

**Megalithic Builders of Odisha:
Living Megalithic Tradition among the Munda
Communities, Sundargarh District***Subodha Mendaly***Abstract**

The state of Odisha is one of the most important regions for tribal groups and we find 62 major types of ethnic communities belonging to different language families. Although numbers of scholars have widely reported on different aspects of tribal religion, beliefs, practices and a few kinds of literature give some information about the living megalithic tradition, we do not have adequate data on their distribution pattern in this region. However, the present work is based on the recent work on the living megalithic tradition of Munda communities. Up to now, many papers have been published on the Mundas but no one has reflected on the living megalithic tradition. Finally, the paper, still at its preliminary stage, gives us some information about their distribution and some other information related to the funeral rituals and megalithic tradition.

Introduction

On the Indian subcontinent, we have found evidence of two unique traditions of megalithic building; but their contexts are different from each other. The first category, found in a prehistoric context, is abundantly found in the southern part of India, in association with iron implements and black and red ware. The second category, found in the northeastern and central parts of India, shows a living form of megalithic tradition among the tribal groups, which occupy forest areas, with a strong cultural implication. The two categories clearly had no connection at all (Fürier-Haimendorf 1945, 73–86; Ramachandran 1971). The megaliths in northeastern and central India show a morphological as well as a functional variation and, due to the diversification of beliefs in present-day megalithic cultures, it is very difficult to categorize them.

However, since the very beginning of the 18th century, in the state of Odisha, many ethnographers and anthropologists have started investigations into the tribal people and published many reports. This report focuses not just on the socio-economic condition of tribal groups, but rather the research covers other aspects, that is to say, mythological beliefs, funerary customs, megalithic tradition, food habits, traditional knowledge, and their settlement pattern in different ecozones (Roy 1912; Das 1931; Das/Chatterjee 1927; Elwin 1945). Nevertheless, there are just a few research papers that concentrate on the funerary rituals and megalithic tradition, a unique cultural tradition found among the tribal groups in this part of the country. The study of the living megalithic tradition of the tribal community provides information not only on past human lifestyles to some extent, but also on other aspects. Thus knowledge of the living megalithic

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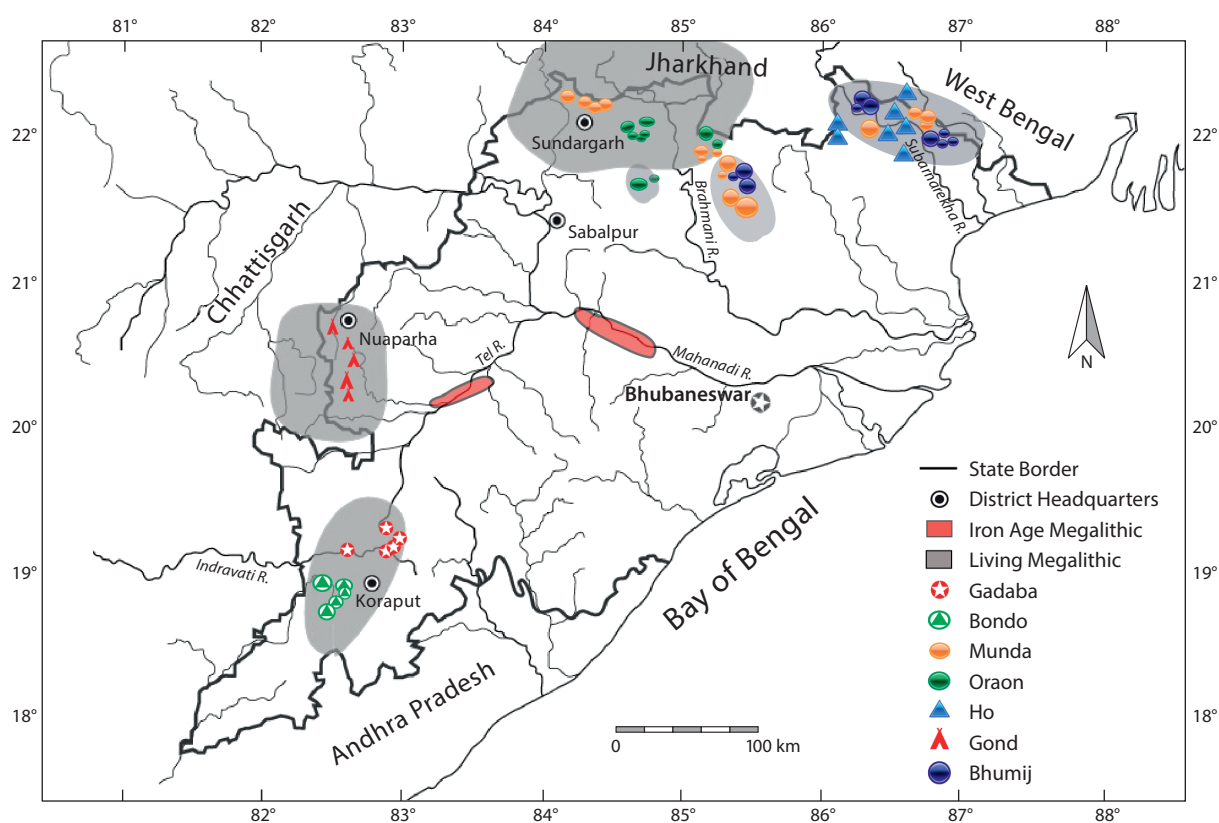
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tradition is helpful for us to unfold the history of early Iron Age communities who settled in this area thousands of years ago and started megalithic practices. It would also enable us to trace the past of those communities who follow megalithism today.

