



# The Petroglyphs of Indo-Myanmar Frontier

RESEARCH PAPER

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## ABSTRACT

The southern part of Manipur bordering Myanmar reveals petroglyphs and represents an ideal region for studying archaeological remains and human artistry heritage. This paper is an introduction to three petroglyphic rock art assemblages located in the Indo-Myanmar frontier. Compared with dated archaeological materials of adjoining areas, the engraved figures range from pre-historic arts to the pre-colonial era of the region. The engraved figures are thematically organized, and contextualized within the subject matter. It argues that the engraved figures like beads, gongs, ponies, and guns are evidence to trade relations with the rest of the world since time immemorial. The motifs were analysed using select colonial ethnographic works, oral literature, folklores, tales current in and around the Indo-Burma frontiers.

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This paper is a preliminary observation and comment on some fresh rock art sites, explored from March 2000 to January 2019. The sites are located on the extreme south of Manipur in the Indo-Myanmar and fall between the rock art sites at Salangthel of Manipur and Champhai of Mizoram. While offering a thematic and geographic overview on the rock arts and synthesizing discoveries, methodological and theoretical advances on the subject matter, it explores the need for conservation initiatives of rock art that has succumbed to natural and human forces. The pictorial arts witness how people articulate and preserve their ideas and contemporary events. The subject-matter includes incised drawings of human figurines, horned animals, hunting scenes, rituals, female figures, and anthropomorphic figures both in regular and irregular panels. Rock art research in the region in question and adjoining areas is still at an initial stage, offering more explorations. There is little documentation on the subject in the Indo-Myanmar frontiers, particularly in Mizoram, Manipur and Myanmar.

Geographically the rock arts in questions stand toward the southern part of the present Churachandpur district of Manipur. It lies between the 'Changchhia Civilization' of the present Champhai district of Mizoram and the Manipur's western hills (Tamenglong and Bishnupur District) rock art sites, mainly Salangthel, Khoupum, and Tharon. The rock art sites in question located toward the north of a historical place, *Chibuh* (salt well) at Tonjang. The area in question is fame for teak, and pine timber (Singh, 2003: 12). Oral traditions indicate that salt production was exported to neighbouring areas by the local people. Benglam (Pienglam or Sura), a legendary personality was said to have exported salt to the Burmese. Colonial accounts too recount how the local people shared both salt spring and wild game at Chibuh. This shows that sharing of the salt well and hunted wildlife continues till the colonial era. The visit of the Manipuri Raja to *Chibuh* and the relations he had established with Kuki villages, like Yangbi, Tuithong (Tuithang), and Lomyang (Lamjang) in 1831 was another resource sharing development benchmark. Since then natural resources determined the geopolitics of the region (Singh, 1995: 107). S. Gelbung is located toward the western bank of *Gun* (Imphal River), opposite the Longya territories, and is about 18 km from the present Churachandpur town, Tuibong. Singh. (1970) and Mackenzie, (2011) recounts the abandonment of the sites due to frequent attacks from the further south by Kamhow in about 1860. It is located towards the west of the Kathong range of the Manipur south. Earlier, the inhabitants moved towards the southern hills from present day Khodang, a foothill village near Sugunu. The Kuki inhabited the present day Southern Manipur since time immemorial (Dun, 1886/1975: 1). The sites in question are located within Haubi ranges, a well-marked off forest-clad peak of the southern Manipur (Ibid, 1886: 89). Hiangtam Kul was reported abandoned on completion of the present Tidim Road (260 km from Imphal) during the Second World War. This paper is thus, the result of field visits to virgin rock arts of the Indo-Myanmar frontier and information collected from ethnography works on the local populace. It is thematically arranged and contextualized within the subject matter. The objectives of the study are to examine the themes and medium of the motifs. At the rock art sites, few pertinent questions arose. Who were the "creator" of these rock arts? Why most of the rock arts are found in the forest? Are they an integral part of the earlier findings from the adjoining areas? Are they exclusively warrior's art? What do they convey to the present generations? Why have these petroglyphs not been explored and protected? These are fundamental issues that need to be addressed.

## METHODOLOGY

Exploring fresh archaeological sites was an uphill task. To identify virgin rock art sites our mind were always preoccupied with the hopes that seldom came. Constant inquiry, interview, and physical survey of the potential sites during dry season and available literature on the subjects were read. Physical visit to the sites, reading the contents of the engraved figures, and photography of the rock arts was followed by GIS. Oral and literary surveys on the history, folk arts, and worldview were consulted while drawing out an imaginary map for the rock art sites. With high hope, and constant surveillance of the chosen geographical landscape, identification of the rock art sites were done through occasional meetings with hunters and food-gatherers of the area. On finalizing the sites, a field visit for data collections was done as soon as possible. The greatest challenge before field visits or exploration was the identification of the sites. The second problem was waiting for winter or dry season and third, all the visited rock art sites do

