1. Introduction

Megalithic culture, it is often claimed that of all the enigmas of archaeology, it is the most intriguing. It is regarded today by some scholars as the first worldwide movement, While other as a well defined stage of civilization, while others still deny completely its existence as a identifiable meaningful culture entity. In archaeology it is defined as a tomb built with big stones in natural forms of roughly hewn or even grave marked with prodigious rude stone or pit dug in soft rocks containing remains of dead human. It is also applied to the erection of huge stones either memorial or for religious purposes. Besides, grave without any lithic assemblage but with certain other traits, especially pottery -Black and Red ware- commonly found in other types of megaliths, are also classified as megaliths.

2. Definition
According to V. Gordon Childe (1892-1957) the term ‘megalith’ is derived from two Greeks words \(megas\)=large and \(lithos\)=stone) and originally introduced by antiquaries to describe a fairly easily definable class of monuments in western and northern Europe, consisting of huge, undress stones and termed in Celtic, dolmens, cromlech, and menhir. It has subsequently been extended to cover a far more miscellaneous collection of erection and even excavation all over the old world and into the new.

3. Typology

The megaliths are, indeed, among the most widespread remains of stone both in time and space. Various types of megaliths are reported from different parts of India. These structures have been classified variously by different scholars resulting in varied typologies, V.D. Krishnaswamy proposed the first systematic classification in 1949. They are as follows:

1. Alignment:
A series of menhirs or monoliths which are arranged in lines on some definite system or raised at regular intervals.

2. Avenue:
It is a cluster of monoliths constituted by two or more alignments approximately parallel with one another. By definition it is formed by 2x2 or 3x3 menhirs or more in number.

3. Barrow:
It is a mound or tumulus made of earth. It may be (a) circular on plan, and (b)ablong or oval on plan. The first one is called round barrow, whereas the second is known as long barrow. It may or may not contain stone cist, built on or below the original ground. It may or may not be defined by a circle of stones or a ditch or both.

4. Cairns:
It is also a barrow but made of heap of stone rubble. Otherwise it may resemble any of the various types of the barrow. It may or may not contain cist and built always on the original ground. In some cases it is defined by a circle of stones.

5. Cists:
It is a box grave built of stone slabs, normally below the natural surface. It is usually consisted of a single stone of orthostate for each side and covered by a capstone on top. Sometimes it may also have a floor stone. One of the orthostate is sometimes pierced with a circular or semicircular or trapezoidal opening. When the opening is semi-circular it is cut into the top of the orthostate immediately under the cupstone. Such opening is called a port hole, and the cist with such port-hole opening is called a port hole cist.

6. Clan ossuary:
This megalithic type is a cyclopean rectangular chamber built of stone blocks open by removing one of the blocks in the front. This is erected either directly on the natural surface of the ground or on a stone platform and serves as a repository for the
uncalcined bones and ashes of the dead known as *mawbah* among the Khasis of Meghalaya.

7. Dolmen:
   It is a table stone/single slab of stone resting on some supporting stones or supported by several orthostatic boulders or slab which encloses a space or chamber beneath the table stone or capstone. It may or may not be fully or partially covered by a barrow or a cairn. A dolmen may be with or without port hole.

8. Cromlech:
   It is derived from the Welsh word *crom* =bent, and *lech* =stone. It is known as Cromlech. It is a circle of monoliths which encloses menhirs at its centre.

9. Topikal / Hatstone:
   It is a Hindi corrupt Tamil word (*Topi* a Hindi word meaning cap, and *Kal*, a Tamil word for stone). According to Babington it is also known as ‘hatstone’. It is restricted to Kerala region.

10. Hood stone:
    A dome-shaped dressed laterite stone resting with its flat surface/face directly on the ground. This type of burial is restricted to the Kerala region. It bears a resemblance to the handless hollow umbrella called the Kundan-Kudai. Babington calls it ‘umbrella stone’.

11. Menhir:
    It is the simplest of all megalithic structures. It consists of a single but huge stone called monolith, planted on the ground, as rule, at or near the burial spot. It may be miniature in size or gigantic in height, with its base fixed into the earth.

12. Rook cut caves:
    The practice of placing the dead in tombs (caves) cut out of lateritic rock in Kerala is definitely to be associated with the megalithic structures.