In the state of Odisha, very little evidence of megalithic sites exists and most of the research work concentrates on the typology of burials. It deals with their individual and common features and comparisons with those in other parts of the country and found elsewhere in the world and the belief systems associated with megalithism (Pradhan 1987; Behera 1995; Behera et al. 2017, 965–91; Hussain/Mendaly 2018, 625–46). Nevertheless, the research into living megalithic traditions among primitive groups in Odisha began in the pre-independence era and has continued to the present. However, the state of Odisha has revealed many surviving megalithic sites associated with tribal communities such as the Bondo, the Gadabas, the Gonds, the Ho, the Parajas, the Saoras, and the Mundas (Füerer-Haimendorf 1943; Mendaly 2015, 1–6; 2016, 1–3; 2017, 930–43; Mendaly 2019; Mendaly/Hussain 2018, 594–605; Basa 2015, 751–70; Mohanty 2015; Mohanta 2015) (Fig. 1).

Fig. 1. Distribution of living megalithic builders in Odisha.



The study area

Sundergarh District is situated in the northeastern regions of the Odisha highlands (Singh 1971, 754–75). The present district covers an area of 2,942 square miles. It is bounded by the state of Jashpur and Ranchi District in the north, Singbhum District of Bihar in the north-east, Sambalpur district in the southwest, and Keonjhar and Angul Districts of Odisha on the east and southeast respectively.

Geographically, the area is an isolated hilly tract, covered on all sides by rugged forest-clad hills, intersected by a few narrow valleys that connect it with the adjoining areas. The Bramhani River and its several tributaries, including the Sankh and Koel, constitute the

largest river system in Sundergarh District. The dense forest growth in this area provides a natural habitat for a large number of wild animal species. It also provides a suitable economic base for the indigenous peoples, that is to say, the Munda, the Hilly Bhuiya, the Kol, the Khariar, the Kisan, the Gond, and so on. Although most of the inhabitants of this region are established agriculturists, there is still a small group that depends largely on hunting and gathering in the forest area (Fig. 2).

