

Explorations of Pre-Historic Sites in Karnataka - A Study

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Robert Bruce Foote of the Geological Survey of India, the father of Indian Prehistory was the pioneer to make detailed investigations of the stone age industries in different river valleys of the Karnataka State and has reported the occurrence of Palaeolithic tools at a number of sites in the districts of Bijapur Dharwar, Bellary, Shimoga, Chickmagalur and Chitradurga in 1876 and 1916. After Foote's pioneer work there was almost a lull in the prehistoric studies for a long period. In South Karnataka a collection of palaeoliths was made by M. Seshadri in 1945 at the sites of Kibbanahalli and Biligere in Tumkur district. This and earlier collection made by Foote in South Karnataka studied in detail by Seshadri since 1949. Stone Age research has been actively in progress in Karnataka mainly on the initiative of Deccan College, Poona. A systematic investigation especially in North Karnataka were carried out. The Malabrabha basin was intensively surveyd by R. V. Joshi in 1955. Banerjee explored some region around Bagalkot in 1957. In 1966 R.S Pappu carried out explorations in the Krishna and Ghataprabha valleys in the Karnataka and Maharastra States. In 1970 Z.A Ansari explored the Tungabhadra region in the vicinity of Tekkalakota in Bellary district in 1968. Dr. K. Paddayya under took explorations in Bhima-Krishna Doab in the Gulbarga district. Apart from these major investigations, occurrence of early stone age tools has been reported at a number of sites in Dharwar, Belgaum and Bijapur districts by H. D. Sankalia, M. Seshadri, Dr. M. S. Nagaraja Rao, A. Sundara, M.H. Krishna, B. Subba Rao, Martimer Wheeler, B. K. Thapar, F. R. Allchin and others.

For the purpose of the study, Prehistory is divided as ;

Megalithic Culture
Chalcolithic Culture
Neolithic Culture
Mesolithic Culture and
Palaeolithic Culture.

According to some features, Palaeolithic culture is further divided as Lower Palaeolithic, Middle Palaeolithic and Upper Palaeolithic.

Lower Palaeolithic Culture :

The district of Bellary was the focal point of pre-historic culture. Most of the Palaeolithic sites are situated on the river banks in Karnataka. They were found in Krishna and its tributaries, Malaprabha, Ghataprabha, Tungabhadra and Kaveri valley. In Bellary district many Palaeolithic sites including that of Sanganakallu was excavated in 1948 by B. Subba Rao and was published. It is a very potential site where a variety of Palaeolithic implements have been recovered. Lower Palaeolithic (Early Stone Age), no implements have been reported from the wooded districts of the Western Karnataka. It is generally believed that the palaeolithic man - usually avoided the forest region where there was heavy rain fall When fertile plains were available for habitation there was no need for prehistoric man to move to the thick forest region. The

most important sites from the point of view of stratigraphy in Karnataka are Hire-Mulangi, Chik-Mulangi, Alur (Talkaved), Maneri, Taminhal and Hole Alur. The tools were found in gravel bed indicating a wet climatic phase. The site of Khyad is important one, where yielded on surface more than 500 tools out of the total collection of 826 (Malaprabha Basin in districts Belgaum, Dharwar and Bijapur work was done by R. V. Joshi in 1955). The tools consists of Abbevillian and Acheulian types of hand-axes, cleavers, choppers, scrapers etc., Two special types of hand-axes were found on the Malaprabha basin, they are chisal edged and burin type. There are no large number of pebble tools. This may be due to the absence of small pebble and the prefers of huge boulders.

On Krishna and Ghataprabha basin about 12 sites on Krishna and 5 on Ghataprabha, of early stone age was obtained of which, the village Anagawadi is situated at Bijapur district has yielded a large number of early stone age tools and can be regarded as a type site of early stone age culture in this region. The palaeolithic man here preferred to live on the banks of the river and on the lower foot hills. Here he could collect various types of pebbles oval, round, and flat based for his tool kit. The tools consists mainly of numerous and varied forms of hand axes, cleavers and also like choppers and discoids. The site Anagawadi consists of favourable environmental factors (1) Perennial water supply, (2) Abundant raw material of quartzite and veins of chert and (3) Physiographic. Setting with a forest covered with large games and edible roots and fruits (good fauna and flora). These factors must have made Anagawadi area an ideal habitation for stone age man who must have fairly in large grants. The majority of the hand axes are bifacial having neatly made thin body and symmetrical outline. The cleavers are mostly made on struck flakes. There are 'U' shaped and 'V' shaped cleavers. They have straight edges sunk with oblique, convex and concave edges On the whole the cleavers are of advanced forms and techniques.

The most significant contribution of the decade is Paddyaya's discovery of an acheulian occupation site at Hunsgi. Actually there are about four sites with a total of 13 occurrences, in river gravel deposits and localities with living or occupation horizons, in a vast oval shaped Valley of the Hunsgi nullah, a tributary of river Krishna. The site noticed in 1974, was excavated in three seasons in 1975, 1976 and very recently in 1983. The Acheulian occupation area was at a depth of about 70 Cms. below the present surface. This site is at present in Shorapur taluk of Gulbarga district.

