

Impact of Development on the Megalithic culture among the Bhumij tribe of Purulia

Naresh Sardar¹ & Dr. Jagdeep Oraon²

¹Ph.D. research scholar, Dept. of Anthropology and Tribal Studies, Sidho Kanho Birsha University, Purulia

²Assistant Professor, Dept. of Anthropology and Tribal Studies, Sidho Kanho Birsha University, Purulia

Email: ¹nareshsardar1992@gmail.com, ²jagdeep-oraon@skbu.ac.in

Abstract: The Indian subcontinent is home to different ethnic communities. The Bhumij tribe is the 2nd largest populated tribe after the Santhal in the Purulia district of West Bengal, India. Apart from Purulia, they are also inhabitants in the districts of Jhargram, Bankura, South and North 24 Parganas, and their adjoining areas, and are also found in the states of Jharkhand, Bihar, Assam, and Odisha. Present research tries to search for the megalithic culture among the Bhumij. It is practiced by them at the burial ground. Megalithic refers to monuments built of large stones for different purposes, like memorial pillars, village boundaries, etc., which are markers of ancestral reverence and cultural identity. Due to rapid development and modernization, there are challenges to preserving this ancient cultural heritage. Here, researchers tried to understand the impact of development on megalithic culture among the Bhumij tribe in the Balarampur block of Purulia district. Through ethnographic fieldwork, various anthropological research methods, like in-depth interviews, participant observation, schedules, genealogy, photography, etc., are employed for primary data collection. For secondary data, I used various books, journals, and websites, as well as Govt reports, etc. The research reveals the decline in traditional rituals and knowledge transmission, threatening the tribal cultural heritage. Apart from this, some community members try to revitalize and advocate for the need for inclusive development policies that respect the tribal heritage.

Keywords: Bhumij tribe, Megalithic culture, Development, Cultural Transformation, Purulia.

1. INTRODUCTION

Megalith is the ancient culture of human beings that presently reflects the Palaeolithic culture of human history. We found that the different tribal communities are still practicing the megalithic culture in the present time, all over the world. The Indian subcontinent does not differ from the world. Here we find different Tribal cultures, which are one of the unique and oldest traditions in human society, that still prevail in the form of Megalithic culture. Megalith refers to monuments built of large stones for different purposes, like memorial pillars, village boundaries, etc., which are markers of ancestral reverence and cultural identity. A universal phenomenon, megalithism has been present over the past 10,000 years in a vast number of human societies throughout the world, ranging from Atlantic and Mediterranean Europe to Korea, the Near East, South America, Africa, and Melanesia, among others. From an anthropological perspective, megaliths are at the crossroads of human diversity and commonality, inviting a reflection on the universality of human behaviours as a product and result of our common needs of adaptation and social organization.

In India, Megalithic Culture mainly belongs to the Iron Age (1500 BC–500 BC), with some exceptions, such as Chalcolithic-Megalithic sites. The first excavated Megalithic site was the site of Adichanallur in the Tirunelveli district, Tamil Nadu. The excavation of Brahmagiri in Karnataka in 1975 helped us understand the culture of early South India. Some megalithic site names in India are mentioned below:

1. Seraikela in Jharkhand.
2. Deodhoora in the Almora district of Uttarakhand.

3. Koldihwa (Belan valley), Banda, Mirzapur, Prayagraj, and Varanasi districts of Uttar Pradesh (Chalcolithic materials).
4. Thrissur and Kunnattur in Kerala.
5. Waztal, Burzahom, and Brah in Kashmir.
6. Maski, Hallur, Chandravalli, Hire Benkal, Coorg, Heggadehalli and Brahmagiri in Karnataka.
7. Nagarjunakonda in Andhra Pradesh.
8. Junapani, Khapa, Mahurjhari, and Naikund are near Nagpur and a few sites in the Pune district in Maharashtra.
9. Adichanallur, Sanur, Kodumanal, and Perumbair in Tamil Nadu

V. Gordon Childe (1892-1957) said that the term Megalith is derived from the Greek words 'Megas' meaning big, and 'lithos' meaning stone. The West Bengal Heritage Commission has declared 244 buildings, monuments, precincts, and sites as heritage till 2022 and also declared Coochbehar & Nabadwip towns as places of heritage buildings/temples/sites/precincts, etc., where 154 sites in Coochbehar and 105 sites in Nabadwip have been identified as heritage. Purulia is part of the Chotanagpur plateau, and the Bhumij is closely related to the Munda tribe, which practices a megalithic culture. The Bhumij community in Purulia still maintains a megalithic culture. They commemorate the dead through funeral rites. Although all tribal communities have a burial culture, not all belong to the megalithic culture. As Risley (1892) said, once upon a time, the Bhumij tribe derived from the Munda tribe, so the Bhumij practiced megalithic culture. According to *Sumahan Bandopadhyay* (2017), the Bhumij used to possess separate cremation grounds and places (Harshali) for the burial of bones of each clan. They use megaliths as a memory of one person after death. Megalithic monuments are raised by these three communities as funeral monuments and for many other commemorative purposes (Shekhar and Joglekar 2015; 2016; 2017a; 2017b; Shekhar 2019; 2020; 2021). The funeral custom of these communities is predominantly cremation, and cremated remains are buried under ancestral stone repositories, Dolmen or capstone burials. Menhirs are raised as memorial stones and in commemoration. Sometimes, instead of cremated remains, a symbolic effigy is buried under the stone chamber (Shekhar 2020: 7).