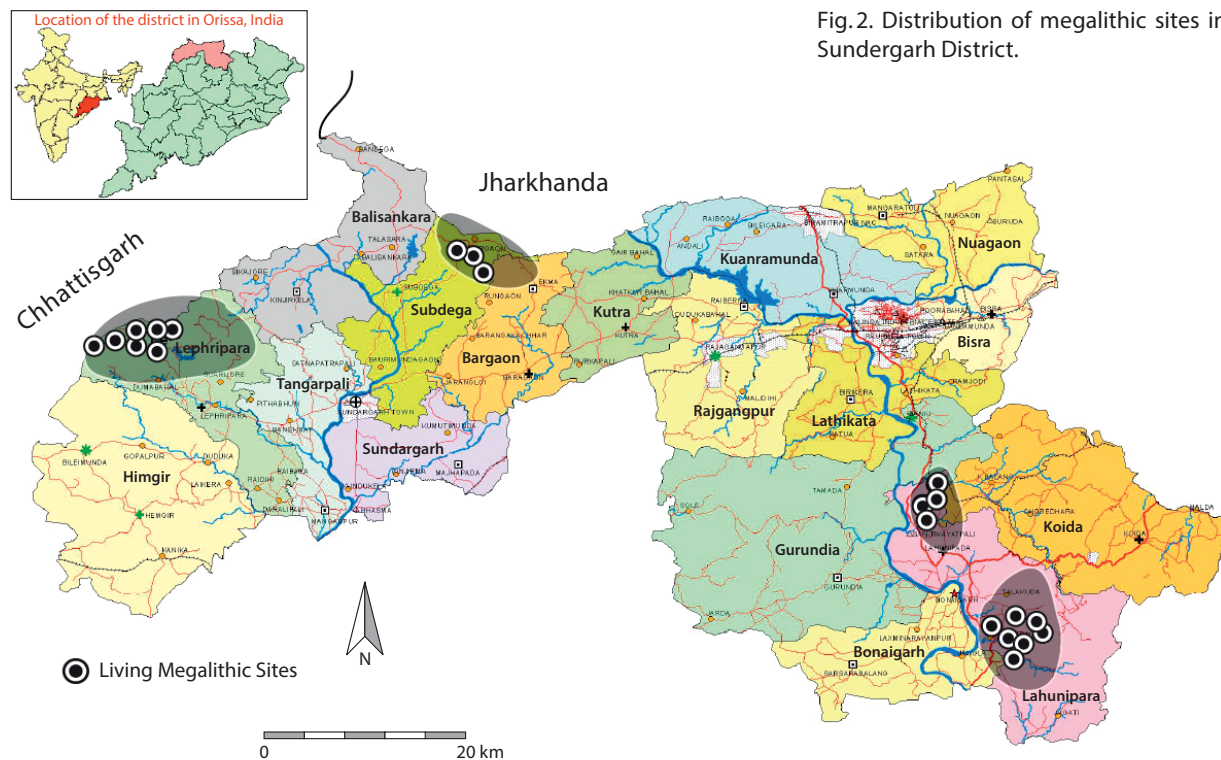


Fig.2. Distribution of megalithic sites in Sundergarh District.

During the course of my research, I have covered most parts of Sundergarh District, but I have concentrated intensively on some villages that are situated in the Bonaigarh subdivision and Lephripada Block in the Panposh subdivision of Sundergarh District because both of the areas contain the majority of the Munda population (tab. 1). While the Bonaigarh subdivision occupies the southeastern part of the district, the Lephripada Block is situated in the northwestern part of the district and the borderland of the state of Odisha-Jharkhand. Besides, in the Bonaigarh subdivision, Munda peoples settled in a plain area while in the Lephripada region they settled in the high hilly region. Also, we observed that the two distinct geographical regions of Munda peoples are responsible for their cultural changes.

Mundas of Sundergarh District

The Mundas settled more or less in all the districts of Odisha. They belong to the Austro-Asiatic language family, spoken mainly in South-east Asian countries. The Munda people call themselves *Horo-ko* (men) and the word Munda was given to them by their Hindu neighbors (Roy 1912). The concentration of Mundas in Sundergarh is the highest. They are divided into a number of groups, like Erenga Mundas, Mahali Mundas, and Mundas. The totems of Mundas are drawn from a large number of exogamous groups called *Kili* (Parkins 1992; Topno 1955). According to Munda tradition, *Kili* are descendants

from one common ancestor. Mundas are exogamous towards *Kilis* and endogamous towards other tribes (Topno 1955). Thus there can be no valid marriage between a Munda and members of other "Kolhan" tribes, such as "Santhals," "Khadias," the "Asurs," and the "Birhors." Now Santhals have developed their script "OL CHIKI" that encompasses many words, styles, and pronunciation matching the Munda clan as a whole (Roy 1912).

The Mundas are mainly divided into 24 different exogamous clans. The clans are totemistic and derive their names from natural objects, such as trees, creepers, fish, birds, snakes, animals, insects, plants, and so. The members of the clan do not eat the totemic objects. They believe that all the members of a clan are descended from a common ancestor and the clan is patrilineal (Topno 1955).

