

Original article

The Sacred Stones of Chhind Kalo: *Thinthini Patthar* and the Megalithic Complex in Chhattisgarh

T. T. Mukherjee¹ and S. P. Satpathy²

¹Associate Professor, Dept of English, Bhatler College, Dantan, India. Email: ttm1974@gmail.com

²Associate Professor, Dept of Humanities and Social Sciences, Siksha O Anusandhan, Bhubaneswar, India.
Email: swayamsatpathy@soa.ac.in

Abstract

This article reports the finding of a menhir adorned with intricate cupmarks at Chhind Kalo, near Ambikapur airport in Chhattisgarh, India. This menhir, known as *Thinthini Patthar* for its acoustic qualities, provides valuable insights into the historical and cultural context of the area. The study aims to highlight the cultural significance of the menhir and the associated stone complex within the broader technological framework of the Chotanagpur plateau region. It seeks to attract scholarly attention from experts in the field to encourage further research. Additionally, the study urges non-governmental organizations and government authorities to take measures for the preservation of the site.

Keywords: Thinthini Patthar, Megalith, Menhir, Castone, Cairn Burial, Stone Circle, Neolithic.



Image 8: A still from <https://www.youtube.com/shorts/hrt5FAVD4Kg>

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Introduction

A special menhir or capstone, known as *Thinthini Patthar* for its musical qualities, has been found at Chhind Kalo near Ambikapur airport in Chhattisgarh, India. It provides a unique opportunity to understand the prehistoric cultural practices of the region in the prehistoric times. From a larger perspective, R.K. Mohanty and V. Selvakumar have written that "...the megaliths of peninsular India can be tentatively dated from the end of the second millennium Be to the middle of the first millennium AD" (Mohanty and Selvakumar, 2002: 320). Considering the latest research Vahia et al opines, "There is ... a broad time evolution with the megaliths in central India dated to be between 1000 BC and 500 BC while those in the east are much later and are dated till 900 AD" (Vahia et al, 2010). However, since the megalithic periods in India vary regionally in terms of chronology, the megalith of Chhind Kalo needs to be dated through expert investigation.

Menhirs, or standing stones, are important archaeological artifacts that offer insights into the socio-cultural and ritualistic practices of ancient communities. It is to be noted that in central India, various tribes such as Gond, Mundas, and Oraons continue to practise the ancient art of megaliths (Roy: 2010).

The menhir at Chhind Kalo is especially notable for its exceptional cupules or cupmarks, which can be considered among the finest specimens in India. Its musical qualities, a rare attribute among megalithic structures, add another layer of complexity to its significance. These structures are often associated with burial practices, territorial markers, ritualistic activities, or astronomical purposes (Das, 2015). The presence of cupmarks on the menhir suggests its potential use in ceremonial or ritualistic contexts.

The initial findings presented in this article seek to attract experts in the field for further research. It is imperative to preserve the site and the menhir for future studies. Non-governmental organizations and government authorities should be involved in preservation efforts to protect this significant cultural heritage site. Future research should focus on detailed archaeological excavations, analysis of the cupmarks, and comparative studies with other megalithic sites.

Research Methodology and Challenges

The investigation of the Chhind Kalo menhir was initiated through an incidental field visit. Local inquiries were made to identify potential archaeological features in the vicinity, including additional megalithic structures, burial sites, and rock art. A significant challenge in studying the Chhind Kalo site is its disturbed condition. Over time, the original arrangement of the stones has been altered, complicating efforts to reconstruct the site's initial appearance and intended purpose. Contributing factors to the site's degradation include human activity, natural erosion, and human settlements. Despite these obstacles, meticulous observation and analysis can still yield valuable insights into the site's historical and cultural significance.

Location

The site of *Thinthini Patthar* is located in the village of Chhindkalo, near Darima in Chhattisgarh, India. This site can be reached from Ambikapur and Mainpat, Chhattisgarh, India.