Bhumij is the second largest tribe after Santal in the Purulia district of West Bengal. They are not only found in Purulia but also inhabiting the districts of Bankura, Jhargram, Paschim Medinipur, North and South Parganas, Burdwan, etc., in West Bengal and the states of Jharkhand, Bihar, Odisha, and Assam, etc. There are 10,45,45,716 tribal population in India, 52,96,953 tribal population in West Bengal, and 540652 people belonging to the tribal community, which consists of 18.45% of the total population of the district as well as 10.52% of the total S.T population of West Bengal (census 2011). Bhumij population is 1,04,570, where males are 53103 and females are 51467 in Purulia. They speak the Bhumij language, which belongs to the Austro-Asiatic linguistic family (Grierson, 1898-1928). The Bhumij practice megalith culture in the burial ground. The practice of burial culture or cremation of the deceased and observance of the death rituals vary very little from place to place. At a time, even the charred bones are kept in an earthen pot and carried to the ancestral clan ossuary for burial. This time, they cut a big stone piece from the rock mountain to establish it as a monument. The impact of development on megalithic culture, often a decline or transformation, as the introduction of new technologies, social structures, and economic practices associated with advanced civilizations gradually replaced the older megalithic traditions, leading to a shift in burial practices, religious beliefs, and the construction of monumental structures, often with the megaliths being repurposed or abandoned.

Megalithic heritage stands as a testament to the ingenuity, spirituality, and cultural richness of ancient civilizations across the globe. This article explores the multifaceted efforts undertaken by tribal communities, conservation organizations, and governments to preserve and protect megalithic sites, which face threats from environmental degradation, urbanization, looting, vandalism, and neglect. Through a comprehensive examination of preservation strategies, case studies, and key findings, the article highlights the significance of megalithic heritage in shaping our understanding of human history and cultural diversity.

2. Megalithic culture of the Bhumij Tribe

There are large numbers of megaliths found all over the world, but they may be grouped into similar types. The types of megalithic structures can be divided into two categories, the "Polyolithic type" and the "Monolithic type". In the Polyolithic type, more than one stone is used to make the megalithic structure. In the Monolithic type, the structure consists of a single stone. The following are the different megalithic structures.

Polyolithic types:

Dolmen: This is a type of megalith which is made in a single-chamber tomb, usually consisting of three or more upright stones supporting a large flat horizontal capstone. Dolmens were usually covered with earth or smaller stones to form a barrow. But many cases that covered have weathered away, leaving only the stone "skeleton" of the burial mound intact.

Cairn: A cairn is a human-made pile of stones, often in conical form. They are usually found in uplands, on moorland, on mountaintops, or near waterways. In modern times, Cairns are often erected as landmarks.

Cromlekh: In British, Cromlekh, a word used to describe prehistoric megalithic structures, where crom means 'bent' and leech means 'flagstone.' The term is now virtually obsolete in archaeology.

Monolithic type:

Menhir: A menhir is a stone Monolith standing vertically. It could also exist as part of a group of stones. They have different sizes with uneven and square shapes, often tapering towards the top.

Stone circle: A stone circle is a monument of standing stones arranged in a circle, usually dated to the megalithic period. The arrangement of the stones may be in a circle, in the form of an ellipse, or, more rarely, a setting of four stones laid on an arc in a circle.

Social significance of Megalith: All over the world and for thousands of years, megaliths have been significant cultural elements, as well as sacred sites and places of power. Nowadays, megaliths act as a strong magnet for tourists; Bhumiij megalithic constructions were erected for funerary purposes and served as individual or collective burial chambers.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Subodha Mendaly (2019) observed in "*A Preliminary Observation on Living Megalithic Tradition Found among the Munda Community, Bonaigarh Subdivision, District Sundergarh, Odisha*," That Mundas performed two types of rituals, namely Hoyoracham and Jagen ceremony. The first ceremony is performed on the tenth day, it is known as "Dasa" or "HoyoRacham." In this ceremony, they invite people from the same lineage and tribal community of their village and also their relatives from other villages. Before the day of the erection of a memorial pillar in the name of the deceased, they organize the Jagen ritual, which is a purification ceremony. He found that the changes in geographical conditions are directly responsible for the changes in rites. The entire process of the death ritual is an expensive affair, but the family members of the deceased somehow adjust and spend a huge amount that they had collected in the last two to three years. Therefore, it is not possible to perform all the rituals and practices for every family. Most rich people can perform all the rituals to gain social status within society.

