

## Chapter: 6

### Comparison, Correlation and Conclusion

After analyzing the burial practices and the artifacts of the five sites, this Chapter is focused on the comparison, correlation and conclusion of the varied dimensions of all the sites. The several facts to be highlighted in comparison and correlation are as understated:

- i. Burial style (human relic)
- ii. Shape of the innermost vessel
- iii. Number and selection of pottery
- iv. Number of pottery internment
- v. Style of lid
- vi. Number of mortuary goods and its style
- vii. Metal and stone mortuary goods

The Burial style primarily focuses on the type and style in which the human relic is buried. At Sekta, the human bones are found unburnt whereas presence of bone fragments from Koutruk shows signs of being burnt. Sites like Andro Khuman, Khangabok and Khamaran/Khamaral yield bone fragments which are either burnt or unburnt.

Another important fact regarding the burial style is the nature of the human relic interned in the innermost earthen vessel of the “Pot Internment System”, which shows evidences of being either burnt or unburnt. The secondary burial is associated with bone fragments of the deceased; the selection of bone to be buried is absurd, as the burial grounds of AndroKhuman, Khamaran/ Khamaral and Koutruk exhibit only bone fragments whereas at Sekta, masked or unmasked skulls are found but Khangabok records either unmasked skull, tooth or bone fragments.

The Shape of the innermost vessel which contains the human relic is varied at different sites. Elongated pots are used at Andro Khuman and Khamaran/ Khamaral whereas at Koutruk, Khangabok and Sekta, circular pot is used to intern the human remains.

The number and selection of pottery vessels as mortuary goods is not specific in all the sites as well as in each burial group. The large pot being common, as this vessel is a compulsion in practicing the Secondary Urn-burial. Each burial group in all the five sites is found not associated with all the different vessel shapes mentioned in Chapter IV. Apart from the large urns, vessels such as the bowls, drinking vases and the regular rounded pots are found

associated with the burials of all the five sites. This point can be further enhanced by studying Table no.4

The number of pottery interment in all the burial sites is different. The pottery interment at Sekta is three in number whereas at Khangabok, Koutruk, Andro Khuman and Khamaran/Khamaral is either two or three or four layers of pots.

The orifice of the innermost urn of the layered pots, containing the human relic is covered with a bowl, which is either with or without a pedestal. The style of the lid (bowl) varied too and it is sometimes either placed on the orifice of an urn, in an inverted or in an upright position. Carla M. Sinpoli also records shallow bowls found at Vijayanagara which might have been used as lids for other earthenware vessel forms.

The statistical record of various shapes of the five Secondary Urn-burial sites is represented in the graphs. The Regular pot, thin sherds of large pot and bowls were found in all the five sites. The neck portion of the regular pot from Koutruk is different from the rest. The vessel shape such as Chaisen (big bowl) and trough or basin is found only at Sekta. The grey drinking vase is also common in Sekta though they are found rarely at Khamaral also.

The numbers of mortuary goods are almost similar in all the sites. The mortuary goods apart from the pottery assemblage, consists of metal (iron) arrow heads, knives, etc. accompanied by metal finger rings, bangles, copper plates and stone and steatite beads. British officials such as Colonel McCulloch, Dr. Brown and T.C.Hodson mentioned about a reddish pebble, which is undoubtedly identified as carnelians. They also reported spiral rings, blue beads, bone and ivory ornaments, etc. All the above mentioned objects are encountered at Khamaram, Koutruk, Sekta and Koutruk as mortuary goods. Apart from all these, rounded copper plates with 10 cm in diameter are found at Khamaran and Sekta.

