

Megalithic stone jars found in Assam

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In news– The discovery of a number of megalithic stone jars in Assam's Dima Hasao district has brought to focus possible links between India's Northeast and Southeast Asia, dating back to the second millennium BC.

About Megalithic stone jars-

- The stone jars range from 1 to 3 meters (about 3.2 to 9.8 feet) tall. Some of the jars feature decorative carvings, while others are plain.
- The jars of Assam were **first sighted in 1929 by British civil servants James Philip Mills and John Henry Hutton**, who recorded their presence in six sites in Dima Hasao.
- **These discoveries were followed up only in 2014**, when a collaborative effort by researchers from the North-Eastern Hill University (NEHU) and Nagaland University under the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) (Guwahati circle) was undertaken.
- The paper, **'An archaeological survey of the Assam stone jar sites'**, has been authored by Thakuria, along with Uttam Bathari of Gauhati University and Nicholas Skopal of the Australian National University.
- They **documented three distinct jar shapes** (bulbous top with conical end; biconical; cylindrical) **on spurs, hill slopes and ridge lines.**
- At one site, Nuchubunglo, as many as 546 jars were found and **this is arguably the largest such site in the world.**
- While the jars are yet to be scientifically dated, the researchers said **links could be drawn with the stone jars found in Laos and Indonesia.**
- Dating done at the Laos site suggests that **jars were positioned at the sites as early as the late second**

millennium BC (2000 BC to 1001 BC).

- The paper stated that **in Laos, researchers had said there was a “strong association” between the stone jars and mortuary practices**, with human skeletal remains found inside and buried around the jars.
- **In Indonesia, the function of the jars remains unconfirmed**, although some scholars suggest a similar mortuary role.
- Mills and Hutton, too, had suggested that the jars were **associated with mortuary rituals.**
- They referred to the **practices of ancestral bone repository of tribes like Mikir, Sakchips, Hangkals, Kuki, Khasi** and Synteng and evidence of cremated bone fragments placed in one of the jars.
- In the 1930s, anthropologist Ursula Graham Bower described these as **“funerary urns”.**

Megalith-

- A megalith is a large stone that has been used to construct a prehistoric structure or monument, either alone or together with other stone.
- The main types of ‘megaliths’ are **menhirs (erect stones), dolmens (flat stones resting on two stone pillars)**, stone seats, stepped stone pyramids, various types of stone tombs, and sarcophagi.
- The prevalence of the ‘megalithic’ custom has been noted here from Late Neolithic to Iron Age.
- Megaliths are spread across the Indian subcontinent, though the bulk of them are found in peninsular India, concentrated in the states of **Maharashtra (mainly in Vidarbha), Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana.**