Table 1 List of surviving megalithic sites in Sundargarh District, Odisha.

Name of Site	Subdivision/ Block	District	Tribal Groups	No. of Burial Grounds	Megalith Type
Jangra	Bonai-Lahunipada	ditto	Munda, Bhumij	3	Dolmen cist, menhir (I, II)
Sulabdiha	Bonai-Lahunipada	ditto	Munda, Kisan, Bhuyan	2	Menhir, dolmen cist
Anugul	Bonai-Lahunipada	ditto	Munda, Kisan, Bhuyan, Bhumij	4	Menhir (II), cairn
Upper Ginia	Bonai-Lahunipada	ditto	Munda, Kisan, Bhuyan, Bhumij	3	Dolmen cist, menhir (I)
Barghat	Bonai-Lahunipada	ditto	Munda, Kisan, Bhuyan, Bhumij	2	Stone burials and menhir, cairn
Jaribahal	Bonai-Lahunipada	ditto	Munda, Kisan, Bhuyan, Bhumij	4	Menhir, cairn, dolmen cist (I)
Bimlagarh	Bonai-Lahunipada	ditto	Munda, Kisan, Bhuyan, Bhumij	5	Dolmen cist, menhir (II)
Sisurdihi	Bonai-Lahunipada	ditto	Munda, Kisan, Bhuyan, Bhumij	4	Dolmen cist, menhir
Fakirmunda	Bonai-Lahunipada	ditto	Munda, Kisan, Bhuyan, Bhumij	3	Dolmen cist, menhir (I)
Musabira	Bonai-Lahunipada	ditto	Munda, Kisan, Bhuyan, Bhumij	5	Dolmen cist, menhir (II)
Hatituku	Panposh-Lephripada	ditto	Munda, Oraon, Kisan, Bhumij	1	Cairn, menhir (I)
Manoharpali	Panposh-Lephripada	ditto	Munda, Oraon, Kisan, Bhumij	1	Cairn, menhir (I)
Bailama	Panposh-Lephripada	ditto	Munda, Oraon, Kisan, Bhumij	1	Cairn, menhir (I)
Laxmanpaen	Panposh-Lephripada	ditto	Munda, Oraon, Kisan, Bhumij	1	Cairn, menhir (I)
Butrakachhar	Panposh-Lephripada	ditto	Munda, Oraon, Kisan, Bhumij	1	Cairn, menhir (I)
Amatpani	Panposh-Lephripada	ditto	Munda, Oraon, Kisan, Bhumij	1	Cairn, menhir (I)
Kunjnala	Panposh-Lephripada	ditto	Munda, Oraon, Kisan, Bhumij	1	Cairn, menhir (I)

To perform the socioreligious functions of the village, a representative called a *Pahan* is selected by village people. He worships to propitiate the local spirit, to save the village from the ravages of wild animals, to ensure successful hunts, to prevent insects from hindering good harvests. As *Panchayat*, the head of the village, he also settles various village disputes and imposes punishments on those who violate their tribal customs. If the culprit is dissatisfied with the decision, he is at liberty to refer the matter to the head of the *Parha*. Generally, a *Parha* consists of eight to twelve villages. A committee or *Panchayat* manages each *Parha*. The office-bearers are known as *Raja*, *Diwan*, *Thakur*, *Lal*, *Pande*, and *Karta*. They have borrowed these titles from their Hindu neighbors. Usually, complaints are lodged before the *Raja* or *Diwan* by the *Parha* of the village. Then necessary arrangements are made to call the assembly of the *Parha*. All the members of the clan are entitled to attend the assembly. Then the *Raja* as president, explains the dispute to the assembly. After confirming all the evidence and statements from the witnesses, he declares the assembly's decision.

Settled cultivation is the primary occupation and rice, the population's staple food, is the principal crop. Agriculture is supplemented by one or more subsidiary occupations such as hunting, fishing, collecting different types of forest products, services, and several arts and crafts. Some of the population have developed proficiency in several rural arts and crafts such as mate making, bidi making, traditional drink making (rice-beer or *Kusna*), carpentry, masonry, leaf pot making, and the like. These activities bring the people additional income during their leisure time.