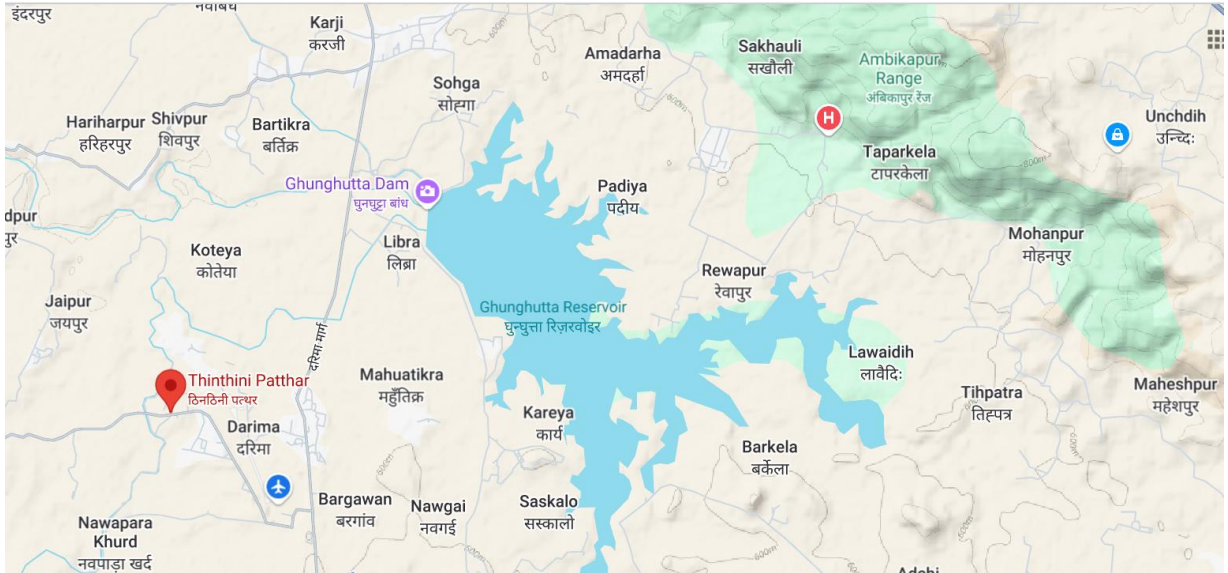


Image 2: Coordinates: (22.99907810135625, 83.18232523676647.

