

Synopsis

*Topic: Archaeology of Bakreswar River valley with
special emphasis on Hatikra*



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Introduction

The Rarh region has been a potential region for archaeological sites since prehistoric times. It has a large number of Chottanagpur fed rivers and their floodplains which are the most conducive areas for archaeological sites. Bakreswar river is one such zone which yields sites ranging from pre historic to medieval period.

The land surface of the Bakreswar river valley has been formed as a result of deposition of alluvium degraded from the western table-land and is composed of reddish earth. The area grades into mild undulating topography very typical of Rarh landscape. Laterite occupies a larger area of this tract which gradually merges on the one side with Rarh area of Murshidabad district while on the other it slopes down to the northern bank of Ajay. The present study is to understand the importance of the chalcolithic settlement of Hatikra in its settings.

Study Area

The entire study area fall in Bakreswar river's plain. It is the tributary of Mayurakshi river. Bakreswar river basin is a part of lateritic Rarh plain region enclosed between 23°43' N to 23°56'. lalitude and 87°17'E to 87°47' E longitudes covering an area of 714.56. sq. km. falling in Survey of India's Toposheets Nos-73M/5, M/9, M/10 and M/13. The study area lies between the river Mayurakshi in the North and Kuya in the South. The river originates from a large pond near Babupur village (Lat. 23°55'N, Long. 87°16'E) of Birbhum at the western boundary of the district then flows through the hot springs of Bakreswar near Tantipara, some 16 k.m. west of Suri, and after following a zigzag course eastward, and receiving one by one the water of almost all the rivulet (locally known an *kandor*) of South Birbhum joins the river Kopai near Milonpur village, a few k.m. before the eastern boundary of the district. The combined water (Kuya) flow into Mayurakshi river In Murshidabad district. The present study area limits itself to the Bakreswar river before it becomes Kuya. Total length of the river is 86.385 k.m. of which about 13.9 k.m. is perennial.

The Bakreswar river:

Bakreswar River is a well known name in the riverine landscape of this region. It is a tributary river of Mayurakshi river. It meets Kopai river near Hasuli Bank, Labhpur area. After that, this river is name as Kuya River, which enters into Murshidabad. It originates from large pond near Babupur village (Lat. 23°55'N, Long. 87°16'E) of Birbhum, then flows

through Murshidabad district of West Bengal and it joins with the Babla river i.e. Dwarka river near Sabitrinagar of Murshidabad district.

Bakreswar river zone is more interesting zone for archaeological exploration because of lack of work done here. In this zone Hatikra is an important excavated site. Very small scale excavations have been done here. No detailed excavation report is available other than Ph.D thesis of Dr. Arun Kumar Nag. But for archaeological investigation in this zone is very much important as geomorphologically this area falls into the juncture of lateritic and older alluvium zone. This present study aims to situate the site of Hatikra in relation to the juncture geomorphological zone to understand the resource linkages and man-land interaction.



Hasuli Bank (Confluence of Bakreswar & Kopai)

Geology

Birbhum is an area of great geological complexity. At its geological base is the Precambrian landmass. The Gondwana sediments of continental origin are found in parts of the district. In sequential development of rock systems of the district, as that of the eastern plateau of India, there are unconformities. But the evidence of the Precambrian rocks followed by basalt flows of Upper Jurassic/ Lower Cretaceous and subsequent developments from Eocene through Miocene-Oligocene to Mio-Pliocene speaks volume about the geological antiquity of Birbhum, which has considerable bearing upon the Pleistocene and Holocene geomorphology of the country in question.

Uncertainty exists between the Pliocene and Pleistocene boundary in Birbhum. Nevertheless, the Quaternary stratigraphy of Bengal can be seen to have developed in a sequence beginning from, what has been designated by Ghosh and Majumder (1991) as, the Lalgah Formation with its Lower and Upper Member units to Older Alluvium and Younger Alluvium series.

South-east of the district is an alluvial plain, with a soil composed of dark clay or sand and clay. Proceeding towards the west, patches of reddish clay and gravel are seen, while ground gradually rises, and becomes irregular and broken. Here calcareous nodules, called *ghutin*, are found mixed with clay, coarse sand, or ferruginous gravel. Further westwards, the ground becomes more elevated and broken into irregular ridges, the coloured clay giving place to a reddish brown gravel and lateritic rock. In some places a few feet of alluvial deposit cover laterite; in other parts coarse sand and *ghutin* are seen through a break under a few ferruginous rock. The district thus a gentle undulating and uneven or irregular character, with rounded ridges interrupted by dips, depressions and waterways. The laterite occurs in the form of gravel and of rock. The alluvial and fluvial fan sediments overlie the Lalgah Formations and make up the post-Pleistocene geomorphology of the Upland Bengal including Birbhum, which have great bearing upon the growth and development of the Mesolithic cultures of the region.

