

## **A REPORT OF EXPLORATION ON DIMA HASAO DISTRICT OF ASSAM UNDER ANNUAL PLAN 2015-16**

In pursuance of Govt. Order no.ARCH.57/pt/Dima Hasao/2015-16/1233, dated, the 17<sup>th</sup> February, 2016, a team of archaeological Officer and staffs of the Directorate of Archaeology, Assam have conducted extensive survey and exploration in the Dima Hasao District since 23/02/2016 to 9/03/2016. The team was guided by Shri Nabajit Deori, Technical Officer of the Directorate. The other members of the team were Sri Apurba Gogoi, Photographer, Sri Arupjyoti Deori, Forman, Md, Hussain Ali and Sri Uttam Saho, Data entry operator (CA).The District Cultural Officer of Dima Hasao district and in-charge of District Archaeology, Shri P.Jemi has extended all possible help and support to the team. Further he regularly deputed Shri P. Hmar, instructor, District Cultural Office and B. Fanglu, monument attendant with the team. Dr. Deepirekha Kouli, Director, Directorate of Archaeology, Assam has joined with the team at the latter part of the exploration and authenticated the explored sites.

After reaching at Haflong, the District head quarter of Dima Hasao, the team assembled with the District authority and the North- Cachar Hills Autonomous Council. The team discussed about the execution of the exploration with Sri Debojit Thousen, the then Hon'ble Chief Executive Member of the NC Hills Council, Haflong.

### **The Dima Hasao District.**

Dima-Hasao, earlier known as North Cachar Hills District is located at the southern part of Assam. The district lies in E- 92°25'30" to 92°42'30"latitudes and N-24°56'30" to 25°51'10" longitudes. The eastern part of the District is bounded by Manipur and Nagaland, Meghalaya and Karbi-Anglong District by west, Nagoan and Karbi-Anglong District in north and the southern part of the District bounded by Cachar. The District covers 4890 sq km. The highest peak of the District is 1932 meters, while lowest one is 85 meters.

### **Geomorphology:**

The formation of Dima Hasao consists of metamorphic rock with a fringe of Cretaceous and Tertiary deposits. In northern part of the district, the Precambrian Shillong groups of rock overlie the formations. The Tertiary formation rising over the weathered platform of Achaean comprises successively the Jayantia groups and Disang groups of Tertiary sequences and over line Borail, Surma and Tipam groups of upper Tertiary sequences. The Jayantia groups are merged with Garampani area. The Sylhet sandstone in the Garampani area is in thick interstratified shale, carbonaceous shale and thin coal seams. The overlain Shillong limestone in Garampani area is also thick and consists of thick foraminifers' limestone with minor shale and mural bands. The Disang group is restricted to a narrow strip near Halflong in the central part. The geosynclinal facies of the overland Borail groups successively includes the Laisong, Jenam and Rainj formation that are exposed in different strips in the south eastern and northern part of the district.

The Surma group overlying the large area of Dima Hasao, uncomfortably overlies the eastern part of the district from vicinity of Halflong through north east ward upto the north east boundary. The Surma Series is poor in carbonaceous matter in contrast to the coal bearing Borails below and lignite bearing Tipam below. In general topography is a confused mass rugged hill and valleys and owes its origin to the harder conglomerate of Surma and Borail series.

### **Soil:**

The soil in the northern part is sandy loam and gradually become lateritic towards the south. The upper slopes have coarse and gritty soil which shallows in depth. Middle and lower slopes have alluvial soil. The red forest soil is deep and fertile and slightly acid with PH ranging 6-7.

**Climate:**

The district can be divided into three distinct zones south to north. The southern phase of Borail range receives considerable high perception. The northern phase false in the rain shadow of the range and constantly perception is much lower. The northern part of the district around Langting is one of the driest and hottest parts of Assam. The central part has cool and equal able climate. Cyclonic disturbances and storm occur frequently in Surma valley but seldom visit Dima Hasao district. This is due to shielding effect of Borail range thunderstorm is quite frequent during summer month. Moist and fog occur in the winter months. Frost is unknown even in depression. Light to moderate wind blow from north or north east except during monsoon when the wind blow from southwest.

Indeed it was the first effort from the Directorate of Archaeology, Assam to explore hidden archaeological treasure of the hilly district of Dima Haso which resulted discovery of important archaeological destinations of the area.

