura-Goalpara road with a number

of mounds on it. A very big tank is located at one corner of the site. Ruins of two brick structures have been found near the village Nalbari. At present it is very difficult to say whether these are temples or some other structures. However, the local people named them as *Jormandir*. This site contains extensive ruins which includes some brick-structures, terracottas, a number of tanks and many other sculptural ruins which are scattered along the length and breadth of the site. Sivalingas and some other designed stone blocks were used by the local people either as support of their granaries or to make stair cases of their houses. The local tradition goes with the story that this ruined city belongs to one 'Dharmiya Raja' also known as 'Bisandoi Raja' or *Mal-gosain Rikhu-Jangher-Raja* (Bhuyan: 1972 : 9).

The Bhaitbari terracotta plaques have stylistically some affinity with the late Pala and Sena artistic idioms. Basing on the terracottas, brick-structures and other such evidences available in Bhaitbari, the existence of this city can be dated back to 11th/12th Century A.D. (Bhuyan: op. cit.)

Similar terracottas have also been found in Phulbari. Some peculiar

types of terracotta have been collected by the present author but all of them are fragmentary. Owing to the paucity of evidences along with the terracottas which were found near Gārobādhā, these have not yet been reported.

Potsherds were also collected from various parts of Garo Hills. Some of them were associated with the neolithic implements. These are in the process of study for a Ph.D. thesis by one of our research scholars. Hence these will not be discussed here.

Khasi and Jaintia Hill Districts :

Archaeological findings in Khasi and Jaintia Hill Districts are very few. Since independence no systematic efforts have been made to unearth the ancient human relics except the house or stray collections of a few neolithic celts. In pre-independence period the British administrative officers have collected a number of neolithic celts from this region. Many of them have been preserved in Pitt-Rivers Museum, London, and a few of them are here in India. All of them are very elaborately studied by Dr. T.C. Sharma in his Ph.D thesis (Sharma: 1966).

Recently a neolithic site has been located in Barnihat as it is reported

(Assam Tribune). A party of the University of Dibrugarh under the supervision of Dr. S N. Rao unearthed a few neolithic celts and pottery. A detailed study of these materials have not yet been made.

Besides neolithic celts, the most note worthy relics of this district are the megalithic monuments. Most of them are centrally protected monuments and maintained by the Archaeological Survey of India. Megalithic bridges on the Un-Nyakameh, Thulu-um-Wi and Um-Kumbah have been protected. Further, megalithic stone memorials of U Mawthaudur and U Maw-thaudur braew are remarkable. Moreover, some important megaliths have been observed at Nonghpoh and Shillong Peak. Till to-day no systematic work has been done on these megaliths. Even these are not well protected. Many of them have been covered by thick jungles and bushes.

In Garo Hills megalithic monuments have been observed at many places; but these are not properly recorded. Most of them are of menhir type. These cultural relics of Meghalaya may give us some more valuable informations so far as the cultural history of this part of India is concerned. Hence in

this regard the Government of Meghalaya can take the initiative. Some of them should be excavated and the rest should be preserved scientifically; but all of them should be recorded.

From the above discussion it is clear that Garo Hills represents the most ancient, rather the earliest cultural heritage of Meghalaya and Assam, which is determined on the basis of the present work done in this line. Further work may change this trend for which we are eagerly waiting.

CONCLUSION :—

Mention has already been made that Meghalaya represents the oldest cultural heritage of Northeastern India. So far as the prehistory of this region is concerned the Garo Hills should be given the top priority. In the palaeolithic period of Garo Hills, altogether four different phases of cultural development have been observed on the basis of the works done to-date. These four-fold classification of the stone implements of Garo Hills have close similarity with the Early, Middle and Late Stone Age complexes of India.

Further the hand axe tradition of Garo Hills has close parallel with Padjitanian of Java, Southeast Asia.

The tropical forest of Garo Hills might have attracted the attention of the palaeolithic migrants to settle here for earning an easy livelihood. The rich and varied flora and fauna of the Garo Hills probably met the food gathering population dispersed along the river banks. All the sites of Early Palaeolithic age have been located on the Rongram and Simsang river valleys. This phase of culture is succeeded by a middle and upper flake and blade tool traditions which may indicate a hunting stage of socio-cultural developments among our early ancestors. This phase of culture in its turn was followed by still more development stages of cultural achievements represented by the microliths and neoliths.

It is interesting to note that the neolithic implements are far more profusely distributed all over the hill tops in Garo Hills, particularly in the Rongram valley region. Another noteworthy fact is that Early, Middle, Upper and Late palaeolithic tools were also found in the localities where neolithic tool types

occur in abundance. It indicates continuous habitation of the site in different stages of its developments. But it is difficult to guess whether the continuity was uninterrupted or whether the neolithic settlers occupied the sites previously occupied by the palaeolithic settlers.

It is needless to say that explorations and excavations are necessary

to uncover the history of the makers and users of these Stone Age tools and also their mode of life. Palaeoanthropological investigations in the Meghalaya have so far revealed the existence of our ancestors in this part of the land in the most ancient period of human unwritten history.



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ANTIQUITY OF THE RUINED TEMPLE AT DA-PARVITIĀ

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The Da Parvatiā village is situated at a distance of about four kilometers from the modern town of Tezpur in the Darrang district of Assam. Tezpur or Sonitpur of the Mahābhārata age abounds in archaeological ruins, some of its finest sculptural remains going back to the 7th 8th century. It is, therefore, no wonder that the Da-Parvatiā village lying in the vicinity of Tezpur should contain the earliest specimen of so far known sculptures of the state of Assam, popularly known as the Da-Parvatiā temple door-frame of the Gupta Era.

Much has been written about the antiquity and workmanship of the Gupta temple-door-frame of Da-parvatiā, but the structural significance of the brick complex there has never been rightly assessed. Dr. R. D. Banerjee, the well-known archaeologist, is of opinion that it consisted of the ruins of a brick-built temple of the late medieval period constructed over the ruins of a stone tem-

ple of the Gupta period. (1). Though much of the present brick structure at this site has been exposed after the aforesaid exploration report was published, it is not known on what evidences the learned scholar assumed the site to have contained a latter Ahom temple with a stone Gupta substructure underneath. The site definitely contains the ruins of a brick-built Gupta temple and whatever ruins are there certainly belong to a single period without any subsequent additions. However, before putting forward our materials to this effect, let us have an idea as to what remains this site contains at present.

The site is plain and is almost similar in topography to the neighbouring villages. The site, as it appears at present, displays ruins of a brick structure with a typical Gupta door frame standing over it. The building complex is oriented in the east-west direction and contains a raised square plinth or platform