



**COMPARATIVE STUDY OF MEGALITHIC CULTURE OF INDIA  
WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO MEGALITHIC CULTURE OF  
NAGAS IN NAGALAND FROM ANIMISM TO CHRISTIANITY**

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**ABSTRACT**

The exercise of setting up megalithic (Monuments or memorial) was rapidly spread among the tribes of naga's and it has been passed down through orally. Understanding the past cultural history of ethnic tribes of Nagas has been an arduous task. Now these monuments also give us the knowledge of past and present since majority of the naga tribes apply megalithic practices. Megalithic culture demonstrates that religious and superstitious beliefs predominated in megalithic communities. The elaborate items connected with the burials serve as clear evidence of this. Various burial practices may reflect various socioeconomic and ethnic groupings, yet there seem to be no established regional norms about the positioning of the remains or funeral homes. Many people believe in an "afterlife" and "rebirth" because of these structures and the artefacts found in graves with the deceased. Today study is, thus an attempt to present a brief about megalithic culture and from animism to Christianity where changes come after the Christianity.

**KEY WORDS:** megalithic, animism, Christianity, equation method.

**INTRODUCTION**

Megalithic Culture of India: Megalith is a term that has been used to describe structures constructed by people from many cultures and geographical locations around the world. A huge stone that has served as the basis for a building or monument is known as a megalith. These buildings were common in the Neolithic era and continued to be used during the Chalcolithic, Bronze, and Iron Ages. Except for several Chalcolithic-Megalithic monuments, much of India's megalithic culture dates to the Iron Age (1500 BC–500 BC). A huge stone that has served as the basis for a building or monument is known as a megalith. These buildings were common in the Neolithic era and continued to be used during the Chalcolithic, Bronze, and Iron Ages. Except for several Chalcolithic-Megalithic monuments, much of India's megalithic culture dates to the Iron Age (1500 BC–500 BC).

**TYPES OF MEGALITHS IN INDIA**

The "Polyolith type" and the "Monolithic type" are two categories into which megalithic building types can be divided. The megalithic structure in the polyolith type is constructed from multiple stones. A monolithic structure is made up of just one stone.

Monolithic Type of Megaliths:

Menhir : - A Menhir is a monolithic stone structure that is upright.

- They come in a variety of sizes and irregular, square shapes that frequently taper upward.



- The Western European countries of Ireland and the United Kingdom are the most common locations for menhirs, however they may be found all throughout Europe, Africa, and Asia. And they have a prehistoric origin.

- Example: Ellarigudem, Telangana, and Several megaliths of Indian Tribes.

### **STONE CIRCLE**

- It is made up of standing stones arranged in a circle.

- The placement of the stones can take the shape of a circle, ellipse, or even as a setting of four stones placed on a circle's arc.

- Example: Stone Circle at Junapani, Madhya Pradesh.

### **MEGALITHIC SITES OF INDIA**

Adichanallur, in the Tirunelveli region of Tamil Nadu, was the first Megalithic site to be excavated. Our understanding of early South Indian culture was enhanced by the 1975 excavation of Brahmagiri in Karnataka. Following is the list of megalithic sites in India: Seraikala in Jharkhand, Deodhoora in Almora district of Uttarakhand, Koldihwa (Belan valley), Banda, Mirzapur, Prayagraj, and Varanasi districts of Uttar Pradesh (Chalcolithic materials), Junapani, Khapa, Mahurjhari, and Naikund are near Nagpur and a few sites in the Pune district in Maharashtra. Adichanallur, Sanur, Kodumanal and Perumbair in Tamil Nadu

Features of Megalithic Culture. The Megalithic culture is characterised by the use of large stone boulders in and around graves.