## Conclusion

It is clear that all the five sites shared a parallelism in terms of the burial style adopted by the inhabitants of the concerned regions. All the five sites are situated in the alluvial plain region of Manipur where the clay is much suitable for pottery manufacturing. Due to the nearness in the spatial location, it is not difficult to conclude that the sites shared a cultural parallelism with slight variations, which could be because of admixture of cultural traits. There are ample evidences to provide that various cultures amalgamated due to meager political frontiers in the region. And for instance, T.C Hodson talks about the tattooing practices of the Tangkhuls in Manipur, which might have been adopted from its neighbour, the Shans. "The affinities of the tribes with their proximate neighbors are great, and they are very similar in political

construction, in economic development, in the essence of their religious beliefs and their general habit of thoughts. There is undoubtedly some borrowing and conscious imitation one of another”. (Hodson, 1984: 20).

Some of the possible relevant conclusions regarding the secondary burial customs:

1. There prevail two different types of Secondary Urn-burial, in the same burial ground, which indicates their coexistence. The existence of division in burial customs amongst the Manipuris can be projected, the reason being due to a cultural phase in terms of acculturation or migrations of different cultures. As old customs died hard, there is always a trait of the older culture amidst the new dynamic culture. “It is well known that up to the advent of Hinduism, the dead were buried, and the chronicles mention the enactment by Khagemba of the house GaribNawaj ordered the Manipuris to exhume the bodies of their ancestors, which they formerly used to bury inside their compounds. At a later date in his reign, in the year 1724, GaribNiwaz exhumed the bones of his ancestors and cremated them on the banks of the Engthe River, and from that times ordered his subjects to burn their dead. The system of cremation in vogue among the Meitheis is very thorough, as Mr Colquhoun remarks, and the frontal bone is preserved and thrown in the Ganges at a later date, as opportunity arises” (Hodson, 1908:116-117). The concept of throwing of the frontal bone in the Ganga could have been misconcepturized into preserving the burnt bone and burying it again as visiting Ganga was not easy for many, or this could be a concept of partial indigenous or local touch to the primary burial as the king ordered exhumation of buried corpse.

It is clear that the mass was divided into two cultural traits following different burial practices in terms of burial customs as well as in selection of human relics, which is seen with slight divergence. Thus some theories can be put forward:

- a. Existence of “Less resistance mass” and “Rigid resistance mass”

The “Less resistance mass” who cremated the death following the law but simultaneously buried the bone fragments of their ancestors according to the old customs, in the form of Secondary Urn- burial.

The “Rigid resistance mass” because of the law enforcement, exhumed the corpse but instead of cremating the corpse, which was not apart of their custom, buried it first and then few selected bone fragments were buried in an urn, in a form of secondary burial.

Incase of the “Less resistance mass”, the human relics were selected randomly as the chances of maximum damage to the corpse is inevitable hence careful selection of undamaged fragments are the sole option and incase of the latter the human bone has

minimal chances of decay as they are unburnt thus the skull and teeth which has minimal decay rate were used for further process.

b. Social Status

- i. Both burnt as well as unburnt bone fragments have been exposed in the same burial site. This could be because of an existence of a sub-section within the same society. For example ;Sounlum is a sub-clan of Gangte, scheduled Kuki-Chin tribe of Manipur, who posed different festivals, the Chapas of Phayeng performed Lai Haraoba (festival) in honour of Koubru and Loyalakpa deities but the Chakpas of Andro celebrated the same festival in honour of Panam Ningthou and Pureiromba deity. There can be variations within a culture, which might arise due to various factors. Thus,there is a good chance of incorporation of slight variations incase of burial practices within one particular clan or society ,though secondary urn burial might have been an mandatory ritual, which was eventually conducted in both the customs.Thesame reason could be applied incase of selection of human relics for the final ritual.
- ii. The adoption of law enforcement of secondary burial during King GaribNiwaz might have been followed by some of the common mass, either in accordance to the order of the higher authority or some might have seen the negative effects of ill sanitary and evil beliefs of burying the corpse in the premise of the settlement area.

c. Political affairs

The various variations in the burial customs and the selection of human relic could also be because of direct paramouncy of the Maharaja, who enacted the laws for burial practices under the influence of Hinduism. The disagreement between the Kings and the local officials, who disliked the idea of the new law enforcement, could have been forced to usurps and must have resulted in dividing the mind sets among the common mass.

d. Economic condition

The economic condition of the deceased family may be the result of such variations. In order to cremate a body, wood logs and other rites and rituals may have been expensive in comparison with the rituals involved in just burying the corspe. Thus, social section under the poverty line in the society would obviously have opted for the latter practice.

