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## **ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXPLORATION OF NORTH EAST INDIA**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Northeast India forms a kaleidoscope of a variety of people having distinct culture, ethnicity, religion, language and physiology and can be considered as a melting pot of various ethnic cultures of different backgrounds. So, what are the root causes of this bewildering ethnic diversity? The movements of people since the prehistoric period may be considered one of the core factors, besides several other socio-cultural, genetic, physical and environmental explanations for this mosaic ethnic situation. Considering the movements of people of different cultural, linguistic, physical and geographical backgrounds, it will not be impertinent to anticipate some archaeological signatures left by the 'people' who colonized and inhabited and migrated through the region. Scanty nature of the archeological data from the region has compelled us to gather evidence from all possible scientific lines of enquiry in order to paint a vivid picture of the development of early farming societies, who must have been the ancestors of some or all of the present day indigenous ethnic groups. This evidence is gathered from the ecological, ethnographical, anthropological and genetic sciences to inspire an interpretation of the available archaeological data. The study also strives to lay a foundation for future research strategies and to set a relevant methodology suitable for the region.

**KEYWORDS:** Culture, Globalization, Green revolution, Ethnographical, Ecological.

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Before going deep into the topic of archaeological exploration, let us first understand the word archaeology. Archaeology is the study of human activity through the recovery and analysis of material culture. The archaeological record consists of artifacts, architecture, eco-facts and cultural landscapes. Archaeology is particularly important for learning about prehistoric societies, for whom there are no written records to study. So, it gives an idea about the changes that have taken place so far with respect to time. So, is there a need to study archaeology? Of course there is a need as it is the study of human culture through material objects. Through this study one can draw conclusions about the past and human culture that includes the pattern of settlement, communications, trade and beliefs.

Now, the question arises that what is archeological exploration? Is it exploration in simple terms or has deep meaning? As we know that exploration is basically exploring a place but archeological exploration means wherein the archaeologist attempt in detecting unknown sites to understand the archaeological potential of the site through various techniques through various methods.

As we know that Northeast India is one of the most diverse areas of Asia in terms of illustrating the relationship between man and environment through the ages. Even though the region is rich for research in various fields of empirical science, it has been unable to gain importance till date. "Seven Sisters"- Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura is rich in flora and fauna and have unique climatic conditions with regions having maximum rainfall or being the wettest place in the world. Due to prehistoric movement of people into this region from mainland India, China and Southeast Asia,(2003), referred to this territory as the Great Indian Corridor. Also, this place is regarded by geographers as an ideal place for early plant domestication and food production. (Vavilov, 1949; Sauer, 1952; Harris, 1973).

As a result of the interest shown by international scholars gathered in the Indo-Pacific Prehistoric Congress held in Pune on 20-23 December 1978, a resolution was adopted regarding the importance of the prehistory of Northeast India. So, after this Lord Cunningham, the founder of Indian archaeology, carried out his survey which covered almost the entire length of India but did not attempt to set foot on formidable forest (hilly terrain of Northeast India) .As a result of this the common people were not aware about their inherent past. Though some very small excavations were carried out, we have scant evidence about the so called-NEOLITHIC REVOLUTION of this region. H.C Sharma (1991) strongly commented that in terms of size, Northeast India is bigger in size than a country in Europe, like "The Great Britain". However, archaeological evidence from these enormous regions of India is still so meager that any attempt to trace the course of human history is difficult. Further he stated regarding the problem of archeological exploration, that it is difficult task in Northeast India as it falls under the Tropical Rain Forest Zone. Dr. Bloch (1906) remarks unfavorable conditions in Assam, such as its torrents of rain and wild vegetation, it is almost impossible to penetrate the exploration process.

T.C Sharma (1991) has pointed regarding the importance of archaeology of Northeast India, because this region is known to have played a great role in the domestication of a number of food producing plants essential for man, including rice.

## **II. OBJECTIVES**

- To Study the Issues associated with archeological exploration of north east India.
- To Analyze Problems and give their solution related to geography of the states.
- To discuss about the diversity of culture in different states.

## **III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This study is of analytical nature and makes use of secondary data. The required & relevant secondary data are collected from various publications of Government of India, census data and various other websites. The time series data and the relevant data have been collected for the period of pre independent and post independent.

## **IV. ARCHEOLOGICAL SURVEY OF NORTH EAST INDIA**

Seven states Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura represents the north east of India the region lies between 20<sup>0</sup> & 29<sup>0</sup> 8' north latitude & 89<sup>0</sup> 40' and 97<sup>0</sup> 22' east longitude .