Megalithic culture demonstrates that religious and superstitious beliefs predominated in megalithic communities. The elaborate items connected with the burials serve as clear evidence of this. There may be social and ethnic groupings indicated by burial practices, but no regional norms for body or grave orientation have been seen so far. These buildings and the remains buried with the dead are evidence of the widely held notions of "afterlife" and "rebirth."<sup>1</sup>

These people may have only temporarily settled in one place before migrating in search of new resources when they were faced with a shortage due to the relatively transient construction of their habitation sites and homes. Horses were buried with the dead in the Vidarbha region, possibly after being sacrificed, but this may have been a local ethnic custom. Common characteristics of these burials include the presence of distinctive pots, i.e., red and black ware. Social Organisation of Megalithic Culture, only a very rough social structure of the Indian Megalithic people can be derived, and information on settlement patterns is essentially non-existent. Division of labour: It appears that the communities may have included a variety of specialised groups, including goldsmiths, smiths, warriors, farmers, and carpenters. Economy: Primitive farming, with some hunting. Proof of plough coulters and iron sickles. Archaeological finds at Kunnattur and Hallur, respectively, have revealed rice and ragi grains, two major foods. The rock paintings at Hire-Benkhal also depict hunting scenes, which support this theory.

Ethnic Affinity and Origin of Megalithic Culture It is unclear from where India's megalithic culture first emerged. Some scholars have said that the builders were Celts or Scythians, the Central Asian tribes. Others have made an effort to connect them to the Dravidians. In some



tribes of India, the construction of megaliths is still a common practice (Gonds, Gadabas, Kurumbas, Mundas, Marias, Garos, Khasis, Nagas, Karbis, etc.).

The skeletal remains found, especially from Brahmagiri, Yeleswaram, and Adichanallar, show that people were of mixed racial type.

Graves have provided evidence of animal bones, iron objects, pottery, ornaments, beads, etc. Villages were common among the Megalithic people. Megalithic people cultivated rice, wheat, ragi and domesticated animals like donkeys and buffalo. The discovery of iron objects in megalithic graves suggests an association with the Iron Age. Different types of pottery, including high-quality red and black pottery, are associated with the Megalithic culture. Some settlements have revealed pottery and Roman coins. Iron weapons, horse equipment, skeletons, and gold and silver ornaments are commonly found in these burials. Megalithic tombs, particularly in the Deccan region, have provided valuable information about the Iron Age.

### **MEGALITHIC CULTURE OF SOUTH INDIA**

Traditional terminology refers to these civilisations as "Megalithic Culture" because to the prevalence of megalithic burials in South Indian sites. The Megalithic builders seem utterly foreign when placed against the area's pre-existing cultural background. No evidence of megalithic burial practices has been found in West Asia, the conventional heartland of Chalcolithic civilisation. Consequently, this region cannot be regarded as the origin of the iron-using megalithic builders' dispersion. Iron Age sarcophagi and cist burials, on the other hand, are seen throughout the Levantine and South Arabian shores. They most likely entered Deccan India via sea. During the Harappan era and the second urbanisation in the Ganga Valley, these people did not seem to have established any major cities. The megalithic builders may have maintained horses for breeding and grazing in their isolated, nomadic tent communities. They traded these horses with the rising political centres in the middle Ganga valley. Northern power centres did not have to do much effort to cement their supremacy in this region during the following 500-600 years, considering how self-centred the Megalithic Iron Age in Deccan remained. Features of Megalithic Culture of South India the South Indian Megalithic Civilisations of the Iron Age are summarised here. Southern megalith types: Bones from previously dismembered corpses preserved in large urns. These urns are stored with other burial equipment in a pit. After the pit has been covered, it can be located using a circular stone demarcation. Cists: Stone slabs are used to build cists, and sometimes another flat stone is added on top of it. Portholes curved out on one of the slabs of the chamber wall are sometimes installed on these. A leg urn, sometimes called a sarcophagus, was a prominent feature of these megaliths since it encased the corpse prior to burial. Burial in a chamber: On rare occasions, sections of the compact lateritic floor have been excavated and used as burial chambers. Coordination of the funeral services: There are a lot of different ways that people in the area of the Megalithic Cultures disposed of their dead. The placement of megaliths on the ground to denote a grave is distinctive to each burial system. Most of the megalithic graves that include iron artefacts are located in the Deccan region of southern India. The Deccan Iron Age sites are mostly known for their black-and-red clay ceramics. Some examples of the ceramic kinds include bowls with pedestals, spouted dishes, and cremation containers. A loop is often attached to the top of a conical-shaped lid. Iron implements such as sickles, tridents, spearheads, lamps, many lamp holders, arrowheads, flat axes with crossed straps, and tripods are discovered at every megalithic site.