2. “The chronicles afford sufficient warrant for the statement that, prior to the introduction of Hinduism, the Meithei were in the habit of bringing in the heads of defeated enemies as trophies of prowess. Doubtless this custom disappeared when the

gentler customs which are associated with Hinduism became generally adopted in the state” (Hodson, 1908:94). There is a possibility that, this custom amongst the Meitheis of collecting heads could have taken a different style or form in course of time, which must have resulted in masked and unmasked skull burial.

3. Variation in the number and selection of pottery assemblage could have depended on the economic condition of the deceased’s family. It is seen that the innermost pot in which the human relics was interned is a compulsory vessel of all the burial sites. Bowls with or without pedestal was used as lids to cover the urns, thus this vessel shape was found in abundance. The appearance of the drinking vase in all the five sites is an unavoidable issue, though it varied in its form. The drinking vessels and its variants are known as Lee, Leiree, LeireeKhum or Chairen Leiree, which is an indication of eminent status. This is believed to have been an integral part in the coronation of a Meitei king. The hookah tops found from Sekta Period III to IV were morphologically similar to those found at Khangabok, with slight variation in its decoration. “Continuity of style is often interpreted as one evidence of continuity of population, and sudden change in style as indicative of shift in population. Typological similarities are analyzed in terms of the relationship of cultures and their influence on one another” (Shepard, 1956). Thus it can be concluded that all the five sites were culturally interlinked with one another.
4. The probable manufacturing techniques of the vessel shapes are understated :
  - i. Grey drinking vase: the body is manufactured by using coil or strip technique is clearly seen in (Ill.XII.1). The coils or strips are joined by using a wooden beater. The neck portion is made by taking a large slab of clay of which the ends are joined and a wet rag is used to smoothen the exterior and the interior surfaces. This piece is then luted to the body which is already shaped properly by using anvil and beater. The interior bottom bears finger prints of the potter. When the vessel is in leather hard condition, it is burnished with a help of a bamboo split, shell or *kang*. This burnishing is done horizontally as the burnishing marks are visible on the shoulder portion running downwards towards the body of the vase. The same technique must have been applied to the redware vase. The pedestals might have been made in similar fashion as those of the neck portion.
  - ii. The bowls are manufactured in three ways. First, a rough model in a shape of a bowl is made out of a clay lump, which is then smoothen with a bivalve shells known as *kongreng maku* (oyster shell), by holding in the potter’s hand. This technique has been observed at Thongjao. Second, a rough model is placed on a

wooden circular disc, which is rotated with the left hand of the potter simultaneously the potter's right hand holding a wet rag (*ngabong phi*) smoothen and shapes the bowl while in motion (Cover page). The wooden disc is generally placed on the knee of the potter. The third technique is similar to the second one, only difference being, the absence of the wooden circular disc instead of which, a wooden stool is used to place and support the clay lump, in which case, the potter would have to rotate around the raw material. This same technique could have been applied incase of manufacturing the trough or basin.

- iii. The long neck ribbed drinking vase is manufactured involving two techniques. The body is hand-made as incase of pots to which the long neck and the pedestal are luted later (III.XII.2). The long ribbed necks are surely made on the wooden stool mentioned above as they bear striations and marks indicating an upward pulling motion towards the orifice. After luting, the whole vessel is washed with clay to smoothen and burnish the exterior.

This same technique must have been used to make the channel spouted vessels.