not yield findings. In a couple of decades, only three fields expedition (March 22, 2000, and January, 5 and 9, 2019) at Chassad *Kholui*, Hiangtam Kul, and the old cemetery of Singat) could be term a successful. These sites yielded some concrete results. At Chassad *Kholui*, two rock arts and some amount of pottery remain that were dug out by the new inhabitants from their kitchen garden were studied. These were photographed. At Singat old cemetery site and Hiangtam Kul, (visited on January 5 and 9, 2019) a monolith bearing different figures on its four faces and several rock arts were photographed after thoroughly cleaning off the moss and remarks with red and black whiteboard markers, purposely to increase the visibility. Clearer photography enhances the reading of the contents or images to a great extent. Despite using markers to get clearer photography, too many figures, improper panels, intersections, mosses, and human interpolations upon certain rocks had obstructed one from reading the contents correctly. This was followed by locating them through GIS. Data collected from the fields were supplemented by primary and secondary sources to derive scientific knowledge of the subjects. The engraved motifs or figures were interpreted using local folklore, oral literature, and ethnography works and the principle that petroglyphs are translatable by any viewer and have recorded important events, instructions, and the desire of the artist. (Bland, 2010: 22). Emphasis is made on visual meaning, diversity, and artist praxis. The pursuit of rock art sites and methods for analyzing petroglyphs are all the methods for viewing the engraved figures (Solomon, 2008: 59). Oral literature and ethnography work on the local populace are scanty but remain crucial in generating an understanding of the materials that are grounded in the Kuki-Chin conceptual universe rather than neuropsychological universals. The contents of rocks are not scientifically measuring and read yet Bednarik (2016) 'Tribology of Petroglyphs' is an innovation for rock art research, particularly for petroglyphs. It is the science of interacting surfaces in relative motion, and as a method of investigations was for the first time applied by him in rock art research, until which it was employed to the study of geology 'metamorphic rocks'. The work helps in demarcating the natural rock markings from utilitarian (engraving) markings and exposed some natural rock markings that were misidentified as petroglyphs in the previous researches (Bednarik R. 2016: 172). This paper looks at the newly explored rock arts from the ethnographic background of the local populace and contested the notion of 'Aristotelian trinity'. It also argued that the rock arts are hunter's rock art and are commemoration, criticism to masculine wanton violence (Fuentes, 2006) and remnants of the lost Civilization found in the present Champhai district of Mizoram not far away from the present study site. After reading the motifs in consultation with folklores/tales and the available ethnographic works collected purposely it can be said that, the ancestors of the present local populace of the study area had vigorously practice hunting as livelihood, which is a continuous tradition of the area till date.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Rock art is an inquiry on human creativity of the past. The figures represent letters of early society (Sankalia, 1978: 84–90) and they are a common form of prehistoric communication, known to the author and their fellow citizens (Bland: 2010). Material remains of the cultural past, Hoerman, (2016), is linked with folk stories and oral literature. The rock art study centre around the universality of arts: *aesthetics, sapiens, homo faber, hierarchical, economics, and Ludens*, which means, artistic, wise, tool-using, political status, economics, and playful (Dissanayake, 2008: 61–62). Rock art surviving treasures are found across the globe in a diverse cultural context and some of them are dated to the Upper Paleolithic (Butzer, 1979: 1201–1214; Sankalia, 1978: 2–3 & Brady (2016). In India, rock arts are identified from most of the states including Manipur (see Mahabaleswara, 2014) and they are broadly divided into Prehistoric context in South India and living traditions in central and Eastern India (Marak, 2014: 45–53). Rock art is further divided into Petroglyphs and pictographs. Petroglyphs involve etching, engravings, pecking, scratching, chiselling, bruising, dotting, and cup marking, cupules on open rocks, and boulders (Butzer et al, 1979: 1201–1214) while pictographs are common forms of rock art created by drawing a line on the surface of the stone using pigment. Based on functionality, they are classified into Hunters'art (with figures of man and animals) and agriculturists, without figurative (Maggs 1995). North East India frontiers being the 'crossroad' for migration of prehistoric populace and cultures is believed to produced more rock art sites.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See concept notes: National Seminar on Rock Art of North East India, Methodical and Technical Issues, October 5–6, 2016, organized by Indira Gandhi National Centre for Arts, New Delhi and Department of History and Archaeology, North Eastern Hill University, Tura Campus, Meghalaya.

Recent researches on the petroglyphs of Arakan in Myanmar show that the date of rock arts ranges from the earliest times to the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Bednarik's (2016) application of tribology in rock art study demarcated 'natural rock markings' from utilitarian anthropogenic markings, portable palaeo-art objects, rock engravings, cupules.