The funerary rituals

Funeral rites are a very common tradition found among the tribal community (Elwin 1939; Elwin 1945; Fürer-Haimendorf 1943), and also people from other castes and religions perform such kinds of rituals and practices. During the time of my research, I encountered, in many villages, several cremation grounds, known as *Smasanas* or *Masan*. These belong to many tribal communities, distinguished from each other by their varying rituals, generally performed by the son of the deceased. The tribes bury the bodies in the family ossuary. Some rich tribal families practice cremation, but their beliefs, motives, and procedures are different from one another. The Oraons put the body in a pit with the head towards the north and the face upwards. The first stage of purification takes place on the fifth day whereas the last day of purification is observed after a few months. The tribal priest arranges a libation for the departed spirit. The Bhuiyan adopt both cremation and burial to dispose of the dead. Usually, people having died of cholera, smallpox, snakebites and the like and also the dead bodies of pregnant women are buried. The Kisans, after disposing of the body, make a diminutive effigy of the deceased and worship it. On the next full moon day of *Margasira* (November-December), the effigy is thrown into a river and the final purification ceremony thus ends. Among the Khariā, the practice of burial is very common, but very important persons are generally cremated. The corpse is put in a pit in the burial ground. A utensil, a few grains of rice, oil, and some coins are deposited in the pit along with the corpse. Mourning is observed up to the twelfth day. On the final day, friends and relatives are invited and entertained with a feast after which death pollution ends.

The Mundas perform ten types of funerary rites with regional variations throughout the Chotanagpur Plateau (Roy 1912). When a Munda person dies, his family members inform their relatives as well as the village headman or *dewon*, in preparation for the funeral. The body of the deceased is dressed in a clean cloth and sometimes a new one is used. Soon afterwards, the body is anointed with turmeric and oil. Occasionally coins are put into the mouth of the deceased. Family members prepare a casket or charpoy on a bamboo mat on which the body is carried to the cremation ground. After the arrival of all relatives and family members, the male members of the village and family take the body on their shoulders to head for the cremation ground. The *matha* is generally situated 1–1.5 km from the village. Both men and women follow the body. Also, male members throw rice products over it. Under the guidance of the village priest (*dewon*), the eldest son of the deceased comes to the burial ground with all the deceased's belongings, the *tangia* or iron axe, bamboo stick, arrow, bow, and the like, to be buried with the body. The village priest selects an area for the grave, which is then filled with different types of goods previously used by the deceased. Sometimes a pile of

wood is prepared so that the body can be burnt and bone fragments collected for further rituals.

Hoyo Racham ceremony

In this ceremony, performed on one day, the tenth day, and also known as *Dasa*, people from the same lineage and tribal community of their own village and also relatives from other villages are invited. As part of the ceremony, two black chickens are sacrificed: one in front of the deceased's clan deity and another in front of the village deity, but it is not necessary for every family of the society to undertake this process as it depends on the socio-economic status of the deceased. The country liquor or *Kusna* is provided to all village members; but before taking this, they offer it to the village deity first for granting permission to organize the *Hoyo Racham* ceremony. They believe that without performing these rituals they cannot proceed to perform the next funeral rites and cannot succeed in erecting a memorial pillar or putting a stone slab over the cairn. Besides, during the *Hoyo Racham* ceremony, the village elders gather and elaborately discuss many other issues related to the secondary funeral system. Here, the rituals play a very important role because they give the elders a chance to gather and appreciate the problems, especially the economic circumstances, of the deceased's family, as well as other aspects of funerary rituals. The tribal priest or *dewon* plays a very significant role as he takes full responsibility during the funerary rituals and the Munda people believe that he is the mediator between the people and tribal deity.