Himanshu Shekhar, Kantikumar Pawar, and Kim Yong Jun (2014) studied the title "*Living Megalithic Tradition Amongst the Munda Community of Jharkhand*." They construct bigger megaliths for the family, which has some sort of hierarchy in society. The size of Megaliths represents the social status of the dead person. Education and cultural interaction also influenced the Megalithic tradition of these people. Instead of carving symbols, the Mundas of Besnadih have undergone a lot of changes throughout time and have been influenced by other ethnic communities, and some new elements have been added to their burial custom; still, they have not lost their actual traditions.

Himanshu Shekhar and P.P. Joglekar observed in (2020) "*A Study of Megalithic Monuments in Murhu Block of Khunti District, Jharkhand*." Considering all the above aspects of megalithic sites discovered in the region, it can be modern megaliths erected by the Mundas. The antiquity of the sites found during the survey at present is unknown since no cultural material was found near the megaliths, and to determine it, a sort of scientific excavation is needed in the future.

Mark (2009) observed the title of "*Burial*." Throughout Mesopotamia, those who were not royalty were reburied below the family home or next to it so that the grave could be regularly maintained. The Greeks maintained that the dead must continually be remembered and respected for their souls to continue to exist in the afterlife.

Kumar (2018) discovered in "*Megalithic culture in Munda tribe of Khunti district in Jharkhand*" that the Megalithic culture found in the Munda tribe residing in Khunti district is a different identity. Here, big stones have been erected on their Sashan. Here, some of the other Megalithic culture, which are associated with their Sashan, has a stone in which the stone is lying in state, which relates to the Asur tribe. Below are some conclusions of this research article. The Sashandiri found in the Munda tribe is related to the culture of the Megalithic. Sashandiri is important from the social and religious view of the Munda tribe. The relation to economic status, property relations, and lineage of the Munda tribe also lies in Sashandiri. Being socially and religiously important, they found mutual harmony. He also said that the Bhumij tribe of Barametyala village mainly practiced arranged marriage. Their rules of marriage are endogamy. People only marry insider members. This way, they maintain their social unity and tribal purity. She also said that till now, Bhumij practice their rituals, and these unique rituals are followed by generation after generation.

Bandopadhyay (2017) explained the Bhumij Tribe in the title "*Trends of change of livelihood in two Bhumij villages of Purulia, West Bengal.*" He said that the Bhumij are mostly found in the districts of Purulia, Jhargram, Paschim Medinipur, and Bankura. (Risley, 1891) nevertheless believed that the Bhumij were a branch of Munda. There are many sub-tribe divisions in the Bhumij society. These are Tamaria, Sikharya, Barabhumia, Patkumia, and Shelo Bhumij. In the village, tutelary deities and hill Gods were worshiped by their priests. The Bhumij used to possess separate cremation grounds and places (Harshali) for the burial of bones of each clan.

Risley (1892) said that there can be no doubt that the Bhumij are closely allied to, if not identical with, the Mundas; but there is little to show that they ever had a distinct language of their own. They worship 'Sarna' or the sacred grove. In March's 1st week Bhumij community observed the 'Sharhul' festival.

Lutfi Yondri viewed "*The Post Megalithic Visualization, A short review from its material cultures found on several sites and traditional tribes.*" This study brought up extended research in certain areas that still perform megalithic cultural tradition values but lack stone resources, so in the formation of culture, the materials are dominated by another element, like wood. There are ways of knowing about material culture and its relation with archaeological data, especially in megalithic traditions in several outlying districts in Indonesia, where there are no stones in megalithic monuments, but at the place, we can find a continuity of megalithic norms.

R.K. Mohanty and S.R. Walimbe studied "*A Demographic Approach to the Vidarbha Megalithic Culture.*" this study suggests that the erection of a monument was not for everybody that the 'adult,' the most productive age group, is predominantly represented and that the occurrence of numerous individuals in a primary context in a single and pathological lesions on bones in many cases indicate traumatic, accidental or epidemic death for the persons interred.

Subodha Mendaly studied (2015) "*A Study of Living Megalithic Tradition among the Gond Tribes, District – Nuaparha, Odisha.*" Due to the lack of research in Odisha with the use of scientific methods, they do not have much information, which gives them a general idea to represent the pattern of the living megalithic tradition among the different tribal groups of people in Odisha. During the investigation, they noticed that the recent megalith erected by the Gonds had some sort of change in size up to a certain extent. There is some typological variation on this burial site as compared to ancient megalithic sites, which are found in another part of Odisha and India. They have also noticed some changes in their mortuary practice as well as their ceremonial feast, which is quite common in the Hindu caste, as well as other tribes and aboriginal groups. Mainly, they were influenced by Hindu rituals, and they adopted the same practice that is followed by Hindus in the present day.