Rock art study in North East India or the Indo-Myanmar frontier is very challenging. The study is largely confined to memorial stones and posts. Bhoti inscriptions at Lungjukthung megalithic sites of Arunachal and Lung Milem (stone sculpture of human figure) of Mizoram depict typical Buddhist meditation (Sarma, 2015: 74; Chatterji 1979: 35). Megalithic, Menhirs (sacred stone), dolmens (the seat of departed souls), and cists (preservation of human bones) are reported across Northeast India (Patar, 2016: 85–92; Kabui, 1991: 53–54) with variation dates ranging from the early times to 13<sup>th</sup> century C.E., (Sarma, 2012: 33; and 2014: 71). Rock arts and wooden memorial posts are common in the Mara region of Mizoram, Chin Hills, the Manipur Hills and the Naga Hills (Malsawmliana, 2015: 78–86). The rock arts like '*Mangkhai Lung; Sakei Lem, Lung milem*, found in the present Mizoram, the rock arts of the Manipur northern Hills and Myanmar are material remains of the past falling within the same cultural landscape and topography. Archaeological studies in Manipur, confines to stone, bone tools and animal remains from Khangkhui caves and Machi of Chandel; Hoabinhian culture (Tharon Caves, in Tamenglong, Napachik; stone megaliths of victory, ceremonial status stones, a memorial for the death, at Willong, Makhels, Salangthel, and Dolmen and Menhirs at Manipur valley (Kabui, 1991: 49–54). The successive study too is largely confined within the earlier exploration sites and adjoining areas and the findings confines to memorial stones, menhirs, dolmens, or agriculturist memorial stones (Devi, 2019). Devi (2003) and Laishram and Shyam (2013) critically investigated Megalithic and Rock Art in Manipur and Mizoram. The authors focused on petroglyphs sites from the Manipur west hills, like the Tharon area; Khoupum valley, and Salangthel and the Rock art sites of Champhai district of Mizoram: Lungohunlain, Zotlang, Lainpui, and Vangchia. The work is the result of earlier excavations, field explorations, and news reports on the petroglyphs from both states. The sites of the present study are located within the present Churachandpur district and lie between the Champhai district of Mizoram, Tamenglong and Bishnupur district but do not appear in the earlier works perhaps due to lack of research on archaeological sites and history. The other reasons could be also their location in the forest. The sites taken up in the present paper are found only in the old village sites, now in the forest. An earlier study has proved that the ethnoarchaeological study is lagging behind. Nevertheless, Kabui (1991) observes the 'Naga and Kuki tribe of the Hills as the author of megaliths of both stone and wooden' who gathered food using *lithic* tools. Shakespear (1912/1988) documented the hunter's ceremony of his contemporary events and Goswami (1985) documented how Kuki hunters commemorated using rock (locally called Sasong). The earlier studies thus open up scope for further explorations. The present paper is the result of one such challenge, exploring fresh rock arts of the Indo-Myanmar frontier, based on a field visit and photography. It provides a discussion on the contents of the rock arts and argued that the present study sites and the Manipur western rock engravings could be an extension of the recently excavated 'Changchhia civilization' of Champhai Mizoram.

## RESULTS

Chassad *Kholui* (S.Gelbung 24°11'53" N 93°44'3" E) lies 22 km or a day's walk away toward the south of the present Lamka town (Churachandpur). Two stones bearing animals, human figures, and utensils stood at the heart of the village. The northern one approximately, 7 × 2 × 1 foot (height, breadth, and thickness) bore a single elephant with defacing. Below the panel of it, children of the village had drawn another elephant figures imitating the original one. The Second megalith had been broken into two halves. The lower part measures 5.3 × 2.4 × 1 foot approximately. It bears a yak (wild Mithun), an elephant, and a tiger. The upper part is much defaced and obstructed clear visibility of items engraved. However, the engraved figures were tacitly arranged in panels, and the incision of the background of the figures makes the figures very attractive. The upper part or breakaway piece bore a tiger, an elephant, yak, wild boar, bear, and a human figure holding a jar, possibly of rice beer in a gourd container.<sup>2</sup> It shows the artisan's skill and expertise. The human figure at the bottom row is partially on the top of

2 The writer of this paper and friends Letkholal Haokip, Hemthang Haokip, and Mangkholal Haokip visited the village on 23, March 2000.

the lower piece lower, projecting jumping over the tiger. Both the rock arts are undoubtedly hunter's art but different stylistically. The northern megalith is simpler in carving. The artisan pecks an elephant figure at about two feet high. The remaining surface got blank at the time of the field visit. The southern megaliths, bore multiple figures and the artisan incised them using different sizes of chisels to engrave the figurines. The artisan must have pecked and incised the background using different sizes of chisels and hammer. The dates are not known yet, the engrave figures make us think that they were laid to commemorate great hunters. The two stones were possibly erected at different times and age. The engraving on **Figure 1.2** below though broken into two pieces, has proper panels and bears different animals. The technique of carving used for the **Figures 1.1** and **1.2** shown below are slightly different. The technique of carving is different. The artists embossed engraving in the case of **Figure 1.2** and pecking in the case of **Figure 1.1**. This shows that the commemoration stones were possibly erected at a different time, not known to us.



**Figure 1.1** Engraving of a single elephant.



**Figure 1.2** Yak, Elephant, and tiger.

Before the publication of this report, the second rock art (the southern one) has vanished forever. The engraved picture was completely removed and bore a jubilee commemorative inscriptions of the village youth.<sup>3</sup> Photography taken during our visit twenty years back is the only surviving evidence about it now. Recycling helps people in many ways but it destroyed historic monuments, events, cultural heritage, and archaeological sites. The site was abandoned in the 1860s due to the onslaught of Kamhow from the Chin Hills and was re-settled in the past few decades, named S. Gelbung. Human and natural agents are indicative of reducing the population of the rock arts. The animal motifs are an indication of the rich ecology of the region. Kapzinga (2006)'s *Khawhring Leh Sai Ram ah* (The Land of Witchcrafts and Elephant), portraying a man fighting a tiger solely with his swords, Lianminthanga Ed. (2003) and naming the present Aizawl after 'Ai' (Ibid: 31) a berry plant used by the local traditional priest to perform warriors or hunters and agriculturists merit feast (Haokip, 2000: 84–89) with the frequent occurrence of 'Bu/Chang-Ai' remind us of the rich ecology, environment, and natural resources. Ironically, elephants are to be seen on the epitaphs and memorials stones for researchers to scratch the idea and events preserved on the rock engravings. Elephants are found in colonial writings and ethnographic work but not in the forest now.