<https://maps.app.goo.gl/TjDMYG1RysR6hyuD8>

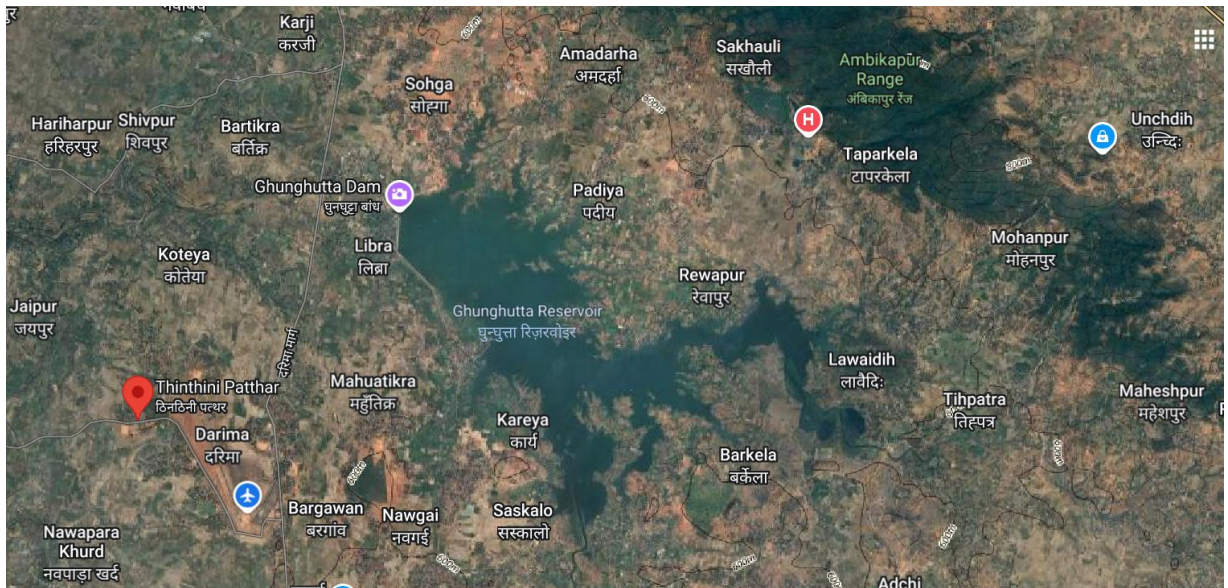


Image 3: [Google Image](#)



Image 4: A still from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P11KIzXY-Gw>



Image 5: A still from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P11KIzXY-Gw>

The Chhind Kalo Menhir: A Detailed Analysis

Physical Characteristics

The Chhind Kalo menhir, a prominent monolithic stone block composed of basalt, exhibits a unique composition with traces of metal ore, resulting in the production of metallic sounds when

struck. This acoustic phenomenon distinguishes the menhir from surrounding stones and suggests that it may have been transported from a different location. The menhir's distinct color further sets it apart from its surroundings, emphasizing its special significance in the arrangement. "This cylindrical rock roughly measures 2 meters and 35 cm in length and 95 cm in width" (Goyal: 2012). There is another similar stone block under the former with only one cupule, and it also produces a distinct sound when struck with an object. The local people reported that the blocks produce five different sounds.



Image 6: A still from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A84HBFG33aw>



Image 7: A Still from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=loWYgcOo5Qc>

Purposes

The stone is positioned horizontally atop a heap of other stones. Its exact purpose remains uncertain; it could have served as a capstone covering the mortal remains of the dead or simply been placed on top of a stone pile. However, the presence of cupules along the stone block suggests a higher likelihood of it being used as a horizontal capstone, an altar, or a piece of prehistoric art. From one perspective, it even resembles an imaginary mythical figure. The cupules may also symbolically represent an anthropomorphic figure. The local legend around it also reinforces this. Long ago, there were stories about a fairy who danced near this stone. Legend has it that when the villagers saw her, she turned into the stone. The local people's belief in the divine nature of the stone and its musical qualities are derived from this story. A psychoanalytic approach may be taken to uncover the cultural elements lying hidden in the collective unconscious. However, these speculations need to be confirmed through proper archaeological investigations.



Image 1: A still from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GSU8VWkI29k>

As for the acoustic property, it is not certain whether the sounds served any purpose—maybe, maybe not. Since the sounds are not loud enough to cross longer distances, they are unlikely to serve any practical purpose. However, it might have served some ritualistic purpose.

The most striking feature of the menhir is the presence of cupmarks. These concave circular incisions were not formed naturally but were deliberately created by human hands along various sides of the stone block. The cupules should not be considered in isolation; they form a series, adding layers of meaning to the act of incision and elevating it to the level of art. Cupules are regarded as prehistoric art due to their embedded artistic properties within the depressions. However, the exact imaginative processes of the prehistoric people remain a mystery.

The Acoustics

Two stones—the capstone and another slab underneath, possess metallic sound properties and produce five different sounds when a rock piece strikes the cupules. It is not certain whether these sounds follow musical notes.



Image 10: A still from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p4lx-LHCfVI>



Image 9: A still from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3igCTB2TcYY>

The Stone Circle and the Cairn

The site comprises a substantial accumulation of stones, displaying a diverse range of shapes and sizes, thereby creating an enigmatic landscape that defies our senses. The arrangement of some stones in semi-circular positions on the ground implies that the site was possibly constructed as a large stone circle. This configuration is characteristic of the Neolithic era in the region, a period during which such structures were frequently constructed for ceremonial and astronomical uses. Similar structures are to be found in Hazaribagh, Jharkhand in the larger techno-complex of the Chotanagpur plateau region (Das, 2016).