In 1970 Ansari carried out explorations in the Tungabhadra valley near Tekkalakota of Bellary district. This resulted in the discovery of sites, Nittur in the same district yielding an industry comprising exclusively of pebble tools recalling the typical chert types. The importance of this site is also due to the fact that alongwith stone tools fossilized animal bones, mostly of Bos nomadicus have been recovered. 31 pebble tools made on olbasalt were collected, of which 11 are unifacial and 13 are bifacial. The unifacial choppers have 4 types of working edges (1) Pointed (2) Straight (3) Convex and 4) Concave. In bifacial there are cleavers like edges and convex edges

Kibbanahalli is at present in Tiptur taluk of Tumkur district. It has been studied by M. Seshadri. The site lies at the foot of Banasirah hills and has a large number of small streams, the gravels of which yielded numerous tools. The collection comprises early Abbevillian, late Acheulian hand-axes, cleavers of all types, scrapers and chopping tools, beaked tools of clactonian technique. The raw material employed was quartzite.

Recently another site of Gulbarga district was discovered. The site lies at the foot of famous salvadgi limestone plateau. The tool bearing deposits consists of bouldery limestone conglomerate two meters in thickness. on the bank of a small Nala about 100 artifacts have been found in the deposit. The site is unique because most of the artifacts are of limestone a few are of chert. The collections comprises fine Acheulian hand axes, cleavers, thick points and flake scrapers. The chopping tools are rare. On the whole the industry may be described as developed Acheulian culture. Very close to this a factory site was also discovered.

Middle Palaeolithic Culture :

In Karnataka, the recognition of the middle palaeolithic industries and discovery of the sites had been done in the late 50's early 60's mostly in the districts of Bijapur, Belgaum and Dharwar. Paddayya explored parts of Gulbarga and Bijapur districts and noticed more than a score of sites of middle peloeolithic age on the banks of the river Bhima and its tributaries. At Hagargundigi Paddayya noticed an implimentiferous stratum of pebble gravel resting on bedrock and over- lain by yellowish brown Kankary silt. The gravel yielded tools, mostly of chalcedony, like scra- pers, borers and points on plain and prepared flakes.

In 1967-68 a team of archeolo- gists from Deccan College discove- red 3 stratified sites at Hunsgi, where Hagaritagi and Hurhalli again tools "purely of the middle stone series" were obtained from a well cemented sandy pebbly gravel. At Devapur in the same district artefacts of this group were obtained in a gravel deposit of a height of 13.7 meters above the bed of the river.

In 1971-72 Pappu reported nine more sites along the Ghataprabha in districts of Bijapur and Belgaum (at Bhanthnur, Bijkuppi, Chinchkha- ndi, Halki, Katarki, Khajjidoni, Laksanahatti, Macha Kanur and Varachgal). The tools from these sites include, as usual, scrapers, borers and points and are made of chert.

Dr. B. K. Gururaja Rao also discovered many middle palaeolithic sites on the banks of the river Bhima, in Gulbarga district at Thanagundi. Kaulur, Maiur, Baba- loti, Bhimanahalli, Machanur and Yadgir Tools were found in high level gravels. Pappu has also reported a few sites in the Krishna basin.

Upper Palaeolithic Culture:

Recently identified upper pala- eolithic cultures in India are also represented though meagerly in Karnataka. In 1961 Seshadri sug- gested that 3 distinct tool traditions existed at Salvadgi in Bijapur district. They are (1) Middle stone age (2) Chalcolithic blade industry and one more distinct blade tradi- tions. Paddayya's fresh study of the problem from this and other few sites in the region, at Gulbal, Vanahatti and Hunsgi has provided a stratigraphical context to the industry. These yielded early, middle and upper palaeolithic tools. The last con- tained lenses of loose pebbly gravel yielding tools of the blade industry. The tools are blades, burins, points, borers, blade cum borers.

Pappu has also reported a thin blade industry at Yadwad in Bijapur district at the Ghataprabha.

Mesolithic Culture:

The Mesolithic or the late stone age has, unforsunately not received much attention in Karna- taka in recent years C. Krishna murthy reported a new site of this culture at Maragoundanahalli in Bangalore district. Dr. M. S. Krishnamurthy-reported another site near Kurugodu in Bellary district. The tools in the latter site include points, blunted back blades, triangles, trapezeum, fluted cores. Paddayya also de.cribed his collection of tools from Hunsiholi in Shoranur taluk of Gulbarga district. Nagaraju also discovered few microliths in Shakapur, Ganga- pur in Gulbarga district.

In the last few years Dr. B.K. Gururaja Rao along with Dr. Shivarudrappa of Geology Department of Manasagangotri, Mysore has collected two Middle palaeolithic tools near Manasagangotri Engineering College. It is an important discovery in connection with Mysore area. Fur- ther the author also collected two micro liths on the surface in Koppa of Mysore district. As this has alre- ady been excavated as a Megalithic site, further extensive search or microliths, is needed.

Durnig the year 1995 C. Mahadeva, Research Scholar of the Department of Ancient History and Archaeology, University of Mysore, has collected large number of Upper Paleolithic and Microlithic tools



from Srirangapatna, a town of Mandya District. As far as Pre- history of Srirangapatna is concerned it is an important discovery.

Still most of the area in Karnataka has not been archaeologically explored. Young scholars have to take up this work to search the entire Krishna, Tungabhadra and Kavery river vallies and other places.

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