The archaeological potentiality of the then North- Cachar hills district was first enlightened by J.H. Hutton and J.P Miles in 1932. They have reported about the existence of several Monolithic stone jar sites in the district which are very unique burial jars and not found anywhere in India. The team surveyed and documented the stone jar sites like Bolosan, (presently known as Nuchebanglo), Khobak, Melongpa, and Derebere( presently known as Dubunglu). Further the team discovered and documented a new stone jar site known as Lungpamlai in Gunjum area which was unknown to the outer world. The team got information of existence of two more stone jar site namely Harakilo and Chamkai which are never reported earlier.

## **Bolosan:**

Bolosan presently known as Nuchbunglow is located about 30 km in north western direction from Haflong Township. The Nuchbunglow is a Jemi Naga inhabited traditional village. Among the stone jar sites of Dima Hasao; Bolosan (Nuchebanglo) can be considered largest one. The site is located about 1.5 km south east direction from the village. Recently a motorable approach road to the site has been constructed by the villagers. Hutton and Miles had counted more than 400 stone jars there but recent counting by the team resulted total 217 numbers of monolithic jars in various shapes and sizes among which 139 are found intact, rests are partly or completely broken due to natural calamities and human vandalism. Various sizes and shapes of stone jars have been noticed at the site. Typologically the stone Jars of Nuchbunglow can be divided into 4 primary varieties.

- i) **Elongated bi-cone shape:** - This type of elongated jars has bi-cone shape. The edge is fashioned near the apex of the jar from where the cavity was curved.
- ii) **By-cone shaped jar type:** - This variety of jars has bi-cone shapes having a central edge. The mouth of the jar is broader than the base.
- iii) **Cylindrical jar type:-** This type of jars has a cylindrical body. The cavity of the jar is quite deep and extended upto lower part. the base of the jar is narrower than the cavity end.
- iv) **Convex bi-cone type jar:** - This variety of jar is convex bi-cone shaped having a bulbous body. The diameter of the jar is bigger than the height.

At Nuchbanglow site dominant jar type is type –I and type – ii. The jars are made up of locally available sandstone by using metal implements, most probably by iron chisels.

The outer body of the jars exhibits polished surface while chisels marks are present on the cavity. Some geometric and non geometric lines, design, foot print, engraving of human face, animals etc were found on the outer surface of jars. As per record Bolosan is an Archaeological Survey of India's notified site. The District Archaeology of Dima Hasao under the NC Hills Autonomous council has constructed a resting shed at the site and maintained the site at regular interval.

**Lungmailai:-** (N 25°21'21.3": E 093°01'26.7").

The exploration team of the Directorate of Archaeology, Assam has discovered a new stone jar site known as Lungmailai. The site is about 15 km in south western distance from Gunjam. The site can be approached by walking 4 km through a hilly track from Lungmailai village. The stone jars are scattered over an area of about 3 acres of land in 3 different clusters. At the site total 59 numbers of monolithic stone jars have so far been counted and documented by the team. Among the stone jars found at the site, 36 numbers are found intact, rests are partly or totally damaged. At the site the dominant jar type is globular one which is found 16 in number, others are pear shaped, bi-cone and cylindrical varieties. The height of globular variety of jars ranges in between 95 cm to 33 cm and diameter varies from 1.5 meters to 75 cm. Some jars are engraving with human face, animals and other geometric and non geometric designs. Most of the stone jars are buried up to neck at the site. Some of the jars are completely buried exposing only the top of the cavity portion.

Since the site is located at a considerable distance from the nearby village in deep hilly forest area; comparatively it is found in good state of preservation.

The site falls under the jurisdiction of Lungmailai village. The villagers are interested to preserve and protect the stone jars of Lungmaili. The site has immense scope for future study and research by proper excavation. The site can be preserved and declared as protected monuments under the concerned Acts and Rules of the Government of Assam.

**Khobak stone Jar site :-**( N-25°16'47.5", E-092°48'57.2")

Khobak stone jar site is located around 1 km in the south direction from Khobak village near to the Meghalaya border. The site is about 145 km south west from the District headquarter Halflong and connected through a motorable road. The inhabitant of Khobak is Biate tribe. The word Khobak originates from Biate word 'Phobak'. In their language Pho means shield and balk means broken or divide. Indeed the village is oldest Biate village of the area. The stone jar site of Khobak known as Lungibel. A number of 32 stone jars are seen at the site which is arranged systematically on a shallow hillock. In the centre of the concentration of the jars a broken dolmen has been noticed with crane circle. A large cylindrical type of stone jar seen on the top of the hillock which is largest of this kind so far is reported in Dima Hasao district. The height of the jar is 1.45 m, (above ground level) circumference-2.82 m and depth of the cavity of the jar is 75 cm. The prominent shapes are Globular, Cylindrical, Barrel shaped, Bi-cone, pear shaped etc. The globular jars have carvings of human and animals, floral design, geometric figures etc. A hillock located in the left flank to the site also has remains of broken stone jars.