Subodha Mendaly observed on the title, (2019) "*Megalithic Builders of Odisha; Living Megalithic. A tradition among the Munda Communities, Sundargarh District,* 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), and Japa-topa (the annual Bone Bying Ceremony) (Shekhar et al. 2015); but such rituals are not practiced in the state of Odisha. Also, we have seen the changes in megalithic buildings, 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 they come to Odisha, they found that they erect such pillars not only in burial grounds but also on roadsides, depending on whether the death is natural or unnatural.

K.R. Srinivasan studied Megalithic burials and urn-fields of South India in the light of Tamil literature and tradition. He said that memorials of non-aryan India are of more than local interest. In other parts of Asia, Africa, and Europe are megalithic structures closely similar to some of those of the Indian peninsula, and the possibility of an integral unity of

ideas and expression over a large part of the earth's surface from 2,000 to 4,000 years ago lends to the inquiry an unusual potential importance.

Dr. Vinay Kumar. When they compared the megalithic culture tradition of North-East India to that of other parts of India, they found that this tradition continues in very few pockets of north-eastern states of India and is not profusely practiced here as seen in central India. Though the concept of Megalithism has changed a lot from what was during the time of crude and rough megaliths to the present cemented cenotaphs and the pained memorial, what yet pleases is the basic core concept of the whole, which is unchanged as many political fractions are trying their best to create political advantages over the sensitive issues related with megalithism which is why these tribal communities think a must according to their tradition. Besides this, authors have observed that today's tribal groups want to develop themselves as far as possible, which is worth applauding, but not at the cost of their own separation from their culture. However, certain exceptions are there as past customs, such as Megalithism, that lack seriousness in present-day tribal group practices.

Puja Mandal, "*Surjit Sinha: Biography and Contribution of Indian Sociology*," Said that S. Sinha had done extensive fieldwork on the Bhumij tribe of Bengal and Bihar. Sinha examined the tribal-caste interactions and proposed several useful concepts like 'Tribal-Peasant continuum' and 'Bhumij-Ksatriya continuum'. He found how tribes become integrated with the regional Hindu caste system. Risley, who studied Bhumij in the 1880s, mentioned that here, the pure Dravidian race has lost their original language and now speaks Bengali. They worship Hindu gods. The Bhumij continue to worship many of their traditional gods and goddesses, such as Marangburu (the mountain god), various hill gods and goddesses, and the sacred grove.

Subhashis Das found that Megaliths are connected with death. Few of these moments served as commemoratives for special occasions or performed as boundary markers, and some were even found to function as astronomical observatories. From Koderma in the North to Simdega and both the Singhbhum districts to its South of the state, most of the districts, if not all, are indeed interspersed with a wide and remarkable array of megaliths (Das 2006).

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To explore and document the Megalithic sites of Bhumij Tribe
2. To analyse how development has influenced the megalithic culture of the Bhumij tribe
3. To assess the cultural, social, and economic impacts on

4. RESEARCH METHOD

Study Area:

This study was conducted in Balarampur community development block of Purulia district. There are 12 megalithic sites we studied, namely Burudi, Churkidi, Darberia, Deuli, Dumari, Hanspur, Harat-Saldi, Kairadi, Rugri, Sapua, Shashandi, and Ulidih.



Table 6.1, Bhumij Harshali sites of Balarampur CD Block in Purulia

	Megalithic Site	Location	Clan	Mouja and JL No	Plot No	Area (Acre)
	Bhurrudi	Vill- Bhurrudih, P.O- Shalboni, P.S- Balarampur	Ubu Shari	Burrudih 65	839	0.65
	Chutkidih	Vill- Chutkidih, P.O- Rangadih, P.S- Balarampur, 723143	Hembram	Rangadih 74	881	1.14
	Darberia	Vill- Darberia, P.O- Bara Urma, P.S- Balarampur,	Badda	Darberia 32	372	1
	Deuli	Vill- Deoli, P.O- Nekre, P.S- Balarampur, 723143	Badda	Deuli 50	74	0.75
	Dumari	Vill- Dumari, P.O- Sagma, P.S – Balarampur	Bhuiya	Dumari 29	2009	3.0
	Hanspur	Vill- Hanspur, P.O- Shalbani, P.S- Balarampur	Hembram	Hanspur 42	948	0.35
	Harat-Shaldih	Vill- Harat Saldih, P.O- Berada, P.S- Balarampur, 7231	Hembram	Harat 92	33	1
	Rugri	Vill- Rugri, P.O- Nekre, P.S- Balarampur	Ubu Shari	Gerua 54	181	0.76
	Kairadih	Vill- Kairadi, P.O-Biramdi, P.S- Balarampur	Kaira	Dhebridih 81		0.60
	Sapua	Vill- Sapua, P.O- Rangadih, P.S- Balarampur	Tesa Sandil	Sapua 57	702	0.45
	Shashandi	Vill- Shashandi, P.O- Rangadi, P.S- Balarampur,	Jaru and Ubu Sari	Shashandi 73	1483	
	Ulidi	Vill- Ulidih, P.S- Balarampur	Jaru	Ulidi 24	709	1.44
Source: Proposal for the preservation of traditional "Bhumij Harshali" or megalith in Purulia district. Memo No- 4219/BCWP, Dated 18/09/2023						