The ceremonial significance of the site likely pertains to burial customs and ancestor veneration, which were prevalent in Neolithic societies and continued thereafter. These customs frequently

involved intricate rituals and the erection of significant monuments to commemorate the deceased and establish a connection with ancestral spirits. The spatial arrangement of the stones in a semi-circular formation may have functioned as a sacred area for these ceremonies and served as a cultural site for communal gatherings and rituals.

Furthermore, the presence of nearby hills adds another dimension to the site's intended purpose. These natural features could have been utilized as reference points for astronomical observations. The alignment of the stones might have been intentionally devised to delineate significant celestial occurrences, such as the equinoxes and solstices. This suggests that the site could have functioned as an astronomical megalith, aiding the Neolithic populace in monitoring seasonal changes and planning agricultural activities accordingly. We know about several such astronomical megalithic structures in Europe, particularly Great Britain and Ireland. Srikumar Menon has written:

There exist another class of megaliths, which again merge space and time in a more direct manner. Some of these at least have long been suspected of being astronomical observatories. These objects spread over space are constructed to keep track of time! These are the most curious of objects in that they connect concrete experiences of movement of time and space, its periodicity and its relation to nature and environment. Megaliths for time keeping are the earliest clocks that work on the time scale of months and keep a track of the movement of Sun and Moon in order to keep track of seasons. (Menon and Vahia, 2011)



Image 11: Image courtesy: Subhashis Das

But the Chotanagpur region had several such structures and they have been well-documented by Subhashis Das (Das, 2015). Consider the following image of the megalithic complex of Punkri Burwadih from Hazaribagh by Das:

Das provided the following interpretation behind its astronomical significance:

The megalithic complex of Punkri Burwadih seems to be an observatory of the transits of the sun to function as a calendar for the communities of the region. The stones here are positioned both with perfect alignment to the notches and peaks of the mountain range that encircle the megalithic complex and in the mode of 1: 2: 4 ratios. The site also consists

of two Holed Stones similar to that of England's. The complex houses a Stone Circle with a phallic stone in its centre. The circle may hold the burial. (Das, 2015)

The site of Chind Kalo similarly might have been aligned with the hills on the eastern side. Human settlements and structures now, however, do not allow any such view of the hills from the site.