Singat (24°08'55"N 93°34'50"E): There stood a rectangular monolith (**Figures 3.1 & 3.2**) towards the west of the present Singat old cemetery. It stood on a bridled path that connects the present Singat and Champhai of Mizoram before construction of the present Guite Road. Local reports claim that the bridled path being the shortest route, travellers took a day (24 hours) to reached Champhai from the rock art sites. The monolith has four faces. One can see the frontal face, the eastern and western face from the bridled path in three-dimensions. The size of the rectangular rock is approximately 3 feet × 16<sup>1/2</sup> × 6 inches. The frontal face had five panels. The first panel (from the ground) contains a deer and doe. The second panel contains a pregnant buffalo; and a human figure holding a piece of stone in an inverted manner perhaps represents the man hitting an animal and the latter knocking down the former on the ground. The third panel bore an elephant and wild boar. On the figure, two elephants were drawn perhaps for want of space. In front of the wild boar, stood human figures holding weapons, possibly stone tools, aiming at the head of the boar. The fourth panel is a representation of an elephant showing a full-grown tusk and a cub. The fifth panel shows four male figures with firearms and two birds sitting on the shoulder of two of the four hunters alternately. What do the birds symbolized is not clear. Perhaps signifying the importance of birds in hunting is depicting.

The reverse bore another story. It is perhaps, later interpolation or engraving. Unlike, the frontal face, the reverse (**Figure 3.2**) did not maintain proper panels. The first and second row from the ground depicts a male figure riding a horse and buffaloes. The third row is difficult to read. It could be that a man was trapped in a wild creeper and his companion is depicted releasing him. The fifth row contains a single animal, whose identity is not known. Interval by Roman scripts showing the birth date of Simmothang, 28/3/1835 (perhaps later inscriptions) the top row of the reverse has shown, a scorpion, a gun, and two gongs on the left and right, perhaps, exhibiting the heroic acts of the hunter. The eastern face (**Figure 3.3**) bore a doe, four deer, dinosaur-like creature, wild boar, wild cat tiger, and a good dress male figure, in the standing position, holds a weapon and a female and children. The western face of the rock (**Figure 3.4**) reveals an engraving of a deer, doe, two wild boars, and about 7 skulls of Mithun and or wild buffaloes.

Hiangtam Kul (24°05'20"N 93°35'47"E),<sup>4</sup> (abandoned after the Second World War) yields some rock arts. It is about 12–13 km away from Singat and is located between Hiangjang and Hiangtam Khunou village. About five-rock arts were traced on the road leading to Myanmar. Four of them are smaller in size but bore elephant, tiger, and leopard (See **Figures 5 & 6**). The nature of engraving is indicative of commemoration. The new road cutting might have dismantled or uprooted many such rock arts. The rocks (**Figures 5 & 6**) are found on the old route. One of the rocks measuring about 4h × 2b × 1t (h = height, b = breadth, and t = thickness) in oval shape (**Figures 4.1 & 4.2**) is a recording of different events. Human figurines, weapons, beads, necklaces, tigers, yak, leopard, gongs, spear, arrow, guns or firearms, hunting scene,

3 Ngamlen Haokip, A Ph.D Scholar of Assam University Silchar in the discipline of Fine Arts visited the site in 2012 and witnesses that the second stone bearing more figures broke into three pieces and the biggest piece that was seen standing in my 2000 visit was completely deface by the village youth club and was re-erected after engraving their organization establishment.

4 GIS for Hiangtam Kul was not done at the spot. It is done through google satellite map.



Figure 3.1 Front View (Eastern).



Figure 3.2 Reverse view  
(southern/reverse).



Figure 3.3 Side/edge (Eastern View).



Figure 3.4 Side/edge (western view).

anthropomorphic (human body with tiger head and tail) with a female figure in a sensuous manner are what one can read from it. Hunting scene, women folk paraded in procession; engraving a wide range of animals, the anthropomorphic figures and materials are an indication of the rich resources, ecology, and cultural heritage. Hunter spearing at a wild animal (*Figure 4.1*) is another striking scene. The date is not known, but they are the storehouse of the past. Its frontal based shows proper regular panels whereas such panels get to messy upwards as the figures were too congested as the figures were read upward. Natural deface, congestions and human interpolations obstructed one from reading the images. On top of the rock art, one can see a few irregulars and overwrite sketches in the Roman alphabet, showing later interpolations.



Figure 4.1 Front view at Hiangtam.



Figure 4.2 Reverse (Back view).