Khobak is also a notified site of the Archaeological Survey of India. The District Archaeology of Dima Hasao has presently maintained the site. Boundary fencing, cc footpath and a resting shed has been constructed by the District Archaeology under the financial aid of NC Hills council.

**Khobak Megalithic site :-**( N-25°17'06.6", E-092°49'24.5")

The most noteworthy achievement of the team of the Directorate of Archaeology, Assam in the Dima Hasao exploration is discovery of a unique megalithic site near at Khobak village bordering to the state of Meghalaya. The megalithic site is located about 3 km north-western direction from the Lungjibel stone jar site of Khobak. The megalithic remains are spread over a ridge of hills in 3 different clusters. The shapes, sizes and construction pattern of the megaliths are most uncommon and unique in nature. The dominant variety is an uncommon dolmen. In this type; the dolmen is a solid rock, round in top, narrower towards base and standing alone without any supportive leg. Stone slabs and pebbles are sometimes seen under the dolmen stone in circular manner. The tapering portion of the stone buried in soil. The entire body bears prominent chisel marks. Local Baite community called this variety of megalith as Lung maisang means table of stone. Apart from this variety other megaliths are cylindrical monolith with round top and narrow base, rectangular Menhir slab, crane circles, round pillar shaped monolithic stone, etc. Most of the round pillars shaped monoliths is buried under the soil. Still the site is safe from encroachment and vandalism. Systematic excavation of the site would definitely bring into light about the burial deposit, construction pattern and other features of the uncommon megaliths of Khobak. Further the site can be declared as protected monument.

**Dubungling stone jar site: -** (N-25°21'25.4", E-92°56'50.6").

Dubungling stone jar site located around 45 km from Haflong town and around 2 km south from the Lanka – Haflong road. It is near to the Dubungling village. The inhabitants are Dimasa tribe. In local Dimasa language; Dubang refers to a tall grass which is used for making a musical instrument, and ling means plantation. In the report of J.P Milles and Hotton, the name of the village was

Derebore. The site is known as Derebore during British reign. The dominant variety of the jars at Darebore is globular having bulbous cavity. The largest Globular shaped jar noticed at the site with circumference of the bulbous edge is 7.27 meters and 96 cm exposed over ground level. Most of the jars get damaged due to growth of trees and root penetration inside the jars. Total 36 numbers of jars so far has been counted but most of them are broken. Adjacent to the jar site 2 number of grave slabs is noticed which having engravings of human figures, circles, rectangles etc.

The Derebare stone jar site is also an Archaeological Survey of India's notified site, but at present the District Cultural Office has been looking after the site. The office has constructed a resting shed at the site in the aid of NC Hills Council, Haflong.

**The Asalu Fort** :-(N-25°11'22.7", E-093°10'34,0")

Asalu is a small village situated around 45 km north-western direction from Haflong town. The village inhabits by Zemi Nagas. The Asalu is known as the first British Administrative centre of NC Hills. The British occupied the southern part of Dimasa Kachari kingdom in 1832 and formed a Sub Divisional head quarter at Asalu under Nagoan District for administration in 1837 . They had constructed an administrative centre in the western direction of present Asalu village which is known as Asalu Fort. The ruin of colonial architecture is still present at the village in a striking location. The rectangular house was made up of locally available schistose rock with lime stone , red sand stone and dust mortar. The building was constructed in gothic architecture. The building is 12.4 meters in length and 7 meters in width and existing height is 5.2 meters. The building lies in east-west orientation. The building has total 8 openings or doors with true arch. The northern wall has 3 openings, southern wall has 2 openings, the eastern wall has 2 and the western wall has 1 opening.



The height of the door from the existing floor level is 2.8 meters and width is 1.47 to 1.27 meters. The thickness of the wall is 65 cm. At present the building is in dilapidated condition. The roof of the building has collapsed and the walls have cracks. The structural conservation is of utmost necessity for safeguard of the historic monument. Directorate of Archaeology can take necessary steps for protection and preservation of the Asalu Fort. At present the District Archaeology of Dima Hasao is preserving the site.

Further the team has visited the ancestral place of the Zemi Naga people of Asalu which is located at the eastern hillock from the Asalu village. The team have also noticed some ancient megalithic burial in front of the Asalu Fort. The megaliths belong to dolmen variety. The dolmen slabs are semicircular, square or rectangular in shapes and stand on vertically placed stone legs.