● **ASSAM**

After the reorganization of states, Assam became much smaller in area covering mainly the Brahmaputra and Barak valleys. The most remarkable discovery so far made in Assam is Daojali Hading of the North Cahar hills district (Indian Archeology 1962-63). This was the first prehistoric site excavated in the Northeast India. M.C Goswami excavated this site in 1963 with the assistance of T.C Sharma. Stone tools, pottery, pestles, grinding stone, bone fragments and a piece of tortoise shell were found. Later Assam was linked to Southeast Asia by T.C Sharma based on the elaborate study of the materials (1962). Further he stated that Daojali Hading contained a single phase of cultural deposition of Neolithic period. He further remarked that DAOJALI Neolithic in particular was influenced by Eastern Asiatic Neolithic traditions. In 1990, a team of explorers dug out a small trench at the site.

This excavation yielded a different result. There were three different layers of deposition layers which were in complete contrast to the observation made by T.C Sharma. These layers were segregated on the basis of color of soil, contents and geo-archeological characteristics.

Another site, Sarutaru located in Southeastern region of Assam was discovered and excavated by the Department of Anthropology, Dibrugarh University in 1973. Rao reported the collection of many stone tools and cord-marked pottery. He claimed the site belonged to Neolithic period. Recently, ethnoarchaeological works have been done by Roy in 1977 on the study of ceramics from Neolithic to Medieval period. Similarly Medhi in 1922 made the elaborate study of ceramic tradition. She concluded that the contemporary pottery tradition of Assam owes its origin to Neolithic period, passing through a stage in medieval period and still continuing among the hand potters and wheel potters.

● **ARUNACHAL PRADESH**

Arunachal Pradesh is in the extreme Northeast of the Indian sub-continent and adjoins China and Burma. In the pre-independence period, only a few stray Neolithic finds from different parts of Arunachal Pradesh had been reported. Research was initiated by the British scholars. For instance, John Anderson reported presence of some tools for the first time in 1871. R.D Banerji found a stone axe on the bank of river Dibongin Siang district in 1933. The collection of J.P.Mills and J.H.Grace in 1933-35 is now preserved in Pitt-Rivers Museum. Sharma (1996) made a scientific analysis of materials preserved there and reviewed Dani's observations. Sharma et.al.(1997) reported on collection of Neoliths from Kamyeng District. Bopardikar (1972) of the Archaeological survey of India brought to light a discovery of Palaeoliths for the first time in Daphabum area of Lohit district (1982). Sarkar (1982) and others like Duarah(1979) also reported a few Neolithic clets from various parts of Arunachal Pradesh. A.A Ashraf, AD of Research, opened four tranches at Parsi-Parlo in 1982 by doing thorough and systematic survey of Kamala river valley. In his excavations, four layers were identified which were of great interest. Interestingly, Paleoliths in Neolithic context have been discovered at Parsi-Parlo.

● **MANIPUR**

Manipur is a crucial area as far as archaeological research is concerned. Yumjao Singh, who collected some copper objects in Imphal, discovered the first cultural relics of Manipur.(1935). He collected a series of limestone caves at Khang Khui Khullen in the Ukhrul area. He also found some bone tools which were similar to those found in Kurnool cave in Andhra Pradesh and chronologically placed these in late Pleistocene age. Later he discovered two stone age sites ,one of which is Napachik, located on right bank of Manipur river( divided into two phases- 1) Edge ground knife and 2) fully ground celts and handmade cord-marked pottery and tripod wires) and the other was Nongpok, located on the left bank of Thoubal river. The archaeological remains discovered from three locations in Nongpok are divisible into Palaeolithic, Hobinhian, and corded ware and curved paddle impressed ware cultures.

● **MIZORAM**

In Mizoram, archaeological investigation is yet to start. Only one stone axe has been found till now in this state. The state Mizoram is popularly known as songbird of India & is one of the smallest states in our country. The name Mizoram signifies the land of the lushai highlanders it is located in the southern corner of northeast India nestled mainly between Myanmar & Bangladesh but also share its boundaries with another states of Assam. The hilly region of Mizoram was previously a part of Assam but was later made a separate state. It is a diverse land with mountains and valleys as well tribal villages & urban centre's with modern culture & lifestyle unlike elsewhere in India Mizoram was the last territory to be explored and conquered by the Britishers in India in the nineteenth century the tea plantations in Cachar area of southern Assam near to foothills of Mizoram were often subjected to raids by the hill tribes. After independence, Mizoram was carved out as a separate state from Assam after decades of insurgency when the hills folk demanded for self-rule. The basic culture of Mizoram is well known for colorful attire of the womenfolk, their musical festivals & the popular CHERAW bamboo dance during the festivals