Jagen festival

Before the day of the erection of the memorial pillar in the name of the deceased, the Mundas organize a *Jagen* ritual, which is a purification ceremony. All the family members and relatives of the deceased are bound to participate and purify themselves before the erection of the memorial pillar. The ritual is conducted under the supervision of the village headman. The Munda people believe that if someone does not perform this festival then the evil powers will create problems for his family. If family members of the deceased do not participate, then they are not eligible to form any matrimonial relations within their community. Every member of the village heartily participates in and supports this ceremony. The tribal priest or *dewon* supervises the entire process. First, he often calls the people together and allocates tasks to all. One group, consisting mainly of older people, gets involved by preparing a feast, while the second group, of young people, sets out for the forest area in search of a suitable rock to erect as a memorial pillar in memory of the deceased. Once the memorial pillar is chosen, the tribal priest performs a sacrifice to the forest deity on behalf of the deceased. It is a tradition for the tribal priest to seek permission to hew a suitable rock from the hill quarry sites. Sometimes the size of the memorial pillar depends on the sex, age, and social and economic status of the deceased (Mendaly 2015, 1–6). Because big stones take much more time to erect than small ones, these rituals and practices are often not finished within one day. Sometimes the overall ceremony takes two or three days and so money is required to supply food and every necessary facility to the people involved in hewing rock. The large memorial pillars indicate the standing of the deceased within the community and society.

Grave goods

The term grave goods is used by archaeologists simply to denote anything found in a grave in addition to human remains and it encompasses a variety of items, from the remains of dress to deliberate depositions of objects in graves as well as sacrificial offerings (Harke 2014). During the 18th and 19th centuries, European archaeologists involved themselves for the first time in the study of grave goods. In the later 19th century, with the development of archaeology into a scholarly discipline, grave goods provided one of the most important means of constructing a temporal framework for a past of hitherto unknown depth (Graslund 1987; Janssen 1975). They provide information about the ethnic and social inferences among the various tribes and peoples (Childe 1948, 4–13) and social hierarchies (Reinecke 1925; Veeck 1926). However, in Munda communities, grave goods are deposited during burial practices or cremation ceremonies, because the grave goods consist of personal objects to which the deceased may have been attached or because they are objects of necessity to provide for his well-being and happiness in the other world. They include bow, arrow, axe, spade, chisel, and various types of ornaments made of iron, silver, copper, and gold, and sometimes rice and rice beer. In the case of a person belonging to the upper class, the grave goods consist of very rich materials (ornaments made of precious and semiprecious stones, silver and sometimes gold), which reflect the social hierarchies within the community.

Megalithic types

Cairn

The cairn is generally a small stone collected, sometimes quarried, from the foothill areas by Mundas. It is placed after the burial, but there are some ritualistic aspects which are conducted by the tribal priest. In accordance with the Munda belief system, the body is buried in a square hole dug in the earth. The four sides of the hole are covered with wooden cladding. The body is put in this hole in a north-south direction, with the head towards the south. Afterwards, the Mundas also put three sticks from a sal tree in the deceased's stomach and one stick in the mouth and the body is covered with the wooden cladding. The relatives of the deceased then cover the grave with soil. Finally, they put a stone on the surface as identification of a grave so that any other person digging there will spot it easily and it will also be protected from wild animals. Although this stone is usually placed on the tenth day of, or during, the *Hoyo Racham* ceremony, in some cases the stone is placed on the day of death. In this ceremony, rice beer or the local wine plays a vital role, because the Mundari believe that without the partaking of rice beer the laying of the cairn is not possible. The laying of the cairn indicates the social involvement of the deceased; it also indicates the beliefs of this community in life after death. This ceremony is performed by Mundas, Sardar Mundas, Bhumji Mundas, and Tandia Mundas (Fig. 3).

However, one of the most interesting facts is that Mundas do not use any stone slabs or dolmenoid cists immediately after the death. Rather they organize a special festival or Feast of Merit where they are able to put a flat stone on top of the cairn. This simple cairn of the deceased symbolizes that he is no longer able to conduct such festivals or organize Feasts of Merit for this region and he is not able to form any matrimonial relations with others. A burial without stone slabs symbolizes the socio-economic status of the person.



Fig. 3. Munda cairn in Bonaigarh, Sundergarh District, Odisha.

Menhirs (*Biridiri*)

Menhirs or memorial pillars are a very common megalithic type, generally found across the country. The memorial serves as the seat of the departed soul and forms a link between the two worlds. The soul is pleased to see that the members of his family remember him through a memorial stone. Sometimes the memorial pillars are very big at 9–10 feet high, and sometimes the height is confined within 5–6 feet. Such a pillar looks like a square stone structure and the width of the pillars is 1–4 feet. Nevertheless, the memorial pillars found in the northeastern part of India are larger than such pillars encountered within Odisha; and such kinds of giant structure are reported from the Jharkhand state (Roy 1912; Das 2009). Also, the erection of memorial pillars is commonly found among the Munda community in the Sundergarh District of Odisha.