The Bakreswar hot spring (32°52'N; 87°02'E), are located on the right bank of Bakreswar stream, 1.6 k.m. south of Tantipara village. Emergence of hot water and gases is noticed here at seven different spots aligned northeast-southwest, which probably is a granite gneiss fissure. The two important springs in this group are Agni Kunda and Brahma Kunda. (Majumdar, Durgadas. 1975)

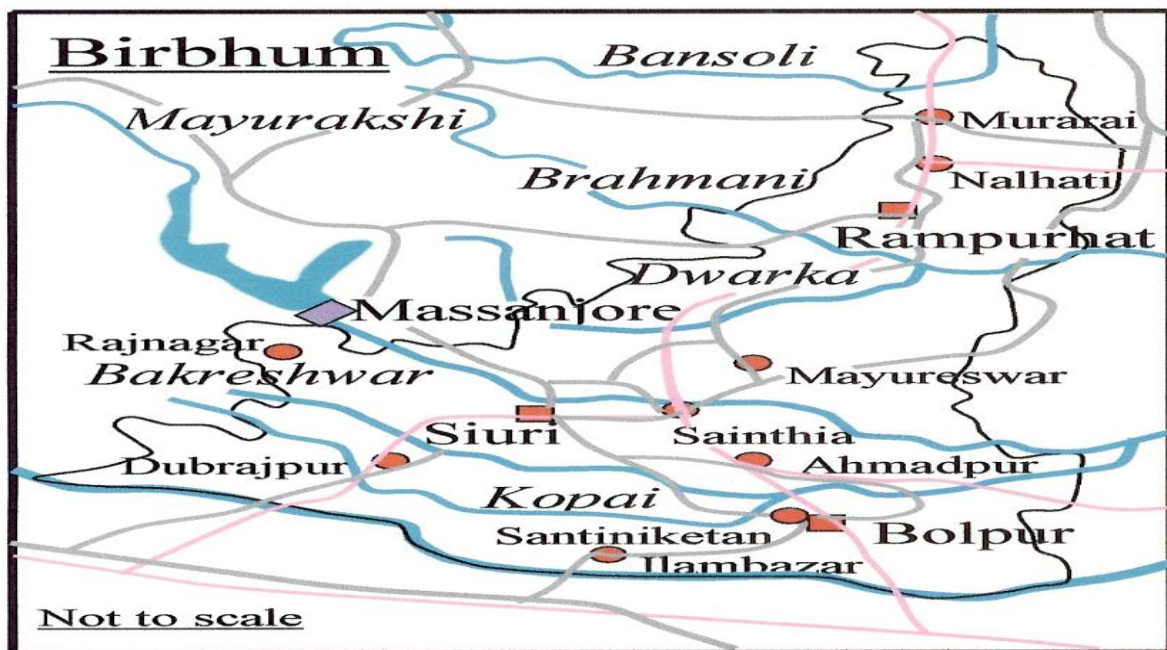


Fig- Rivers of Birbhum

Previous Archaeological Research

Few sites have been excavated in this region-

Haraipur- 73M/9; 23°52' North and 87°55' East is a small village by the side of Bolpur-Suri road. In 1964-65 the Eastern circle of Archaeological Survey of India has conducted a small scale excavation at the site under the supervision of R.C. Kar, R.G. Pandya and Amir Singh. The excavation revealed a 3.5m thick occupation deposit, which has been divided by the excavators into six layers. The excavators revealed the Chalcolithic habitation deposit is about 2.6m. No clear cut chronological sequence yet to be published. The chronology of the site is also yet to be published. The excavators revealed the Chalcolithic habitation deposit is about 2.6m. The most important discovery from the site is that of ten child burials. Besides, plain and painted BRW were found from the excavation. Other ceramics assemblage are black on red ware, white painted red ware and dull red ware. Burnt clay nodules with reed impression and a charred wooden pole (4cm in diameter) have been discovered. Other finds from the site include short beads, ground and polished stone celts, a stone pestle, and bone points.

The most important site of this river valley is **Hatikra/ Hatigra**-73M/9; 23°49' N and 87°45' E, located on the right bank of Bakreswar. The site was excavated in 1985 by N.C. Ghosh and Arun K. Nag. The site revealed the Chalcolithic phase (Period I) and the 'Ferro-Chalcolithic' phase (Period II) with no intervening phase (*JAR* 1986-87: 94). Iron-free Period I is represented mainly by BRW (with outturned rim, straight necks, angular shoulders, deep bowls/basins, dishes and channel spouted bowls), red ware (vase, bowl and dish), buff ware, a few grey and BSW and black wares. A few sherds of BRW bear thick lines in white pigment. Other finds include mullers, pounders, beads, terracotta beads, discs with and without perforations, balls, floors of rammed earth, post holes and wattle and daub fragments. Fire places were also recorded from this level. Period II yielded similar remains besides terracotta beads, balls, fragmentary figurines and eight iron pieces and slags. Six from the seven radiocarbon dates from PRL are erratic. The only acceptable date PRL 1191: 2870±120 B.P. or 1000 B.C.E. However there is no excavation report.