### **Megaliths of Tungje:-**

Tungje village is one of the oldest Zemi Naga village in Dima Hasao District located about 120 km north eastern direction from Haflong town. The majority of the villagers practice traditional religious system and erecting of megalithic structure after dead is still prevalent. Considerable numbers of old megalithic structures has been noticed in and around the village which were more than hundred years old. The major megalithic type is Menhir. A few dolmens and crane circles are also noticed.

### **Prehistoric crane circle at Tungje: (N- 25°15'41.9", E-93°22'28.8")**

At the south-western corner of the village an earthen mound has been noticed by the team which is 1.7 meters in height. The villagers informed that the mound is very much unknown to them. The Tungje village is more than 300 years old. As per local account the mound is older than the village. On the flat top of the mound a crane circle has been found with a circumference of 21.8 meters, radius is 6.7 meters. About 30 – 40 cm high upright stone slabs has been

erected in the crane circle. The eastern side of the mound have an earth cutting section where stones slabs and pebbles exposed. The nature, construction pattern of the crane circle indicates it may be a prehistoric burial. Systematic excavation of the mound would enlighten the cultural deposit of the ancient megalithic burial.

**Cist burial at Tungje village :**( N-25°15'28.1", E-93°22'8.9").

At the southern direction of the Tungje village, a typical cist burial has been found at the bank of a historical Lake namely *Nreujai* which is single example of this kind so far reported in the District. The rectangular cist chamber is still intact while the covering slab is fallen. The length of the cist chamber is 1.3 meter, width is 80 cm and the depth of the chamber is 45 cm. At present lake water has percolated inside the cist chamber. The location, construction pattern and nature of the burial suggest that it may be a cist burial of prehistoric period.

The team have documented the ancient megalithic burial of Hazarichwok area. On the roadside at Hazarichwok, total 18 numbers of Menhirs so far have been counted which more than 100 years old are. The height of the Menhirs varies from 2.8 meters to 40 cm while widths vary from 73 cm to 50 cm and average thickness is 15 cm.

The erection of megalith in the memory of death has been prevalent almost in all the traditional villages of Zeme Naga. So megalithism is still living tradition among the Zeme's.

**Historic cave at Langthor:** (N-25°14'24.8", E-93°01'52.6").

On the Haflong – Lanka road, at a distance of 18 km from Haflong town, a large natural cave is found which had been used as a shelter for night stay since the time of unknown past. Indeed the road was used as foot track by the hills tribes of NC hills from the plains since prehistoric period. The cave is formed due to

the fault of rock mass of the hill. The height of the cave is 2.42 meters, breadth or mouth of the cave is 4 meters and depth is 3.6 meters. Inside the cave at least 5-10 people can easily stay. The cave has witnessed of fire activities at floor. The walls of the cave became dark due to smog. There is possibility of habitation of prehistoric man inside the cave. Systematic excavation at the cave may give clues about the prehistoric life.

### **Sources of Raw material of the stone jars:-**

The stone jars were made from the locally available sand stone of Barial formation. Rocky outcrop and sand stone blocks provide necessary raw material for making jars in various shapes and sizes. Blocks of unused stone still can be seen at the jar sites.

### **Manufacturing technology of stone jars:-**

The jars were made from sand stone block with the help of metal implements. Most probably iron chisel was used to give proper shape of the jars, as parallel chisels marks are still found on jars. The outer surfaces of the jars were polished to remove the chisel marks. The inner surface bears distinct chisel marks. Usually the cavity of jars left without polish but the jars of Dubungling inner surface were also polished.

### **Authorship of the jars:**

So far the available data and information is concerned; there is no any account of manufacture of such stone jars among the tribes of Dima Hasao nor this kind of jars so far reported anywhere in India. In the entire world only Laos and Philippines have such type parallel examples. But it can be presumed that the jars were built as repository of cremated human remains, related to mortuary practice. J.P Mills and J.H Hutton mentioned that the jars were used as ancestral bone repository. A bone was found by them inside a jar which was later

identified as human bone by Mr. Calavert. On the basis of this identification Mills and Hutton proposed that the jars were perhaps used as repository of an unknown ethnic group. In fact the Zemi Naga of present Dima Hasao District collected skeleton remains of dead from primary burial and buried in under megalithic structure. Proper study and research of the stone jars of Dima Hasao would definitely help to trace out the migratory route of mankind from South East Asia to North East India. A unique and uncommon tradition not found anywhere in India, is an archaeological asset of the state of Assam. The stone jars sites of Dima Hasao should be protected as per archaeological norms in the interest of preservation of ancient heritage of the state of Assam.

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