

Archaeology of North Cachar: Recent archaeological exploration in Assam

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ABSTRACT

The paper discusses the results of recent archaeological exploration conducted in North Cachar district of Assam. It was a successful exploration in locating five stone jar localities along with the evidence of habitation deposits, dolmen and menhir. The stone jars are unique to North Cachar as these have no parallel in India except from Southeast Asia. However, the evidence of earthen pots used for mortuary practice in peninsular India is available from the Iron Age Megalithic period but those findings are limited in terms of cultural significance when compared to the stone jars of North Cachar and Southeast Asia. Excavations and explorations carried out in Southeast Asian countries on stone jars sites suggest that stone jars were built as ancestral bone repository. Moreover, the jars significantly suggest their affiliation with Austro-Asiatic people and their migration route. The present paper offers a discussion on the results of the exploration conducted in North Cachar, nature and distribution of the located stone jar sites, morphology of the jars, function of these jars, origin, ethnographic analogy and possibilities of those builders being the Mon-Khmer speaking people of Austro-Asiatic lineage. A discussion based on ethnographic analogy derived from Khasi-Jaintia mortuary practice has been offered to understand the mortuary purpose of the stone jars. The evidence on jars coming from Southeast Asian countries has also been incorporated in the discussion to corroborate with evidence retrieved during the present exploration at North Cachar. The paper explores the possibility to evaluate the jars and jar sites as archaeological evidence to examine the migration and migration route of Austro-Asiatic populace to North-east of India. The paper further explores the possibilities to relate the jars with the early use of iron in Northeast India.

Keywords: North Cachar, stone jar sites, Austro-Asiatic