Paharpur- 73M/9; 23°80' North and 87°65' East. It is the small site situated on the left bank of Bakreswar river. To understand the ceramic assemblage of this area Sharmi Chakraborty and her team taken trial trench in 2007-08 (Chakraborty, Sharmi. et.al 2010, pp 49-50). The excavation revealed a rough chronological bracket of around early medieval to pre-modern period. The ceramic assemblage reported from this site- Numerous type of red ware (Dark, light, coarse), grey ware, black ware with grey core, black on red slipped ware, black ware with sooty slip, Chocolate slipped wares, black burnished ware with red core, Other assemblages are terracotta balls, beads, figurines and a polished bone fragments, a chert flake belonging to the parallel sided blade technology etc. found. The excavation at Paharpur revealed chronological span of approximately about 1500 years. This chronology is presently proposed due to recovery of plaque stylistically belonging to post-Gupta period. (Chakraborty, Sharmi. et.al 2010, pp 49-50).

Kusumjatra-73M/9; 23°48' North and 87°41' East. The site located in Birbhum district of West Bengal and falls under the administration of Ahmadpur block. The village is situated on the left bank of the river Bakreswar at an altitude 40 m. A trial trench was taken in 2009-10 (Chakraborty, Sharmi. et.al 2010, p. 51). The excavation revealed Chalcolithic pottery include-

Black and red ware, red slipped ware, black slipped ware, grey ware, and coarse red ware. Antiquities from the site include beads of chalcedony and terracotta. A bone point also was recovered. Lunate,scrapper, and flake blade from chert also found.(Chakraborty, Sharmi. et.al 2010, p. 51)

Other than **Hatikra, Paharpur** and **Kusumjatra** this river flood plain was also extensively explored in search of black and red ware settlements in West Bengal (Chakrabarti, Dilip K. et.al 1993; Ghosh, A. 1989). Some of the important explored sites that were reported are- **Khustikhuri, Mangaldithi, Batikar, Potanda, Behariya, Keora, Sindurtopa, Kusumjatra, Kagas, Nirbhaitala.**



Hatikra & surroundings

In 1965 The Department of Archaeology, Government of West Bengal, explored the valleys of the Bakreswar and Kopai in district Birbhum and obtained a sequence of stone age sites yielding Middle and Late stone age implements of **Giridangal** formally discovered by the Dictorate. In Chinpai.(IAR. 1965-66. P. 58). From the **Maligram**, about 5 k.m from Purundarpur, They discovered Middle and Late ages tools. (IAR 1966-67 p.44).

Subrata Chakrabarty of Department of Ancient Indian History Culture & Archaeology, Visva Bharati University, carried out investigation in the Birbhum district. He mainly

explored and record the stone age settlements. He reported microlithic assemblage found from the Kopai-Bakreswar river valley mainly from the Suri, Bakreswar and other places from district of Birbhum.

Centre of Archaeological Studies of Eastern India also explored Bakreswar river basin to understand and knowing the site and settlements distribution pattern o this river basin. They explored the Birbhum district. To understand the ceramic assemblage of Paharpur Sharmi Chakraborty and her team taken trial trench in 2007-08 (Chakraborty, Sharmi. et.al 2010, pp 49-50). A trial trench was taken at Kusumjatra in 2009-10 by Sharmi Chakraborty and her team. (Chakraborty, Sharmi. et.al 2010, p. 51)

Lacunae's of Previous Research

Explorations investigating Black-and-Red ware settlements in West Bengal (Chakrabarti, Dilip K. et.al 1993 ; Ghosh, A, 1989;) also refers to names of certain sites Khustikhuri, Mangaldithi, Batikar, Potanda, Haraipur, Behariya, Keora, Sindurtopa, Kusumjatra, Kagas, Nirbhaitala in this river valley. However a systematic intensive survey was not done in these works.

The few excavated sites do not have excavation reports. The importance of Hatikra is not understood as no work is done on its provenance or analysis of assemblage.

Though other sites are excavated, no attempt is yet made to understand any kind of networking linkage within sites.

As the excavation suggest a long continuity from chalcolithic to early medieval, it becomes imperative to understand the changing character of settlement pattern which is lacking in earlier researches.

Scientific study on provenance, resource bearing zones in relation to the site has not been attempted.

A complete holistic understanding Hatikra situating in the context has been lacking.

Aims & objectives

1. To investigate the distribution of sites around Hatikra surroundings in Bakreswar river valley. An attempt will be made to understand the origin and development of sites in the region in relation to the landscape.
2. To understand the importance of the site of Hatikra as an important chalcolithic site in this area. The aim will be to situate the site of Hatikra in the settlement pattern emerging in the study area.

3. To analyse and interpret the excavated archaeological assemblage of Hatikra which was excavated earlier by the department of Ancient Indian History Culture and Archaeology, Visva Bharati.
4. To make a comparative study of the excavated and explored material specially ceramics to understand its variability and provenance, and chronological sequence.

Research Methodology

1. Review of research: Detail review of previous work will be done to understand the lacunae of the work. Geological studies will also be consulted to understand the landscape in relation to formation of the site. