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Stone Age Remains around Banki-Athgarh Region, District Cuttack, Odisha

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Abstract: The paper is the outcome of two months field work in the Banki Athgarh region. The survey has yielded eight numbers of prehistoric sites from Palaeolithic to Neolithic. The study of Stone Age is very much important for establishing the past cultures and societies, thus the river Mahanadi has been well explored in this region and the gullies like Barajhara and Sankhajhara were also studied which falls in the Sapua River. The region is also covered with reserve forest like Haripuli and Subasi range. As we know that most of the study on stone tools were earlier confined to the districts like Mayurbhanj, Dhenkanal, Keonjhar, Indravati Basin and Phulbani region etc but through this survey it was found that the early stone age cultures were also predominate in the region of this part of Cuttack district especially near the palaeo channels and rivers and forest ranges which have some historical importance.

Keywords*:* Banki, Palaeolithic, Culture, Stone, Cuttack

Introduction

The foundation of the prehistoric studies laid by Valentine Ball has resulted in the discovery stone implements from Dhenkanal, Kaliakata in Angul district, Harichandanpur in Talcher sub-division and Barsapalli in Sambalpur district in Orissa. The district of Cuttack is located in the coastal region of Odisha is widely known for its early historic to early medieval archaeological remains. In comparison to the research in history, numbers of attempts have so far been made to study prehistoric cultural traditions. Ball was the real scholar who placed the Cuttack district in the prehistoric map of India in 1876 by reporting a discover of microliths near a place around Chowdwar in the same district.

Study Area

The present study area of Athgarh region geographically is between $20^{0}30'$ (North) to $20^{0}34'$ (North) latitude and $85^{0}37'$ (East) to $85^{0}41'$ (East) longitude. It is situated at about

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35 kilometers to the west of the Cuttack city and about 50 kilometers to the North of the state capital, Bhubaneswar. The area is very much known for the Nidhipur Ghantikhal Railway Station on the south East Railways (SER) East Coast section. It is also known for its important hills, Haripali and Subasi range, reserve forest. The area on the north is bounded by Khuntuni and Radhakishorepur localities, on the east by Subasi reserve forest extending towards north and south on the south by Nidhipur Ghantikhal localities and the west by Champia, Dalabhoga, Subarnamanjaripur localities lying on the western fringe of Subasi reserve forest. The natural landscape is highly distributed with hills and mountains. Haripali is a block hill located close to Radhashyampur and Belasahi Saharsahi. There are many perennial and seasonal streams which considerably drain the landmass. Among them Barajhara on the North West and the Sankhajhar on the south are important perennial streams. While the Barajhara forms an affluent of the Sapua River a tributary of the Mahanadi.

Baideshwar lies very close to river Mahanadi. The place is famous for the temple of Lord Baideshwar under Banki block. It is at a distance of 15-20 kms. from Banki and 25 kms. from Khurdha. A hill is also in the area. The temple is in the foot hill of the hill. Likewise Alasua is a small village with a household of 40 approximately this is a place which lies by the side of the road which leads to Kantilo (Nayagarh) from Baideshwar. This site is at a distance of 1.5 kms. from Baideshwar and is a hilly region.

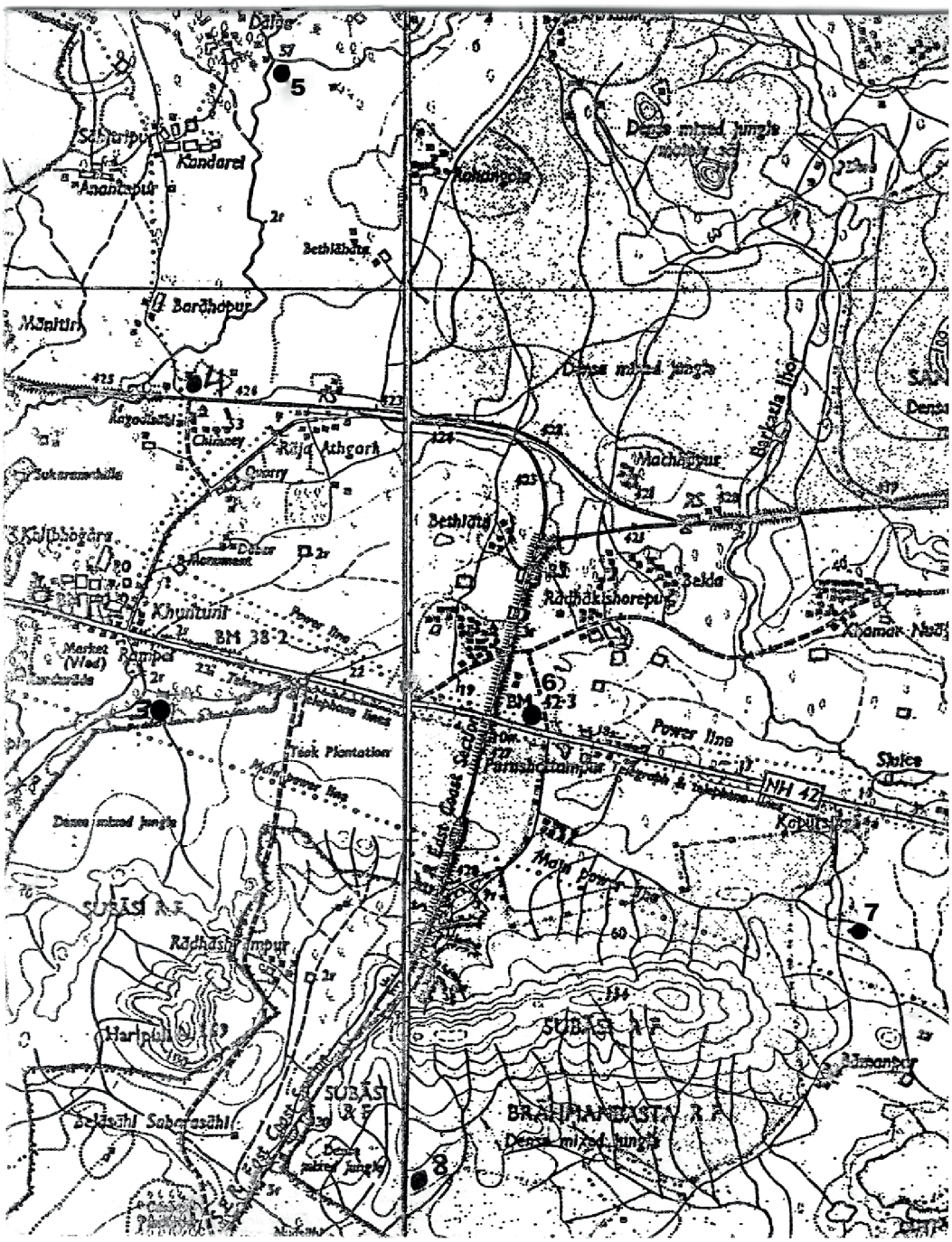
Archaeologically Athagarh and Banki region proves itself to be potential for prehistoric research.

Previous Work

In the previous study of the Cuttack district eleven (11) number of sites of every culture (i.e. Palaeolithic, Mesolithic and Neolithic) were discovered. The study was conducted around Ghantikhal region of the district. Though the survey was concentrated in 11 sites, but it was conducted in an intensive manner with extension of investigation of the uncharted sites. Hence the survey along with a trial trench at Bela Sahi Sabar Sahi and section study in the sites of Nuasahi Khalipadia. Evidence of Iron smelting too has been found from the site of Subarna Manjaripur and Bela Sahi Sabarsahi. The collected antiquities were grouped under different cultural period.

Aims and Objectives

Although numerous prehistoric sites associated with various cultural remains have been brought to light from the survey around different heavy terrain regions of Odisha not much emphasis was given in the study of the prehistoric culture of coastal region of Odisha. So, the aim was to study the region properly and to find out sufficient evidence of prehistoric habitation in and around Banki and Athagarh region of the district Cuttack.



Toposheet map of the study area

Satellite Image of the Study Area

1. Steady industrialization in the study area is causing destruction to the prehistoric sites.
2. Heavy earth quarrying in the area for the construction of railway tracks and for construction of road and buildings as well as encroachment of land by government sector and private sector have also been destroyed the sites of prehistoric importance.
3. So before any more destruction of the early heritage happen, it was necessary to study the area properly and find out the sites of the early human activities in this part of coastal Orissa.

Before the destruction of the sites in the region our survey in this region aims to record the existing prehistoric heritage in the area.

Table 1: Site-wise distribution of the artefacts

Name of the site	*Abbreviation*	*Northern Latitude*	*Eastern Longitude*	*Materials Recovered*			*Total*
				Palaeolithic	*Mesolithic*	*Neolithic*	
Baideswar	BDR	20°21'22"	85°22'45"	--	02	--	02
Alasua	ALS	20°20'42"	85°22'29"	--	26	01	27
Rampei	RMP	20°33'20"	85°43'46"	02	04	--	06
Ramnagar (Tangarsahi)	RNR	20°34'38"	85°43'58"	02	05	--	07
Lakmideipur (Dalua)	LKP	20°36'08"	85°43'41"	--	28	01	29
Radhadamodarpur	CER	20°33'23"	85°45'20"	01	43	--	44
Kapursingh	KPH	20°32'52"	85°46'57"	01	09	--	10
Ramshyampur	RSP	20°30'54"	85°45'20"	03	--	--	03
Grand Total				09	119	02	130

Distribution of Site

The survey around the study area has yielded eight numbers of sites associated with lithic and antiquities pertaining to prehistoric periods. Archaeology and the prominent geomorphic features of the sites are briefly comprehended below:

1. **Baideswar (BDR) – 20°21'22" N. Lat. and 85°22'45" E Long.**

   The site is located very close to river Mahanadi near the Baideswar temple. A hill called Baideswar is located at the backside of the said temple. Due to erosion, river pebbles and pottery fragments of late medieval period are found around the site. From the survey the site has yielded only remains of microliths from the patches found at eroded places in the site.

2. **Alasua (ALS) – 20°20'42" N. Lat. and 85°22'29" E Long.**

   This site is a foothill site located at a distance of 20-30 mtr on the left side of the road which lead to Kantilo from Baideswar. This site is a small hilly site. It had shown very good feature of Microlith culture. This is covered with shrubs and Eucalyptus trees. It is also a eroded place due to which plenty of microliths were found exposed at. Heavy duty implements were also found from the site. Scrapers and core, blades and lot of chips were found from the site. It has also yielded a Neolithic pestle.

3. **Rampei (RMP) – 20°33'20" N. Lat and 85°43'46" E Long**

   The site Rampei is located on the 500 mtr south of NH – 42 near Khuntuni Bazar. It is situated on the peripheral area of the Subasi reserve forest. It is a more or less eroded plain land with a defurat laterite quarry. There is also a small laterite pit of 35m X 25 m because of quarrying of laterite slabs for building and construction purposes. The site is covered with thick shrubs now. Due to the erosion, a few numbers of microliths and 2 palaeolithic scrapers was found. At this place microliths are generally found associated with the light brown soil mixed with quartz pellets.

4. **Ramnagar (Tangarsahi) (RNR) – 20°34'38" N. Lat and 85°43'58" E Long**

   This site is highly eroded and lateritic expose are seen at places in the site. It is at a distance of 30 mtr from the Ramnagar level crossing. Laterite quarry had changed the site into a very big pit like structure, from where very good palaeolithic hammer and scraper has been found. Mesolithic core and chips were found.

5. **Lakmideipur (Dalua) (LKP) – 20°36'08" N. Lat and 85°43'41" E Long**

   This site is located near Dalua village. The site is highly eroded and laterite out crop is marked. Heavy quarrying of laterite is seen in the site. The site has yielded many good number of microlithic tools with 1 neolithic flake. The microlithic tools found are basically core, blade, scraper, nodules and chips. A palaeostream flows through the site.

6. **Radhadamodarpur (RDP) – 20°33'23" N. Lat and 85°45'20" E Long**

   This site is located right side of NH – 42(from Chaudwar to Dhenkanal), where a road divert toward Radhakishorepur. This site is eroded with lateritic out crop. The site has yielded 1 discoid of palaeolithic period. Plenty of microlithic tools were found from this site.

7. **Kapursingh (KPH) – 20°32'52" N. Lat and 85°46'57" E Long**

   This site is located at a distance of 3-4 km from the NH – 42 in the road lead to Brahmanabasta. There is an eroded patch seen at the site. The site has yielded one very good and intact palaeolithic knife and 7 chips of Mesolithic period.

8. **Ramshyampur (RSP) – 20°30'54" N. Lat and 85°45'20" E Long**

   The site is located about 500 m. to the north east of Ramshyampur village. It is situated in the southern foot plains of the Subasi reserve forest. It is a highly eroded land mass and expositions of sand stone at places are marked.

   Towards the east of the site the sand stone out crops is found to be overlain by loose laterites and the loose laterite is further capped by a deposit of light brown soil mixed with quartz pellets and gravels. 3 palaeolithic artifacts were found. 1 point 1 scraper and 1 flake.

Material Recovered

Out of the 8 sites of my study area 129 numbers of artifacts of different culture have been discovered. All these artifacts classified into 3 major cultural periods as Palaeolithic, Mesolithic and Neolithic.

Culture Segment and Analysis of Data

Palaeolithic Remains

Right after excavation led by Bose and Sen's at Kuliana (1948) showed that it is mainly a core identity comprising primarily the tool types of Choppers, handaxes and cleavers. Moreover, it had pebbles and small admixture of flakes with high flaking angles and unprepared and unfaceted striking platforms.

Singh's survey (1985) in the Dhenkanal district of Central Orissa has yielded 53 lower palaeolithic sites with handaxes and cleavers as the predominant types, some of these being associated with lower pebbly gravel and Kankarised soil. Mohapatra (1962) advocated for the evidence of Middle stone age. Behera in 1989 has reported upper palaeolithic artifacts from the Brahmani valley and from Sundergarh. From Karanjia, Khiching, Baripada and Rairangpur of Mayurbhanj district (Basa, 1984, Mishra 1990,

S. Chakravarti, 2000) have also reported many sites having Palaeolithic assemblages including several typologies similar to the occurrence from different places of India.

From the present survey nine numbers of Palaeolithic artifacts were recovered. The findings have been arranged in a tabular manner below:

Table 2: Site and Site Wise Distribution of Palaeolithic Artifacts

Sl. No.	*Name of Site*	*Abbreviation*			*Tool Typology*			
			Flake	*Hammer*	*Scraper*	*Point*	*Knife*	*Total*
1	Baideswar	BDR	----	----	----	----	----	-----
2	Alasua	ALS	----	----	----	----	----	----
3	Rampei	RMP	----	----	2	----	----	**2**
4	Ramnagar	RNR	----	1	1	----	----	**2**
5	Lakmideipur	LKP	----	----	----	----	----	----
6	Radha Damodarpur	RDP	----	----	1	----	----	**1**
7	Kapursingh	KPH	----	----	----	----	1	**1**
8	Ramshyampur	RSP	1	----	----	1	1	**3**
Grand Total			1	1	4	1	2	9

Basically the findings of the present survey are Flake, Hammer, Scrapers, point and Knife. The materials are of quartz and quartzite.

Mesolithic Remains

With the folding up of the great ice age some 10,000 B.C an end. It may be said that the transitional period between Palaeolithic and Neolithic which began around 10,000 B.C and continued till approximately 4,000 B.C represents the Mesolithic in the Holocene epoch.

The Mesolithic, as pointed out before, bridges the Palaeolithic with the Neolithic. The stone tool the Mesolithic man prepared are known as Microliths. Microliths means 'tiny stones', so called because of the small size of these tool. The microliths generally vary in size from 10 mm to 50 mm depending upon the size of the nodule available for their manufacture. The microliths include specialized geometric forms such as triangles, trapezes, lunates. It is the presence of these geometric forms which distinguishes the Mesolithic industry from that of the Upper Palaeolithic.

The Mesolithic culture of Orissa as a transition between Palaeolithic and Neolithic has been subjected to intensive research in the last decade. Nanda (1982 – 84) had reported 85 microlithic sites in the Indravati Basin, Backed blades, fluted core and

scrapers are the predominant varieties. Ota (1982-86) found both geometric and non-geometric microliths from 30 open air sites in and around Phulbani – Kandhamala region. Mohanty's survey in Keonjhar from 1985-93 resulted in the discovery of 58 mesolithic sites on the valleys of Baitarini and its other effluents.

Out of the eight sites 119 number of Mesolithic artefacts were recovered. Almost every variety of implements has been found. The findings are systematically arranged in a Table below:

Table 3: Site and Site Wise Distribution of Mesolithic Artifacts

Sl. No.	*Name of Site*	*Abbre-viation*	*Tool Typology*										
			Core	*Flake*	*Chips*	*Blade*	*Scraper*	*Point*	*Borer*	*Burin*	*Lunate*	*Pen Knife*	*Total*
1	Baideswar	BDR			2			1					**2**
2	Alasua	ALS	8		5	3	10						**26**
3	Rampei	RMP	2		2								**4**
4	Ramnagar	RNR	1			2		1			1		**5**
5	Lakmideipur	LKP	3	1	8	6	3	1	2	1	**3**	**1**	**28**
6	Radha Damodarpur	RDP	1	14	15	11	1	1					**43**
7	Kapursingh	KPH			8	1							**9**
8	Ramshyampur	RSP											
Grand Total			15	15	40	23	14	4	2	1	4	1	119

The raw materials of the tools found were chert, agate, quartz and quartzite too. In the present study 5 numbers of heavy duty implements, otherwise can be said as Scraper, mostly of quartz and quartzite materials are found.

Neolithic Remains

As the youngest period of stone age history of man Neolithic has always been understood as a well defined stage. It is not surpising, therefore that antiquities were sought merely to fill the grand definitional frame till as late as 1959 in India. Pre-defined types usually referred to as celts whenever found, no matter even if from surface, were taken to locate a Neolithic site. The usual techno-morphological analysis of these types formed the ultimate in understanding the culture. This was more or less similar to the methodological basis used for the preceding periods in prehistory.

Neolithic culture marks great technological and economic changes in the society. These changes are of such a far reaching importance that many scholars have termed this phase "Neolithic revolution". Although the Neolithic age began much earlier in 7000 B.C. Neolithic settlement in the Indian subcontinent are not older than 4000 B.C.

Technologically speaking, Neolithic culture is usually associated with grinding and polishing technique, evidence of pottery and domestication of plants and animals.

Thapars excavation at Kuchai, near Baripada during early 1960's yielded Neolithic artifacts made of grinding and polishing techniques, together with a coarse grit tempered red ware (1987) has made an extensive study on Neolithic of orissa from the view point of distribution, typology, technology and raw materials used. According to him, there are final stages of Neolithic typological development in Orissa. Oblong forms resembling the Paleolithic axe forms, appeared in the first phase, to be in the first stage by the oval types, in the third stage by the trigonal and cylindrical types, in the fourth stage quadrangular forms without cornered edges and in the fifth and last stage by the purely quadrangular and flatted forms with accurately straight geometric outlines.

Table 4: Site and Site Wise Distribution of Neolithic Artifacts

Sl. No.	*Name of Site*	*Abbreviation*	*Tool Typology*		
			Pestle	*Flake*	*Total*
1	Baideswar	BDR			
2	Alasua	ALS	1		1
3	Rampei	RMP			
4	Ramnagar	RNR			
5	Lakmideipur	LKP		1	1
6	Radha Damodarpur	RDP			
7	Kapursingh	KPH			
8	Ramshyampur	RSP			
Grand Total			1	1	2

Neolithic debitages from the survey are very few. Only 2 numbers of debitages have been found. One pestle half broken and a flake of diorite have been found.

Concluding Remarks

The present survey not only resulted in establishing link between coastal and other parts of Orissa but also resulted in discovery of prehistoric sites related to various lithic culture and historical periods. The survey resulted in discovery of 8 unchattered sites

rich in various type tools, potsherds. The concentration of Mesolithic artifacts is more in comparison to artifacts of other lithic cultures. They have been discovered from eroded beds of light brown soil deposit associated with quartz granules. Then comes the remains of palaeolithic culture. Only 9 palaeolithic artifacts have been found. 2 neoliths were also found from the survey area.It was seen that the Mesolithic artifacts around my survey area dominates the other cultures. The microliths were made of various types of crypto crystalline and crystalline rocks characterized by cherts of different colours such as black chert, greenish chert, grey chert, jasper and quartz, quartzite materials. Though the survey area hold potential for lithic study, but industrialization, encroachment of lands and construction of buildings, roads and railway tracks have totally damaged the study area and thus the sites were disturbed still the sites have yielded artifacts of lithic cultures. However to emphasize the pre-historic importance of the area the work was undertaken.

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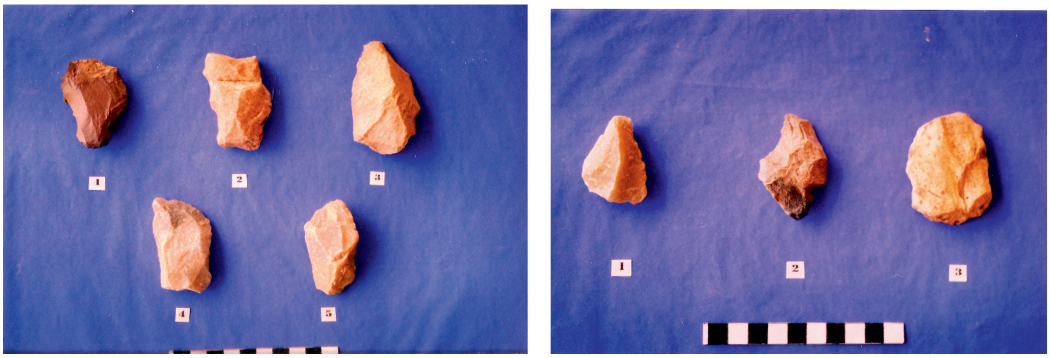
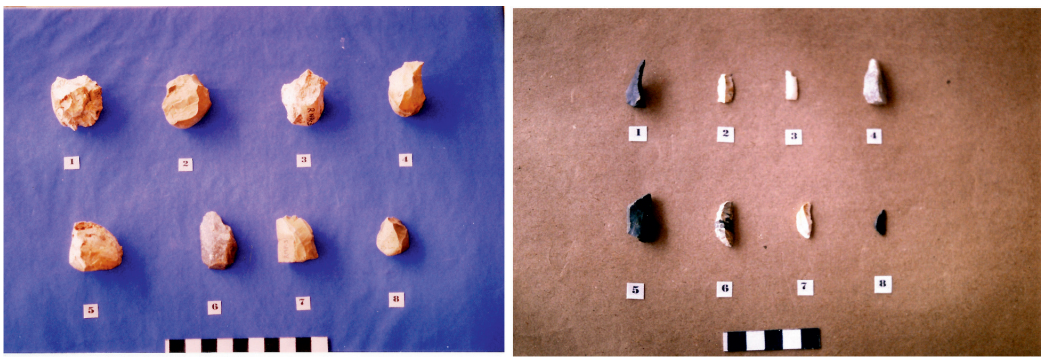
Illustrations



Palaeolithic Implements collected during the survey



Mesolithic Implements collected during the survey

Neolithic Implements collected during the survey

Author working in the study area

General view of the site Ramnagar

General view of the site Ramshyampur