● **NAGALAND**

Nagaland appears to be potential area of prehistoric research due to its strategic geographical location but except for the British, no one has explored this. Hutton reported the first evidence of prehistoric antiquities in 1924. No survey has been conducted thereafter by anyone. In the pre-independence period, however Neolithic Celts were collected from the Nagas without any reference to sites where they originally might have occurred. These are now preserved in the Pitt-Rivers Museum of Oxford University and various other museums. These are the only source materials on prehistory of Nagaland. The mountainous state of Nagaland is located on the eastern boundary of northeast India bordering the kingdom of Myanmar and remains home to the sixteen NAGA tribes each with distinct cultures, tribal traditions & languages Nagaland hosts the popular Hornbill festival every year in December, which is one of the biggest tourism event in the Indian subcontinent The famous NAGA hills came into importance during World war II when the Japanese invaded India to over through the empire The Nagaland is also a historic town which witnessed important battles of the second world war dimapur located at the foothills is the largest town of Nagaland

● **TRIPURA**

Tripura, the south eastern most bordered state of North east India, is another potential area for archaeological research. Recently, two geologists B.C Poddar and N.R Ramesh of Geological Survey of India, made important archaeological discoveries. They found several Stone Age sites in the valleys of Hoara and Khowai rivers near Agartala. The important sites identified by them are Teliamara in Khowai valley, Sonai Bazar, Bairagibari, Sonaram and Agartala in Hoara valley. The stone age implementations they found exposed on the eroded surfaces of the river terraces locally called tillas which have been dated by C14 method to the late Pleistocene Age i.e. B.C. 35690+-3050. This has not only established the presence of Paleolithic culture but also helped set aside all doubts expressed about Paleolithic man and his cultures in the region. The Tripura assemblages contain all types of prehistoric cultures from Paleolithic to Neolithic periods. The most remarkable features of the Stone age industries is the utilization of silicified fossil wood for manufacturing tools, as in the Anyathain culture of Myanmar. The sites have also yielded microliths. Regretfully, after such a remarkable discovery, no further work has been taken up.

● **MEGHALAYA**

Prehistoric archaeological work in Meghalaya started after the establishment of the Prehistoric Archaeology branch at the Anthropology Department of Gauhati University in 1956. Several attempts were made to discover many more stone age sites and antiquities from this area. Teachers and students of prehistoric archaeology carried out investigations in the Garo Hills every year and discovered a large number of Stone Age sites. A part of this collection was reported jointly by Sharma and Sharma (1968). The Stone Age sites discovered after 1966 in the Garo Hills are mainly concentrated in the valley of Rongram, Ganol and Simsang rivers. About 19 sites-one in the East Garro hills, 17 in the West Garro hills and one in the Khasi hills district of Meghalaya-have been

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discovered so far. Several Indian scholars/archaeologist visited most of these sites. Some of them who carried out geomorphological and archaeological investigations jointly with the Department of Anthropology, Gauhati University, are K.B Cordeington of London University and H.D Sankalia, V.N Misra, R.V Joshi, R.S Pappu and S.N Rajaguru of Deccan College, Pune.

Some tools were collected from the Garo hills and belong to the Paleolithic and Mesolithic periods. Rajaguru et al (1978) conducted a survey of quaternary formations in the Garo hills jointly with the Department of Anthropology, Gauhati University with a view to foster quaternary geological background for the Stone Age culture reported earlier.

They took keen interest in the work done by the research team of the Department and made their expert knowledge available for working out chronological sequences of the prehistoric cultures of Northeast India. The Stone Age sites discovered so far in Meghalaya yielded cultural materials of different phases of this age. Earlier, the Neolithic cultural phase was considered to be the only culture of the prehistoric period. Sankalia, who visited the Garo hills in 1969-70, was convinced that some of the sites discovered there earlier had yielded Paleoliths. Another interesting and important tool tradition-the Chopper tradition-was discovered in 1978 by the present author at Nangalibra in Simsang-Nangal valley of East Garo hills district. In the same environmental situation, another lithic tradition, with the flake tools and a few microliths on chert and jasper, was found, which justified the presence of Levalloisian and Microlithic traditions. Sonowal, on the other hand, studied some of the sites discovered in the river valley of Rongram, Ganol and Didami of the West Garo hills. Her study was mainly based on typo-technology of the stone tools of Paleolithic periods. She included these materials in her Ph.D thesis titled 'Studies on the Flake and Blade Industries of the Garo hills, Meghalaya' (1987). Sharma reported another microlithic industry at the West Garo Hills.

#### **V. CONCLUSION**

Several Stone Age sites that yielded Paleolithic, Mesolithic and Neolithic cultural relics have been discovered in different parts of this region. Despite considerably research done by various scholars an acceptable cultural sequence and chronology for the prehistory of North-East India is yet to develop. Absolute chronology was not there in Stone Age culture so it is not possible to draw a picture prehistoric man and his culture in this part of India. However future researchers may be able to generate some datable materials from this spectacular region. Considering the C14 dates, the prehistoric man started living in North-East India from the late Pleistocene time. In the Pleistocene time the culture is totally different as compared to today's culture of the north-east India. Their living standards their family background & their level of expenses and consumption were been seeking heights from Pleistocene period till now.

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