Analysis:

There are 12 megalithic sites in Balarampur C.D Block in Purulia District, West Bengal.
The total Megalithic land area is 11.14 acres (approx.).

Table: 6.2, Total megalithic areas and avg. area

Sl. No	Clan	No. of Sites	Total Areas (acres)	Avg. Area/Site
1	Hembram	3	2.49	0.83
2	Ubu Shari	3	1.41	0.705
3	Badda	2	1.75	0.875
4	Bhuiya	1	3.00	3.00
5	Kaira	1	0.60	0.60
6	Tesa Sandil	1	0.45	0.45
7	Jaru	2	1.44	1.44
Source: Field work				

The largest megalithic site is Ulidi (Jaru clan) at 3.44 acres. Hembram and Ubu Shari have the highest number of sites, but the megalithic site of Hembram is smaller than the Ubu Shari megalithic site.

Table 6.3, Clan-Wise Megalithic Sites			
Sl. No	Clan Name	No. of Sites	Site Location(s)
1	Badda	2	Vill: Darberia, P.O: Bara Urma, P.S: Balarampur Vill: Deoli, P.O: Nekre, P.S: Balarampur
2	Bhuiya	1	Vill: Dumari, P.O: Sagma, P.S: Balarampur
3	Hembram	3	Vill: Chutkidih, P.O: Rangadih, P.S: Balarampur Vill: Hanspur, P.O: Shalbani, P.S: Balarampur Vill: Harat Saldih, P.O: Berada, P.S: Balarampur
4	Jaru	2	Vill: Shashandi, P.O: Rangadi, P.S: Balarampur Vill: Ulidi, P.S: Balarampur
5	Kaira	1	Vill: Kairadi, P.O: Biramdi, P.S: Balarampur
6	Tesa Sandil	1	Vill: Sapua, P.O: Rangadih, P.S: Balarampur
7	Ubu Sari	3	Vill: Shashandi, P.O: Rangadi, P.S: Balarampur Vill: Rugri, P.O: Nekre, P.S: Balarampur Vill: Bhurrudih, P.O: Shalboni, P.S: Balarampur
	Total	13	
Source: Fieldwork data			

There are 7 clans, and 13 sites are found in Balarampur C.D Block. Hembram and Ubu Shari have three sites each. These two clans dominate in terms of geographical spread. Badda and Jaru have two sites each. Bhuiya, Kaira, and Tesa Sandil with 1 site each. 4 clans (Hembram, Jaru Ubu Shari, and Badda) account for 77% of all sites. All sites are under Balarampur C.D Block, and Shashandi has two clans' megalithic sites, one is *Jaru* and the other is *Ubu Shari*.

Table 6.4, Percentage of Total megalithic sites		
Sl.No.	Clan	% of Total sites
1	Hembram	23.1%
2	Ubu Shari	23.1%
3	Badda	15.4%
4	Jaru	15.4%
5	Bhuiya	7.7%
6	Kaira	7.7%
7	Tesa Sandil	7.7%
Source: Fieldwork data		

So nearly half (46%) of sites belong to Hembram & Ubu Sari combined.

Menhir- A Menhir is a large upright standing stone. Menhirs are found singly as monoliths or as part of a group of similar stones. Their size can vary considerably, but their shape is generally uneven and squared, often tapering towards the top.



Pic. 1- Menhir site of Rugri

Dolmen- A rectangular chamber erected above the ground and made of three or four vertical slabs (orthostats) set on end, surmounted by a capstone. In the case of closed chambers, one of the orthostats may have a circular, semi-circular, U-shaped, rectangular, or crude porthole in one of the orthostats.



Pic. 1- Shashandi

Table : Table 6.5: Number of Megalithic sites found in the Balarampur CD Blocks of Purulia				
Sl. No	Megalithic Site	No. of Megaliths Found		Total
		Menhir	Dolmen	
1.	Bhurrudi	7	104	111
2.	Chutkidih	0	83	83
3.	Darberia	3	90	93
4.	Deuli	7	94	101
5.	Dumari	6	59	65

6.	Hanspur	15	41	56
7.	Harat-Shaldi	0	94	94
8.	Rugri	10	75	85
9.	Kairadih	4	64	68
10.	Sapua	9	68	77
11.	Shashandi	12	215	227
12.	Ulidi	7	513	520
Total		80	1500	1580
Source: Fieldwork				

Rituals performed by the Bhumij tribe

Bid Diri: Bid Diri is deeply involved in the traditional megalithic culture of the indigenous Bhumij society. In Bhumij language, Bid means Bury and Diri means Stone. So buried Stone called Bid Diri. There are three types of *Bid Diri* in their culture. They namely *Shashan Diri*, *Nishan Diri*, and *Panchar Diri*.