**Figure 5** Rock engraving at Old Hiangtam Road.



**Figure 6** Front view (Old Hiangtam Road).

Tiger, elephants, and leopards are common figures. Small stones, engraving with a single image of tiger or elephants were also observed. More rock art sites were reported on the Indo-Myanmar borders, and one such is at the Behiang Kholui bearing stick marking animals. The largest rock arts at Hiangtam Kul bore a large number of figures. The artists did not use proper panels. Frankly, they are difficult to read even after re-markings with markers. Human interpolations, like inscriptions of few Roman scripts and defacing due to constant exposition also become an obstacle.

## DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS OF THE MOTIFS

The recently explored rock arts contain multiple figures, representing the artistry heritage of the region. The anatomical positions of the figures are significant. Tigers, elephant, deer, doe, stage, and human figures are drawn with geometrical properties. The various figures speak about the rich biodiversity of the region under study and reveal technological changes in the pursuit of a livelihood. A simple drawing that depicts animals' mostly horned beast and hunting scenes, is common in the Himalayan belt (Orofino, 1990: 173). Engraving of elephants and tigers in all the rocks is interesting. Certainly, both these animals elevated the status and prestige of hunters. The former because of its importance in terms of size. The "Kuki-Chin' customs and traditions concerning meat division is a revelation to the status of a hunter and the killing of big animals be it a wild game or domesticated animals. The meat division custom of big animals among the local population is a revelation to the importance of killing big animals. When giant or big animals were hunted or killed, the whole community from the village chiefs down to widows, maternal families, neighbours, friends, and well-wisher of the hunters have a share (Gangte, 1993: 183). Second, ivory is highly valued in the custom and traditions of the local population. Possessing Ivory was a symbol of power and honour. He who hunts elephants was an honour in society. The people highly valued this item. Ivory and even other animal bones were used for making chisels of different size for making basketry. Colonial ethnographic accounts show that ivory or the tusk possessed commercial values. Emphasis on elephant and gongs, (*Figures 3.2 & 4.2*) remind us of the spread of the Buddhist Doctrine in the Ko-ki (Kuki) country in the east (Debiprasad Ed. 1970). Shakespeare (1912/1988) claimed that 'Elephant tusk being highly prized and its flesh consumed for food', the Kukis hunts elephant in groups of at least 20. This shows that the social status of the hunter moves upwards in parallel with the headcounts of the animal the warriors had hunted. Representation of gongs, beads, buffaloes, and Mithun (gayal) that had purchasing capacity symbolized the socio-economic position of Ai performer in the society. Hunting scene showing stone tools, wooden sticks, wild creepers (to catch wild animals), club, and spearing of game, and engraving of guns (*Figures 3.1; 3.2 & 4.1; 4.2*) at two sites, depicts the technological changes of the past. Recycling of memorial stones due to want of stones (Limestone) and human interpolations makes the study more difficult. There are contradictory claims. Were they pre-historic art or of the early colonial era? Therefore, they cannot be studied in isolation.

The engraved figures at S.Gelbung (*Figures 1.1 and 1.2*) emphasise on tiger and elephant. Stylistically, they appear to be much smoother than engravings found from Cite adjoining area and suggesting a different time. The absence of guns on the hunter's rock art at Chassad shows that the petroglyphs were not disturbed. The petroglyphs at Chassad are hunter's rock art commemorating a living tradition. For instance, the broken part (*Figure 1.2*) represents how the hunter jumps over the tigers. The representation is of how a successful hunter performed the ceremony. Interestingly, the representation of women folk and children in ceremonial procession at Hiangtam Kul rock arts (*Figure 4.1*) is a striking find. The story could be what ethnographers term "hunter's commemorative ceremony" (Goswami, 1985: 115; Shaw, 1929: 75; Haokip 2000: 86). The reception ceremony of a warrior is called *Sadot* (Sa, animal) and *dot* (to welcome) and is performed by the chief's private priest purportedly to conferred power and social status (Parry, 1988: 8; Sakhong, 2003: 46). The significance of it lies in entertaining the hunter(s) by serving *Zu* (traditional drinks. The hunter performed Sa-Ai (victory ceremony) when he took 500 heads, including a tiger or an elephant or leopard (Gangte, 1993: 179), and enough foodstuffs for the grand ceremony (Goswami, 1985: 115–16). Instances of *Sakei* (tiger) Ai, at Thenjawl in the present Mizoram is a revelation to the commemoration tradition. The account is summed up as below:

One day a tiger beset Thenjawl village and killed a Mithun and two goats. The crier immediately calls on the people to surround and Thangbawnga shot it and performed the Ai ceremony the next day by sacrificing a Mithun. Thangbawnga dressed up like a woman, smoked woman's pipe, wore woman's petticoat and cloth, ivory earrings, carried a small basket, spun a cotton spindle and let his hair down and wrapped with a mottled cloth around his head a turban, for the crowd to watch him and yelled laughter. Removing his disguised as a woman, he now dressed up his own, took pieces of flints (oval and round flints called Salung/Sailungvar) into the mouth of the deceased tiger, and he ate eggs. Then he says I have swallowed mine and you have not swallowed yours, now you will go by the lower road, I will go the upper road; You are the brave man of the southern Hills (lower); I am that of the northern ones (higher), he said, and cut the tiger head three times with his dao and buried outside the village (Shakespeare 1988: 79–80).