Fig.4. Menhirs (Type I), Bonaigarh, Sundergarh District, Odisha.



In the Munda community, the memorial pillars are broadly divided into two categories based on whether the person died inside or outside the village. In the first category, if a person suffers an unnatural death outside the village because of an accident, such as a snakebite, heavy lightning, then the community erects a memorial pillar on the roadside of the deceased's parental village. The size of the stone pillar is very small, 3–5 feet high, and it is placed vertically. The eldest son of the deceased erects it after twelve days, with the help of other clan members and the priest. The Mundas believe that their ancestors live on in the stone and protect their families from evil spirits. During our explorations, we noticed many small stone pillars placed on the roadside (Fig.4).

In the second category, if someone dies from natural causes within the village, then the memorial pillar is erected on the burial ground in memory of the deceased (Fig. 5). Beliefs behind the erection of this pillar are similar to those in the first category. Also, every year, the community organizes a ceremony with a feast for their clan and family members. If a family observes every ritual and succeeds in erecting a memorial pillar, then the person acquires some sort of special status in the society or occupies a special position within the Munda community. For the Munda people, menhirs symbolize the socio-economic status of the person, as well as the person's fidelity to his religion and customs. If we discuss the menhirs and their erection procedure in and around the Indian subcontinent and the state of Odisha, then we can easily trace regional variations or, we may say, the cultural diffusion of megalithic tradition (Mendaly 2016). The two most important causes of this cultural diffusion are: first, they do not belong to any single linguistic family, rather to different linguistic families; second, their adoptive milieu and eco-zone differ from group to group, if we consider raw material utilization procedures, which may lead to changes in their traditions.

Fig.5. Menhirs (Type II) placed in the burial ground, Bonaigarh, Odisha.



Dolmen cist

Besides the menhirs, the dolmen cist represents another category of megalith. It is a simple flat stone, which is generally rectangular or circular. The length of the stone is 4–7 feet, the width 2–4 feet and the thickness 8–12 inches. The size of the dolmen cist indicates the social status of the deceased, because cutting a big stone slab requires huge manpower and takes much more time than a small

slab. Placing a dolmen cist represents the primary form of burial system, in which the body is buried in a square hole about 3.5–4 feet deep, without any clothes and then covered with soil. Ten days after the day of salvation, the relatives select a big flat stone and put it over the burial pit. This process is not possible for every family and many of them just celebrate the day of salvation and then quarry a flat stone from the hillside and place it over the burial pit when they are able. The placing of the flat stone requires a well-organized Feast of Merit, which in turn demands the accumulation of great wealth because the deceased's family invites every member of the village and relatives from other villages to the ceremony. However, the sacrifice of a goat or hen at the feast is not compulsory for every family. It depends rather on the economic circumstances of the family. Furthermore, during the course of my research, I did not find any sacrifice of an ox, which generally prevails in the northeastern states of the country and is found among the Gadabas and Bondo (Fürer-Haimendorf 1943, 45).

Interestingly, the dolmenoid cist is more common in this region than the complete form of the dolmen that is found in southern parts of India in various types and forms (William 1976, 90–128). In most cases, the variations in megalithic structures reflect the environmental conditions that influence the development of tribal people and also the availability of suitable raw material, as was found in Sundergarh District of Odisha (Fig. 6).

Fig. 6. Dolmenoid cist from Sulabdiha village burial ground, Bonaigarh, Odisha.



Discussion

During the course of my work in Odisha-Jharkhand and Odisha-Chhattisgarh border area, I found that Munda peoples had settled in a mountainous region but they still maintain a form of megalithic tradition, although many changes have been found in funerary rituals and megalithic building. The cultural practice that the Mundas follow here continues into Jharkhand state. Their belief in life after death, megalithic types and their funerary rituals are different from those of Munda peoples that have settled in the Bonaigarh subdivision of Sundergarh District (Fig. 2). In Chhattisgarh-Jharkhand state, the Mundas follow three types of funerary rituals: *Rapa* (the Cremation Ceremony), *Umbul-ader* (Calling Back the Shadow of the Dead), *Jang-topa* (the annual Bone Burying Ceremony) (Shekhar et al. 2015); but such rituals are not practiced in the state of Odisha. Also, we have seen the changes in megalithic building like the erection of dolmens, which are not commonly found in Odisha, though we have some evidence of stone slabs. The Mundas of Jharkhand state have erected their memorial pillars on their burial grounds but when we come to Odisha we find they erect such pillars not only in burial grounds but also at roadsides depending on whether the death is natural or unnatural.