Shashan Diri- For the death of a male in the society of the Bhumij tribe, they keep a Bow and Arrow with him, and for the death of a female, they keep a Sickel with her. When anybody died, the news of the death was given to the relatives and neighbors. When the relatives of the village arrive, a special discussion meeting is held. The work is done according to the decision of that discussion to take necessary measures in collaboration with the family of the deceased. The dead person is then taken out of the house and placed in the yard, the body is kept, and the head would be south side, turmeric oil is applied on the body, Alta is smeared on feet, a vermilion tip is given on the forehead and both ears, the forehead is adorned with sandalwood tip and a garland of rose flower and says last farewell. The deceased is taken three times around the courtyard, shouting "*Johar Johar Marang Buru Singh Bonga Kin Johar*" and then taken to the crematorium. The women of the house come up to the entrance of the village and scatter dung with brooms behind the deceased. The dead body is taken to the crematorium, where it is turned three times and laid with the head facing south. Later, arranged the Cheetahs and gave each one a piece of wood. The deceased person was lying down on a cheetah. The son of the dead person was blindfolded and set on fire with the face of the dead person, and taken away from the cheetah. Then, the rice was scattered onto the cheetah, and the blood of a black hen was splattered, and the whole cheetah was set on fire. After the burning is over, water should be brought with a Kula, and water should be given three times to the cheetah as per the rules. After that, everyone goes to bathe in the pool/pond/river together to raise the sound "*Johar Johar Marang Buru, Singh Bonga Kin Johar*." On the way to the bath, a Kul thorny or thorny stalk is left, which is slowly jumped over. After reaching the water body, the used spade, axe, hammer, etc., are removed and washed upside down. A Barber is called to the pond. Villagers and relatives are bathed in a pond after cutting their hair, beard, and nails, and the Bhayads and family members of the deceased only bathe; they do not cut their hair, beard, and nails. After bathing, the Bena grass sprinkles water. After doing these rituals, everyone comes back home from the pond with wet clothes and raises the sound, "*Johar Johar Marang Buru, sing Bonga kin johar*." Before reaching the house, the chaff is left on



Pic. 3 – Ulidih



Pic. 4 – Shashandi

the broken earthen pot or cow dung cake, and the fire of chaff and incense is left. Everyone takes the heat into their hands and puts them on their head. When they came

Home, they all bowed down at the place where the dead person was kept, with water from a wet cloth. Leaving wet cloth, wet gram, boiled pulses, semolina, etc., are eaten. The one who gives a face fire wears a piece of cloth around his neck. And he has to wear the same clothes for ten days and follow some rules.

The next day, the villagers and relatives of the family will go to the crematorium again. The bones of the three burnt parts (head, chest, legs) are collected, washed with turmeric water, and placed in a mug. The burnt bone is called '*Jang Baha*,' and the pot is called '*Jang Baha Chukha*.' After burying the '*Jang Baha Chukha*' under the *Mahul* tree, everyone returned home after bathing. Bitter rice was eaten in three days. On that day, the family members of the village, including Mama, cooked vegetarian rice and gave it to eat, accompanied by the bitterness of Neem. Once rice curry (rice and Neem leaf cooked) is served, it is not served twice. From that day on, relatives in the village can cook rice at home, but only vegetarian food. Within ten days from the date of placing the '*Jang Baha Chukha*' on the ground floor under the Mahua tree, the '*Jang Baha Chukha*' stored on the ground floor is lifted, and the Bahas are washed and bathed with turmeric water. After feeding *Pitha* (Rice Cake), *Muri* (puffed rice), and *Chira* (flattened rice) meat and rice, they are taken to the dead person's burial ground. There, Laya worships a black rooster. Make a hole and bury three stones straight on the three sides of the hole. The name of the deceased person, date of birth and death, and name of the tribe are engraved on the top, which is called (*Harshali*) cremation diri/ shashan diri. The dead were given offerings by the descendants, and the tradition of the dead person's sons performing rituals (*Harshali*). The Bhumij people offer a black cock at the time of placing megaliths.