The whole rite of passage is the subjugation and appropriation of animals. The warrior disguised himself as a woman to hide his identity purposely to ward off himself from the attack of a tiger. Giving flints to the tiger and comparing the tiger to lower hills, and jumping over the carcass and cutting with his dagger or sword symbolized how the man (warrior) overpower animals. The numerous rock art engraving with tiger and elephant is a pointer as to how mankind places themselves above the animals. The Ai ceremony connotes safe passage and respectful journey of the hunter's departed soul to the afterlife on his death. Folk songs depicting the hunter's soul riding the spirit of the tiger and other animals becoming slaves or property of the departed hunter speak a volume on the belief system (Haokip, 1997: 111). As stated above, the hunter jumped over the effigy covering with an original tiger skin and said 'You tiger had descended from Ngamton, I can jump over your body as many times; neither you nor your father and grandfather, are not matched to me, my father and grandfather (Goswami, 1985: 121). Wessing (1995) believed that tigers are complementary to ancestor's spirits in east Java, Indonesia is a deep-rooted belief and traditions in the Indo-Myanmar frontiers. The victory ceremony performer was entitled to commemorate the events by erecting a megalith called *Sa-song*, (*Sa*' means 'animals' and 'song' means stones) [Ibid, 265]. The performance of it centres on livelihood, survival, and hunter's desire of blissful state in the next stage of life. The hunter, animal, and the next stage of life relations, remind us of the 'Aristotelian trinity'. The notion that 'Aristotelian trinity' as a western thought wherein 'God(s) has power over man, the later sway over animals' (Fuentes, 2006: 124) is contested by the rock engravings. The hunter's victory ceremony discussed above clearly the place of God above the hunter (man) and the tiger is subject to human's appropriation. Commemoration, however, varied from region to region, yet hunter's priority centred on the number of heads. There is a story of how the hunter wore a woman's dress and spindle at the ceremony. The story goes:

In olden times, a Kuki man roaming in the jungle came across a beautiful tiger cub. He got so fond of it that he hugged the cub and kissed it repeatedly in affection. After sometimes a baby was born to the wife of the man. When the baby was about two years old and was standing near the threshold of the door, the tiger appeared and the baby cried in fear. His mother who was spinning inside was attracted by the baby's cry, came out, and saw the tiger. She hit the animal on the head with her spinning spindle. As a result, the tiger died (Goswami, 1985: 120).

Needless to mention here yet Kauffmann, (1938) 'Die Fallen der Thadou Kukis of Assam' and hiring of Kuki by the colonial administrators to lay traps purposely for tigers and leopard to protect tea garden labourers (Wright, 1895/2014: 72) and reports on Kuki prisoners hunting in the Andaman and Nicobar Island, Sadiya and Taungyi of Burma (Lianminthanga, 2003: 15; Guite & Haokip, 2019; Haokip, 2013: 68) during the colonial period, indicates hunting was the centre of socio-economic life of the hill dwellers. To quote Shakespeare: The Kukis are great hunters, and are passionately fond of sport, looking upon it, next to war, as the noblest exercise for man. They kill tigers, deer, and other minor games using poisoning arrowheads of about 18 inches and elephant tusks and flesh being highly prize are slain by a party of twenty men, some scaring them by shouting and beating gongs and others who ascend on some convenient tree discharge fire' (Shakespeare, 1988: 194–95).

The petroglyphs are more than a commemoration of death but a corpus of information on the human environment, ecology, livelihood, wanton violence on the weak. It also conveyed how the wealthy man host feasts to the general populace.<sup>5</sup> Wooden arts and rock arts differ from place to place yet the theme is to overpower the spirit of hunted animals. A figure of male (*Figure 3.1*) holding stone tools, possibly to hit wild animals remind us of Mesolithic and Hoabinhian culture in Manipur (Kabui, 1991: 50–53), showing the struggle for livelihood and existence. Depictions of different hunting stages conveyed to us, the technological development as well. A man hitting a wild boar with stone tools, and engraving of guns on some of the rocks conveyed the accumulative experience on hunting techniques acquired by hunters at different stages of development and new inventions.