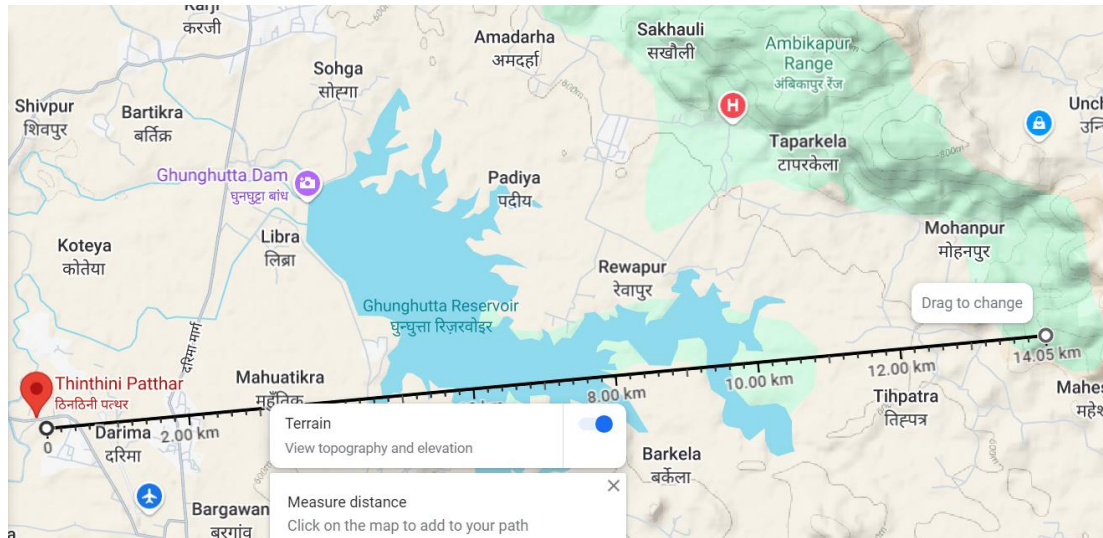


Image 12: Approximate distance from the hills

The stones accumulated at the center might have formed a burial cairn. Cairns, which are human-made piles of stones, are found in large numbers across Europe, the Near East, and the Middle East (Scarre, 2002). However, they are also present in several parts of the region, particularly among tribal populations who continue to practice ancestor worship and erect menhirs in honor of the dead. Devi and Bhoi (2017) have written a well-documented article on this subject, highlighting the cultural significance of these practices. It is important to note, however, that the tradition of building cairns at sites like Chhind Kalo is not necessarily associated with present-day practices among the tribals. If this were the case, the sacred site of Chhind Kalo would still be in active use. Instead, the presence of these cairns likely reflects ancient cultural practices that have since evolved or been abandoned.

Potential Interpretations of the Cupmarks

Robert Bednarik conducted extensive research on cupules and highlighted their complex and varied nature. He argued that despite their simplicity, cupules are scientifically and culturally intricate phenomena. Bednarik emphasized that interpretations of cupules must take into account their technological production, taphonomic effects, and cultural context (Bednarik, 2012). This suggests that the cup marks on the Chhind Kalo menhir could have served multiple purposes and that their meaning may have evolved over time:

- **Calendrical Markers:** The cupmarks may have served as a celestial calendar, with certain marks corresponding to specific astronomical events such as solstices or equinoxes. This interpretation is supported by the presence of similar markings on other megalithic structures around the world (Horn, 2015).

- **Ritualistic Symbols:** The cupmarks could represent symbolic motifs associated with religious or spiritual beliefs. They may have been used in rituals or ceremonies to invoke supernatural forces or communicate with the divine (Dubey-Pathak & Clottes, 2019).
- **Ownership Indicators:** The cupmarks might have been used to mark the territory or ownership of a particular group or individual. This interpretation is more common in later historical periods, but it cannot be entirely ruled out for the Chhind Kalo menhir (Nisbet, 2019).

Further research, including detailed analysis of the cupmarks' orientation, depth, and relationship to other features on the menhir, is needed to understand their significance fully.



Image 13: A still from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=loWYgcOo5Qc>



Image 14: A still from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P11KlZXY-Gw>

Neolithic Cosmology and Imagination

The first author of the article wrote while analysing the archaeology of gender:

A new phase, Early Farming followed away from the hunting/gathering state and human groups settled in open spaces on relatively high ground resembling the outer womb, a kind of elevated space, sometimes created by human labour. In the Hindu religion this kind of place, Kurmaprishtho was considered divine. The elevated ground, a feature to be found throughout the world during the phase of Early Farming, must have had some practical purposes, but there must have been some symbolic functions as well. Here we can make some conjectures: the womb-like shape of their settlement places could point to the feminine principle operating in nature in the form of regenerative and reproductive power from a deity whose image was immediately available to them in nature in anthropomorphic forms like a hill resembling the shape of a pregnant woman or the image of two hills together resembling the shape of human breasts. But these immediately available forms had greater symbolic meanings. The journey out of the cave led the humans to an understanding of the presence of a feminine principle or a deity out in nature on earth. The concept is finely preserved in the idea of *Dharitri* as the Mother Goddess. (Mukherjee, 2021)

In the same article, while commenting on the arrival of the phallus, it is explained:

At the height of the Neolithic Revolution in Ireland, England and Scotland we find the rise of stone circles. The circle itself must have been drawn from the vulva, but the underlying vulvic base design was imposed and suppressed with something else that would orient the eyes not to the base but to something beyond the ground, to the horizons and the sky. The phallic presence of the stone or menhirs represented a shift in favour of the sky god (Frazer, 1926, p.33), a shift to be noticed in the replacement of the supremacy of the moon with the sun because of agricultural productivity. (Mukherjee, 2021)

During the Neolithic era, the adoption of agriculture and settled life led to a significant shift in cosmological beliefs that were deeply intertwined with the natural world. The fixity of the place would make them more attached to the landscape they were living in. The success of harvests and the overall well-being of communities were greatly influenced by their understanding of the cosmos. This transition necessitated a deeper understanding and reverence for natural cycles and celestial phenomena (Bellwood, 2005).