Nishan Diri: A ritual is celebrated for ten days, called *Um Ghat*. All the relatives are present on this day. *Dhopa* (washer man), *Barber*, who cuts nails and hair of the persons, and *Panigirai* (A person who performed the rituals), who instructs how to perform the culture of *Um Ghat*, are present on that day. *Dhopa* (Washer man) cleans the dirty clothes of the dead person's house and goes home. The *Panigirai* takes all the people in the household to the pond. There, barbers cut women's nails and men's nails, and beards. The relatives of the dead are cut off and have shaken hair. Uncle and aunt cover their heads with the mud of all the *Ghatoya* (Blood relatives of the dead person), the relatives of the deceased. After that, all the people take a bath one by one and, for the last time, water the Bena grass and bow down. After that, *Panigirai* gives a white thread to the hands of all the people and recites the mantra. *Panigirai* asks if there is any fault, and the relatives respond that there is no fault. After that, the uncle and aunt first donate new clothes, and then other people donate clothes. They took off their old clothes and put on new ones. After that, light a lamp of *Shal* leaves and release it into the water in remembrance of the dead person. Takes water in two brass bowls. Fish or snails are taken in one bowl. After that, the uncle and aunt hold hands and pull them out of the water and chant *Johar Johar Marang Buru Singh Bonga Kin Johar*. They move towards the house, making noise. Before reaching the village, they all stood at the entrance of the village. There, the thread is twisted three times on the *Ashwath* tree, lamps are lit, water from a pond or river is slowly poured at the base of the tree, women bow their heads, and men hug the tree to their chests and leave for home. A plate of *Shal* leaves is placed at the gate of the house, which is stitched with three leaves. On that page, everyone stands, and young girls wash their feet. Then *Panigirai* lets all the *Ghatoya* drink the water in which there are fish or snails. Meanwhile, *Panigirai* performed worship and distributed Prasad at the place where the deceased was kept. All the *Ghatoya* bow down. *Sukh Dukhu Durang* (Song of Happiness and Sadness) played all night that day. Shraddha is performed on the next day, i.e., the eleventh day. On that day, the courtyard was covered with dung. *Panigirai* bathed and sat in worship. At the end of the puja, a stone called Nishan Diri is placed at the entrance of the house with the name of the deceased, date of birth and death, lineage, and cremation place. Then, everyone bathes with oil and soap. They worship *Haparom Bonga*, and sacrifice a black cock, and the meat is distributed by their clansmen.

Panchar Diri: In the village where the Bhumij population is majority, there is a stone erected engraved with village name, post office name, police station name, name of *Laya* (The priest of Bhumij tribe), name of *Moral* (The Chief man of the village), and population of the village, which is called Panchar Diri.

Perspective from community members and stakeholders: The Bhumij tribe has a declining awareness of their megalithic culture, although they pay homage to their ancestors on every occasion of the year. The integration of these diverse factors in our study enables an analysis of the impact of the mitigation of megalithic culture.

Impact of development on megalithic culture: Rapid development is also a problem in keeping the cultural heritage safe. Because the megalithic culture of the Bhumij Tribe is based on big stones so now due to so many reasons, they are now facing challenges in conserving their culture. A few challenges are highlighted in this article below:

1. Destruction and removal of architectural monuments: Many ancient megalithic pillars, pyres, and monuments have been destroyed or removed due to the construction of rail tracks, roads, dams, industrial projects, or power plants. Example: Many megalithic monuments have been removed during excavation or construction work in various mouzas of the Balarampur community development block of Purulia, such as Shashandih, Darberia.

2. Degradation of cultural sites due to changes in the natural environment: Deforestation, stone quarrying, and construction of new settlements have destroyed the ecological balance of megalithic sites. Example: Traditional megalithic monuments are now abandoned due to cutting down forests for development projects in the area adjacent to the Ajodhya hills, in Purulia district.

3. Disengagement from tradition among the younger generation: Due to the influence of modern education, the attraction of city-centred life, and social media, the new generation is not able to appreciate the value of megalithic heritage. Example: Many young Bhumij youth consider the “*Sasan*” or “*Bid Dir*” structures built as a memorial to their ancestors as superstition or unnecessary.

4. Extinction of local beliefs and religious practices: Megalithic monuments used to have regular religious rituals or worship, but due to development, these places are becoming uncovered or unsuitable. Example: Due to the construction of an electricity substation in a village, the local “*Pataleshwar Sasan*” site has been shifted, and annual worship is no longer held there.

5. Obstacles to archaeological research: As many important structures have been destroyed in the rush of development, researchers do not have sufficient information and samples. Example: Megalithic monuments under multiple JL numbers in the Balarampur region are now falling under the purview of administrative development projects, so excavation or research is not possible.

6. Waste of cultural tourism potential: If these megalithic sites could have been preserved, it would have helped in the development of tourism. That potential is being destroyed due to wrong development planning. Example: Some ancient Sasan sites have been identified in Jhalda and Baghmundi regions, but they have been destroyed because the tourism department did not notice them.