Another striking figure from the field was anthropomorphic, at Hiangtam Kul (*Figure 4.1*) depicting, courting of a female, by an Anthropomorphic figure (a body of the man with head and tail of tiger in folktales) in a sensuous manner. Meaden & Bender edited (2020) anthropomorphic figure makes the study interesting. Tiger transformation is common in Northeast India and the Himalayan belt (Hutton (1920); Lyngdoh (2016). Anthropomorphic figures in Australia have been push back to 40,000 years (Mike, 2020: 149). Picturing the Bengal tiger as a predator to hundreds of white women and children during the 1857 revolt (Crane & Fletcher, 2014) is a colonial presentation of how masculine powers prey on the weak. Lenchonghoi is a beautiful lady who had seven brothers but was kidnapped by an unknown man called Khalvompou (local name) as a very energetic man, (Haokip, 1998: 15), having supernatural power and could transform into a tiger at wish. The story ended with a raid to rescue the victim from Khalvompou, (a man who can turn into a tiger at wish) favouring man (Zou, 1988: 1–12). Ahsijolneng is a story wherein Lhominu (tiger woman), got transformed into a woman (human being) by sucking the blood of Ahsijolneng, to get the hand of the victims' husband, locally called Changkhatpu. On detecting her foul play she was murdered (Zou, 1988: 19–29; Shaw, 1929: 106) by Changkhatpu. For third, Moltichan, Neinou, (Lhungdim, 2004: 10–15; Haokip 1998: 3), and the story of Fachirang and Rangchal (Shakespeare, 1912/1988: 175) who had married to Lhomipa (tiger man), after the latter had charmed her. Field informants reported that Neinou was the daughter of a Manlun chief of Myanmar, bordering India. However, the story is revealed in other parts of Kuki-Chin habitat areas. (Shakespeare 1988: 175). The stories are a revelation to human greed, exploitation, and masculine powers exercised over the weak and perhaps human trafficking for a slave. The engraving figures do not confine to the glorification of hunters alone, but contain constructive criticism and are evidence of artistic traditions. As the oral sources go, kidnapping or eloping of a woman by strangers, powerful man, or murdering of the woman by a woman to get the hands of her husband, and or human trafficking could have been what the society had experienced from the remote past. The engraved figures like rhinoceros, elephant, and perhaps, tigers and yaks disappear from the rock art sites. Human cruelty to animals is not a recent development.

Beads, necklaces, gongs, guns, and ponies are other engraved materials. All these materials are undoubtedly very valuable, inseparable, and prestige items in pre-Christian society. Carter (2016) examine and trace the production of beads and necklace in South East Asia to 500 BCE. Beads and necklaces are part of a bridewealth among the hill dweller. Engraving of this valued laden material is a clear indication of mobile trade relations with plain people. The study site is directly or indirectly connected to two power beads country, India, and China. This reminds us of trade between Arikamedu, (the earliest known place of beads manufacture on the coast of southeastern India), and southeast Asia (Solheim, W., & FRANCIS, P. (2003: 130). The bead trade with South East Asia including Myanmar and China too was in vogue since early time. Prehistoric Taiwan had produced glass beads, bracelets, and earrings during the First Millennium B.C.E and exported to other South East Asian regions (Wang et al, 2014: 51–52 & Kenoyer, Vidale & Bhan, 1991: 44).

Gongs are other prestige items engraved on the rocks. It is a powerful and mythic instrument whose origin is shrouded in mystery. Typically, the gongs commonly used in the area of studies are Nipple or Embossed gong similar to those used in Chinese temples, Buddhist temples in South East Asia (Nicolas 2009: 69, 77) particularly the Rang Kwien bossed gong now preserved

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5 (L) Jamkhotang of Monglham village had performed Sa-Ai rituals in 1984. He died in 1987 and his death ceremony was so elaborate and the tiger he had hunted and mithuns sacrificed during the celebration were engraved on his memorial stones. I have seen the celebrations personally. This helps me to read rock engraving better.

in Maritime Archaeology Museum, Chantaburi, Thailand (Ibid, 70). Interestingly, China, Burma, Java, and Annam were believed to be the four main gong manufacturing centres of the ancient World. Gongs were used in group hunting, the announcement of emergency assembly, death, and bridewealth. The making of clay model gongs for rituals and its purchasing capacity shows how people have valued it (Shakespeare 1912/1988: 154, 166, 202, 374 & 379). The engraved figures of gongs that are very old musical instruments show the trade relations between Manipur and other southeast Asian countries. Evidence of a shipwrecked with gongs, bells, and cymbals and the used of flat gongs dating to the tenth century, in Borneo, Sumatra, and the Thai-Malay Peninsula, linking to Hoysala in India, Vietnam, and China, shows that certainly, the network of exchange and distribution extended towards the east to Oceania, to China in the north, and to India, Africa, and the Mediterranean in the west (Nicolas, 2009: 62).

Engraving of guns marks the use of firearms. It contradicts many of the pre-historic figures. The use of a gun in hunting, trapping, warfare, and an announcement is doubtless. The outbreak of the Civil war among the Siyins (Carey & Tuck, 2008: 131) in Chin hills due to missing guns was an instance of how people valued guns. Guns were a symbol of heroism, and the means to recruit slaves for the chiefs, causing sudden raids in the Indo-Myanmar frontier during the colonial period. Like gongs, firearms too indeed come to Manipur and other Northeast regions via Burma (Myanmar) from the South East Asian countries much before the European traders. The transfer of Chinese military technology to Tai polity (Maw Shan), of northern mainland Southeast Asia during the late 14<sup>th</sup> century predates the arms trade of the Colonial period (Laichen, 2003: 499). The Kingdom of Ava Burmese and Mon historical records refer to frequently used hand-guns primarily in Central and Lower Burma from 11<sup>th</sup> to early 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, before the arrival of European firearms (Ibid, 501). The Royal armed forces of Burma are dated to the ninth century and the Chin's handguns to fight against the Mon is dated to 1386 (Ibid, 502). Ahom and Meitei have received gunpowder technology from China via Burma. The view that firearms were first introduced into Assam in 1527 or 1532 by the Muslims from Bengal is not tenable. This is because, the Ahom had subdued the Chutiya, during 1505–1523, had acquired cannon from them. It was likely that firearms may have reached India either from Assam or from Lower Burma from the mid-fifteenth century (Ibid, 506). The Meitei and Kuki had learned the art of manufacturing gunpowder and cannon from the Chinese merchants who visited Manipur around 1630 (Hodson, 1908: 21; Singh, 1965: 158). A male figure clad with a dress riding pony (*Figure 3.2*) is another striking feature. In 1831, the Maharaja of Manipur and his Senapati had captured 13 Chiefs of the area and these conquered chiefs were reported presenting 20 Ponies, 20 metnas (Mithun), 7 elephant tusk, and 20 gongs to the King (Singh, 1995: 107). During the First World War, the British had received a supply of ponies for transportation. These are indicative of trade and commerce relations between China, the present Southeast Asian countries, and Northeast India. Perhaps, horses in this region came from China.