- iv. The manufacturing techniques of Pots (round, globular or elongated) are same as seen at Thongjao (Chapter V), Andro and Chairel.
- v. The perforated vessels from Andro Khuman were made by using the similar technique as pots but the only difference is the perforation, which is pre-fired, with an instrument which had a triangular section.
- vi. The manufacturing technique of the hookah tops is similar to that of Ningthemcha Karong, as described in Chapter V. The smoking pipe variety which seems to be of intrusive nature is made by moulding technique by using two casts. This is proved by the presence of a mark where the two casts were joined.

- 5. The result of the analysis of the rim and the neck portions of the Koutruk pots clearly highlight their manufacturing techniques. It is concluded without any doubt that the manufacturing techniques used were similar to those of present techniques adopted by the potters of Thongjao and Chairel as described in Chapter V. The neck portion is straight and long which is an unintentional result of the potter who moves around the rough clay model with a wet rag known as *ngabong phi*, with the potter's palms in an upright position so as to create a straight and long neck. Though the present pots from Thongjao exhibit much straighter and longer neck portion one can definitely conclude that the techniques were the same with slight differences.

6. It is clear that offering of earthen vessels as grave goods was mandatory as some of the vessels were not for functional purpose. Miniature forms of channel spouted vessel, pots and drinking vases were encountered in all the sites. It is important to mention that these vessels can be inferred to have been used for ritualistic purposes rather than functional, as a channel spouted vessel was found without a perforation in its channel
7. As regard the funerary goods; it will be wrong to verbalize that accompaniment of ornaments indicated female corpse and not male as there is enough evidence to prove that, the inhabitants of Manipur both genders wore ornaments (Ill.XII.3). “Among the Quoirengs both men and young girls before marriage wear the long spirally-coiled brass ornaments so common among the Kabuis” (Hodson, 1984:35). Hodson also records that the Mao, Maran and Mayang-Kong group, men and women alike wear necklaces made of rows of polished hexagonal cornelian beads which were valued highly.
8. The four irregular square coins with what looks like the alphabet, ‘Shri’ in Devnagari script were also among the artifacts collected during the house survey by the State Museum from the excavated area of Khangabok (Ill.XI.4). “The word Shri an abbreviated symbolic word signifying the regal power, fortune, wealth and prosperity was most commonly used as the legend of the Post Hinduism coins in Manipur. The legend Shri was depicted both in Bengali and Nagari scripts” (Singh, 1983:90). The Hinduism Period began with the King GaribNiwaj (1709-48 A.D) thus at least the square coin with ‘Shri’ on it can be dated doubtlessly to the 18<sup>th</sup> century A.D.

#### Problems or limitations

1. First and foremost problem is the solely dependency on the excavation reports and the personal interviews with the excavators. Personal participation in the excavations of the understudied sites, would have lead to better understanding of the relevant issues of the research program.
2. Apart from the time and financial constraints, geographical factor is a major problem, as most of the sites are inaccessible in terms of social beliefs and lack of importance of archaeological values in their surroundings. Incase of Koutruk excavation, the staffs of the State Archaeology Office were not allowed to process at the sites by the locals, as unearthing the burial ground offended their sentiment hence, the excavation was terminated.

3. The absence of infrastructure such as microscope for studying minute details on the artifacts, Munshell soil colour chart, pottery drawing instruments and proper place for studying the materials were major problem faced during the study.
4. The process of cleaning the earthen vessels was arduous challenge due to the manufacturing techniques. As the vessels were dabbed with beaters to create the exterior decorations and is ill fired, soaking in water more than required or carelessness while brushing them led to eroding the decorations.



Illustration. XII



1. Coiling Technique



2. Luting



3. Metal Ornaments



4. Coin from Khangabok



*In research the horizon recedes as we advance, and is no nearer at sixty than it was at twenty. As the power of endurance weakens with age, the urgency of the pursuit grows more intense.....*

*And research is always incomplete.*

*Mark Pattison 1813-84: Isaac Casaubon (1875)*