### **MEGALITH CULTURE OF NAGAS:**

1. Megaliths: These are large stone structures or monuments erected for various purposes, including ceremonial, funerary, or commemorative. They are often associated with prehistoric cultures.
2. Types: Common types include menhirs (upright stones), dolmens (table-like structures), and stone circles.

**Geography:** The Naga people primarily inhabit the states of Nagaland and parts of Manipur in India, as well as parts of Myanmar.

**Traditions:** They have rich traditions that include elaborate rituals, festivals, and social practices. Their traditional culture is diverse, with various tribes each having distinct customs.

### **PRACTICES**

Outside of the settlement, along the road that goes to the Fields, you may see these monuments. Ekhwiza: "Tiger status" is the direct translation. Those who have slain tigers are honoured with these stones. Outside the settlement, you may find the stones. "Headhunting status" is what it implies, Eriza. The individual whose name is associated with this stone and wood construction outside the hamlet is said to have captured the heads of their adversaries. The gates of sanctification, or Kheleli: The rectangular entry to these village gates is formed by stacking stones and building wooden poles. The main village's perimeter is guarded by this sort of gate, which acts as a sentry and provides security from adversaries during headhunting seasons. The majority of these gates may be found along the road that leads to the fields. Only two gates remain now, while the villagers' elders remember fourteen. Sumian megalithic rituals are comparable to and different from those of Chizami in some respects. There is a strong connection between the Feast of Merit and the construction of monuments. Site selection, rituals, gene, and other such matters are also integral parts of the feast, in addition to the construction of one or many stones. Married people may provide two different kinds of Feast of Merit, depending on their income.:

1. Funerary Practices: Many Naga tribes use megaliths as grave markers or memorials for important individuals. These structures are often intricately carved or decorated.
2. Cultural Significance: The megaliths serve as symbols of social status and are often associated with ancestor worship and rituals.

**Historical and Cultural Insights:** While there may not be extensive scholarly work on a unified "megalithic culture of the Nagas," megalithic traditions among the Nagas offer valuable insights into their history and social organization. **Continuity and Change:** Some Naga tribes continue to practice megalithic traditions, while others have integrated modern practices.

Understanding the megalithic culture of the Nagas involves exploring how these stone structures fit into the broader context of Naga history and cultural practices.

### **CONCLUSION/CRITICAL ANALYSIS**

There are a lot of fascinating things to learn about the construction of megaliths in India. First, it confirms the Nagas' position in the India megalithic complex; second, it shows how the Naga tribe's habits changed and declined once Christianity arrived. His arrival of



Christianity among the Naga tribes in northeastern India brought significant changes to their traditional practices and ways of life. Here's a look at some of the key changes and how practices have evolved: **Rituals and Festivals:** Many traditional Naga rituals and festivals, which were deeply rooted in animistic beliefs and practices, saw a decline with the advent of Christianity. For example, ceremonies associated with ancestor worship and spirit appeasement became less common as Christian beliefs took precedence. **Social Structure:** Traditional social structures, including practices like headhunting, which was once part of warrior culture and spiritual belief systems, were gradually abandoned. Christianity promoted values that conflicted with such practices, leading to their decline. **Education and Language:** Christian missionaries often established schools, which led to increased literacy and education among the Naga tribes. This also resulted in the promotion of the English language and the decline of some indigenous languages and traditional oral histories. **Customary Law and Governance:** The influence of Christian values also impacted traditional governance systems. The introduction of Christian principles often led to changes in customary laws and practices related to conflict resolution and community leadership. **Daily Life and Values:** Christian teachings introduced new moral and ethical frameworks that influenced daily life and personal behaviour. Practices related to traditional rituals, including dietary restrictions and ceremonial practices, often saw a decline. **Art and Culture:** While some traditional arts and crafts persisted, the focus shifted towards Christian themes in art and cultural expressions. Traditional ceremonies and dances sometimes incorporated Christian elements or were replaced by church-related activities. **Marriage and Family:** Christian teachings influenced changes in marriage practices, including the shift towards monogamy and changes in matrimonial customs that had previously been part of traditional Naga culture.

Overall, the influence of Christianity led to significant changes in the cultural and social practices of the Naga tribes, reflecting a broader pattern of how missionary activities can reshape local traditions and ways of life.

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