Similarly, the Gond type of megalith is different from the Munda community's. The Gond erect simple memorial pillars and we find cairns or burial stones (Mendaly 2015) but no complete form of dolmen, stone circle or big stone slabs. In the Bondo community, menhirs are erected as seating places for village deities and path stones or indicators of the territorial boundary, whereas in Gadaba and Gond communities menhirs are erected only in memory of their ancestors, or for other memorial purposes, and they believe them to be the seating places of their ancestors. Sometimes, they call a menhir an "ancestral stone." Furthermore, the Bondo and Gadabas erect stone *Sadoors*, dolmens and memorial pillars (Fürier-Haimendorf 1943), but such types of stone *Sadoor* are used as seating places, a use not found within the Munda community. Meanwhile, they organize different types of ceremonial feasts in the honor of their ancestors, and this system is quite common in all the communities found in Odisha (Fürier-Haimendorf 1943; Elwin 1945; Mendaly 2015).

The most exciting features of the megalithic tradition are the connection with the matrilineal system. The cists reveal matrilineal clan unity but the menhirs in the form of family stones, divulge much more. The latter symbolize the matrilineal kith and kin: those erected in admiration of the founding ancestress and her kin (Fürier-Haimendorf 1943). Interestingly, we have found menhirs in almost all communities from different parts of the world including India, but the thinking and beliefs behind their erection vary from group to group.

However, in the case of the Ho community, firstly the size of the memorial stone depends on the financial status of the family of the deceased as well as the seasonal timing of the death, because a bigger stone needs a greater workforce for transportation. Consequently, the economically weaker Ho prefer to place a small memorial stone. Secondly, during the rainy season, people become busy in the fields, so they cannot divert their time to searching for and transporting huge stones (Mohanta 2015). The aforementioned first reason behind the megalithic tradition is also relevant to the Mundas, but not the second.

Besides, collection and transportation of megalithic structures are parts of the tribal funerary practice. It is the best occasion for ethnographers to study the social involvement of the deceased along with his socio-economic condition within the society. During the time of

food gathering in the forests and hillsides, the members of the community select many stone quarry sites. Also, whenever they find the time, they use it to collect small stones from the nearby foothills. Traditionally, the Mundas transport huge stones using two methods: either in a wheelless cart pulled by a group of people or a bullock, or a palanquin made with four wooden poles. Rice beer is profusely used to provide the group with strength to transport this huge stone. The same process of drinking rice beer and taking rests continues at fixed intervals until the destination is reached.

Conclusion

The settlement patterns and adoptive milieux in the differing environmental conditions of Munda communities are reflected in their funerary rituals and megalithic traditions. We find the changes in geographical conditions directly responsible for the changes in funeral ceremonies and typology of megalithic structures. However, the entire funerary ritual is an expensive affair, and families of deceased spend huge amounts, which they have accumulated over the previous two to three years. Therefore not every family can afford to perform all the rituals and practices. To some extent, it is the upper-class people of the society and the heads of families that perform the most rituals, thus indicating their social status within society and the respect they command in the family. The Munda peoples try to perform every ritual eventually, although they believe that if someone refuses to practice the funeral ceremony then he/she becomes a demon in his/her next life. Apart from this, changes have also been observed in typological variation and ritualistic aspects that might be due to the influence of other, neighboring non-tribal and tribal communities.

Although the present district comes under the Austronesian sphere and Mundas form the prime group in this linguistic family, we cannot conclude anything about the origin of megalithic people and traditions, their migration and distribution in a larger part of the country. Moreover, we are far from drawing conclusions on their distribution in the countries of Southeast-Asia and the Austronesian regions. The present information includes a chapter on people in central-eastern India as well as the eastern part of the country. Further research, may provide lots of information and help us to understand megalithic culture along with the migration of Austro-Asiatic people on this subcontinent.

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