7. Loss of traditional knowledge and oral history: If traditional knowledge and history are not collected from local elders under the pressure of modern development, they will be lost forever. Example: Many elderly people know whose memory is under which stone or on which day worship was performed, but that history is being lost because it is not preserved in writing.

8. Impose of Different mining laws: After imposing the Mines and Minerals Act, the nearby place where they cut stone for use in megaliths is now facing problems in collecting stone due to being under the law, so they are building their memorials with bricks. Example: Many megalithic sites of the Balarampur community development block are being constructed as their memorial on bricks, such as Chutkidi, Ulidih.

6. CONCLUSION

The megalithic culture of the Bhumij tribe in Purulia, deeply engraved in their ancestral memory, spiritual worldview, and collective identity, is undergoing a rapid transformation under the forces of modern development. Infrastructure expansion, mining, deforestation, urbanization, and inflow of mainstream religious and cultural values have all contributed to the modernization of traditional practices. Sacred sites have been encroached upon or destroyed, traditional knowledge systems are being lost with each again generation, and youth are increasingly distanced from customary rituals. A recent study carried out in the Balarampur Community block has revealed the nature of the megalithic monuments. This finding is a part of the Iron Age culture. It is very difficult to place any type of burial in a specific chronological or stratigraphical frame without creating a vast database. Diverse geographical settings, availability of resource materials, and level of technology determined the nature of Iron Age monuments. All monuments are usually based on surface observation. A closer study of the menhirs, dolmens, and their associated tombs can help better understand the need for problem-oriented regional research. Their culture is so ancient; it is known that they have been practicing this culture for many generations. Megalithic culture is a separate identity of the Bhumij tribe, so if this culture disappears, it will be difficult to identify them. There is no fence or boundary wall in the megalithic sites; as a

result, constant movement of people is found. If the walls are raised, the free movement of the people and the animals outside will be protected, this cultural heritage.

REFERENCES:

1. Shekhar Himanshu ET. All (2014) "Living Megalith Tradition amongst the Munda Community of Jharkhand" *Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies in Archeology* 2(2014).
2. Shekhar Himanshu ET. All (2020), "A Study of Megalithic Monuments in Murhu Block of Khunti District, Jharkhand", *Indian Journal of Archeology*.
3. Risley H.H. (1892) vol-I "Tribes and Casts of Bengal" *Bengal Secretariat Press, Calcutta*.
4. Mark, Joshua J. (2009) "Burial." *Ancient History Encyclopedia*.
5. Kumar Jainendra (2018), "Megalithic Culture in Munda Tribe of Khunti District in Jharkhand," *International Journal of Academic Research and Development*, vol.3, page no-1381-1383.
6. Srinivasan K.R. (1946) "Megalithic burials and urn-fields of south India in the light of Tamil literature and tradition" *Ancient India*, no 2 pp. 9-16.
7. Yondri Lutfi "The post megalithic visualization, A short review from its material cultures find on several site and tradition in traditional tribe" Academia.edu. <https://www.academia.edu/4871599>
8. Mandal Puja, "SurjitSinha: Biography and Contribution of Indian Sociology," *yourarticlelibrary.com*.
9. Kanrar Priyanka, (2018) "An Ethnographic Study on Traditional Marietal Rituals and Practices amongBhumij Tribe of Bankura District West Bengal, India." *International Journal of Research in Social Science*.
10. Mohanty R.K. et all. (1993) "A Demographic Approach to the Vidarbha Megalithic Culture" *Man and Environment*, XVIII (2).
11. Mendaly Subodha (2019) "A Preliminary Observation on Living Megalith Tradition Found Among the Munda Community, Bonaigarh Subdivision, and District-Sundergarh Odisha" *Indian Journal ofArchaeology*, vol. 4, no 1.National Trust for Promotion of Knowledge.
12. Mendaly Subodha, (2015) "A Study of Living Megalithic Tradition among the Gond Tribes, District-Nuaparha, Odisha" *Ancient-Asia-Journal*.
13. Mendaly Subodha, (2019) "Megalithic Builders of Odisha; Living Megalithic. A tradition among the Munda Communities, Sundargarh District. ResearchGet.net/publication/337978288
14. Bandopadhyay Sumahan (2017) "Trends of change of livelihood in two Bhumij villages of Purulia, West Bengal." *The Indian Journal of Anthropology*, vol. 5(1). Page 87-104
15. Mohanty R.K. and Walimbe S.R. (1993)"A Demographic Approach to the Vidarbha Megalithic Culture." *Man and Environment* XVIII (2). Page 93-103
16. Kumar Vinay (2018) "Megalithic Cultural tradition amongst the Khasi and Jaintia tribes of north-east India" *The Tribal Tribune*, Vol-6 Issue-4
17. Das Subhashis (2015) "The Hargarhis of Jharkhand: A Brief Study of The Megaliths of Jharkhand" *Chitrolekha International Magazine on Art and Design*, Vol. 5, No. 1