13. Sarcophagus:
    It is a cist often with leg. In the present context it is always of backed earthenware or Terracotta.

14. Stone circle:
    As the name signifies, it is a circle (but sometimes oval or irregular in plan) built of juxtaposed stones. It is normally but not always be adjacent to a burial ground. It is known as *Sindibor* the Bondos of Orrisa.

15. Stone seats:
    The stone seats of Assam, Manipur, and Nagaland are mere stone slabs ceremonially placed under a village tree and apart from serving a ritualistic need are useful as seats for travelers. Sometimes they overlie a pot or pit containing bones or decapitated heads
(collected during the raids) prior to their removal to clan ossuary or village chief’s or the head hunter’s residence.

4. Wheeler’s classification of megalithic structures

Wheeler also made another classification. According to him there are eight types of megalithic structures. They are listed below:

1. Delmenoids cists,
2. Slabbed cists,
3. Shallow pits burials,
4. Deep pit burials,
5. Umbrella stones and hat stone,
6. Hoodstones,
7. Multiple Hoodstones, and
8. Menhirs.

In 1994 U.S. Moorti has classified the Indian megaliths into only two broad groups. They are:

1. Sepulchral, and
2. Non-Sepulchral.

The first group includes pit, chamber, legged, and unlogged burials. The second group includes those megaliths which are commemorative or memorial in nature.

However, all typological classifications made by different scholars suffer from problems created by the complexity, diverse structures and distinctiveness of the megaliths in each region. Hence in this module, the term used by the Dept of Archaeology in India are followed and described.

In different parts of the world, there begin the customs of erecting megaliths on a large scale among different communities from the Neolithic times onwards and this continued in the bronze age and upto the prehistoric period. But in some parts of India particularly in Orissa, Manipur, Meghalaya and Nagaland, megalithic culture is still practiced by different tribal communities in the same way or in some modified forms. Among these tribal communities megalithism is a living culture.

5. Origin and affinity of the Indian megaliths

Regarding the origin and affinity of the Indian megaliths, these were explained through migration and diffusion from southwest and central Asia as there are many similarities between these two regions particularly in burial practices, ceramic, horse implements, and paintings. Migration theories are also explained through anthropometry and linguistic analyses. Some scholars have sought cultural affinities as far as Oman in the west and Japan on the east, whereas some scholars have opined that some of these traditions were perhaps developed indigenously. It is evident from the Neolithic-Chalcolithic burial customs of south India. But in northeast India, particularly in Manipur it is a living tradition as it is still practised by different tribes of this state with a common trait i.e., feast-of-merit. Structurally the megaliths of Manipur can broadly be divided into seven types:
1) Flat stones or capstones,  
2) Menhirs, alignments and avenues,  
3) Cairns (with or without circles)  
4) Stone circles,  
5) Dolmens  
6) Stones seats and  
7) Miscellaneous types.

Functionally, the Manipur megaliths are broadly classified into eight types such as  
1) Memorial stones or Commemorative stones,  
2) Stone seats/resting stones  
3) Watch tower,  
4) Graves stones,  
5) Religious stones,  
6) Witness/Judiciary stones  
7) Village foundation stones  
8) Village gates

The ethnoarchaeological study of these megalithic traditions of Manipur provides a suitable model to shed light on the socioideological aspect of the people. In order to explain the significance of the various megaliths of this area, the rude stone structures are divided into two broad groups. They are  
1) Memorial and commemoratives or Menhirs of Social status, and  
2) Funerary and ritualistic megaliths.

6. Conclusion:

The tradition of constructing or raising huge stones on different functions is termed as megalithic culture. Megaliths are found in different states of India and her adjoining countries, but mostly concentrated in south India and N.E. Indian state. Many scholars have tried to classify the Indian megaliths based on its structural types of them mention may be made of the works of V.D Krishnaswamy, R.M. Wheeler and U.S. Moorti. Regarding the origin and affinities of this culture, there are three theories. Some scholar put its origin and affinity from south west Asia, while others explained its origin and affinity both from the East and west together, while another group suggested its indigenous development. This culture continues as a living tradition in N.E. India particularly in Manipur.