Dating the rock arts is also a challenge. Excepting *Figures 1.1* and *1.2* mentioned above, the rest contradict themselves. Engraving of male figures holding either a stone tool or dao to hit animals; spearing of a wild game using the spear, and techniques and styles all pointed to pre-historic art, yet engraving of guns and Roman scripts shows that human interpolation on the earlier commemoration cannot be ruled out. The technological changes are visible. Thus, scientific dating is a far cry at the moment. Identification of human settlement at Tharon (Hoabinhian or Neolithic culture (Kabui, 1991: 50) and megalithic culture belonging to the Kukis and Nagas (Tibeto-Burman Mongoloid too is traced to 1000 B.C (Ibid, 53). Typologically, the rock arts in Manipur west and south are either contemporary or a continuation of *Changchhia* (a lost civilization) that extends to most parts of Mizoram, the eastern part of Myanmar, and some parts of Bangladesh. Based on the cultural sequence the date of Vangchhia is divided into two periods - circa 600 to 1400 CE and circa 1400 CE to 1750 CE (Das, 2016 & 2018; Sanga 2018; Karmakar, 2019; Devi, 2003: 22). The rock arts in Manipur west and south are geographically a potential extension of the Changchhia civilization. Strikingly, Lalhminghlua and Sarkar, (2017) trace Cupule petroglyphs from Mizoram, which is considered as one of the oldest recorded rock throughout the world (Parkman E. Breck 1986: 246). Bland (2010) observes that petroglyphs are pre-historic rock art. The rocks selected for this work are perhaps, overwritten and recycle for want of rocks and space. Our interaction with the local people and physical visit to the rock arts, revealed a few pertinent information. The rock arts are found only in the forest because, the people shifted their village sites, and in second, hunter's rock arts are not necessarily erected

on the grave but near the bridle path or the roadside for travellers to see them. So far, the rock art sites are all on the hills or mount where bridle path passed through. These petroglyphs need protection. Massive conversion to Christianity and the ideas or notions that every practices and tradition that is not Christian ways of life is immoral had completely sideline preservation of pre- Christian traditions. As mention above, the people of S. Gelbung were given awareness to preserved the rock arts that stood in the heart of the village. However, the finest rock arts has been completely erased and reused for Baptist youth Fellowship Jubilee commemorations in our second visit. The rock art sites discussed in this paper remained unexplored perhaps due to a lack of exploratory studies. As mentioned in the review of the literature section of this paper, Rock art or megalithic research in the region taken up so far centre around what the British ethnographer or administrator had touched upon or documented and some local researchers and writers, particularly, O.K Singh and Gangmumei Kabui. This shows that there is a lack of exploratory or field-based research. The rock arts though not protected or taken care of, reveals and also conveys to the present generation the life and culture of the authors who engraved and erected them.

## CONCLUSIONS

Intelligible hunter-gatherer images that are found in Manipur is extreme south region point to common traditions. The location of these megaliths and their environs conform to the people who inhabit the region. They are not explicitly shamanic. Image-makers of the regions emphasized the religious practices and cosmological framework. Exactly what these figures may signify is, at present, difficult to answer. The accurate answer can be drawn only when exhaustive research on rock arts available in the neighbouring area, like Champhai of Mizoram and Chin Hills of Myanmar or Arakan regions is made. The intelligible motifs than if they remain with stylistic criteria, the significance of which is still not understood. The ritualistic scene depicted to us that Rock arts- petroglyphs are possibly used to commemorate the warrior chiefs and people of higher status. Man animal fighting scenes, beads, gongs are indicative of trade relations with the outside world and guns are suggestive of continuous trade. Anthropomorphic figures narrated in many folklores is for the first time seen in Rock art. Though the numbers are less, they became very authentic sources for dealing with the socio-economic and political life of the native people and how they valued their traditional beliefs-life after death during those days can be seen from the petroglyphs. Contradictory figures are due to later interpolations. Prehistoric rocks elements dominate the figures. The authors of this rock art indeed had included the areas in particular and Northeast India in the global map of Rock Art-Petroglyphs. The sad part is how long the inhabitants would preserve these memoirs?

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The author has no competing interests to declare.

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