In Neolithic cosmology, the sun held a central role and was often personified as a male deity associated with fertility, growth, and the seasonal cycle, all of which were essential for agricultural productivity. Male deities were often attributed with characteristics such as masculinity, authority, and control, and were perceived as overseers of the cosmos, responsible for ensuring its harmonious functioning (Gimbutas, 1991).

Conversely, the earth was commonly depicted as a nurturing mother, symbolizing fertility, abundance, and the source of life. This maternal figure embodied the generative and sustaining aspects of nature, supplying the resources necessary for human survival (Eliade. 1960). The dualistic view of the cosmos, with male deities presiding over celestial forces and the earth

depicted as a maternal provider, heavily influenced the beliefs, rituals, and social structures of Neolithic societies.

The stone circles also were believed to act as a gateway or a link to another world after death: they are “universally viewed as connections to the heavens, to ancestors, to the gods themselves”. (Varner, 2004) In other words, the stone circle with the passage tomb would first connect with the Mother Goddess in the form of a hill and then finally merge up with the sky. Perhaps the concept of heaven was invented in this manner. In later historical period, we find the continuation of the idea in the philosophy of *eros*, the principle that attracts the creation to the Creator in perpetual movement.

This cosmological framework had a significant impact on religious practices, social hierarchies, and gender roles within Neolithic communities. Rituals were often oriented around agricultural cycles, with ceremonies designed to honor the sun and earth and seek their favor for bountiful harvests (Hodder, 1990). The reverence for these deities reinforced existing social structures, with authority and control typically vested in male figures, reflecting the perceived cosmic order. The Neolithic cosmos reflected the dependence of agrarian societies on natural cycles and celestial phenomena. The dualistic representation of the sun and the earth as male and female deities, respectively, underscored the interconnectedness between cosmological beliefs and agricultural practices.

The menhir of Chhind Kalo displays phallic characteristics. This refers to the gender dynamics during the Neolithic era. Phallic symbols found in ancient monuments are symbolic manifestations of fertility and potency. In the context of the Neolithic period, the construction of gender was connected to cosmological beliefs and agricultural practices. So, this aspect of the menhir at Chhind Kalo can be interpreted as a tangible expression of these beliefs, proclaiming the significance of male fertility and authority within the society. The place needs to be reimaged: with its hills, swamps, forests, high grounds, and little rivers would look like in those prehistoric times.

Preservation and Future Research

The preservation of the Chhind Kalo site is crucial for understanding the prehistoric cultural landscape of the region. As a unique and valuable archaeological resource, the site provides essential insights into the beliefs, practices, and social organization of ancient communities.

Specific measures for conservation should include:

- **Site fencing:** A sturdy fence should be erected around the perimeter to protect the site from unauthorized access and damage. Hitting the stone must be stopped.
- **Visitor management:** Controlled access to the site should be implemented, with designated pathways and restrictions on touching or climbing on the megalithic structures.

- **Public awareness:** Educational programs and public outreach initiatives should be conducted to raise awareness about the significance of the Chhind Kalo site and the importance of preserving it for future generations.

Potential avenues for future research include:

- **Detailed excavations:** Carefully planned excavations can provide valuable information about the site's chronology, cultural context, and the relationship between the menhir and other archaeological features.
- **Geophysical surveys:** Techniques such as ground-penetrating radar and magnetometry can be used to identify buried features and structures without disturbing the site.
- **Interdisciplinary studies:** Collaborations with experts from various fields, including anthropology, sociology, and environmental studies, can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the site and its relationship to the broader cultural landscape.

By implementing these preservation measures and conducting further research, the Chhind Kalo site can be protected for future generations and continue to contribute to our understanding of the prehistoric world.

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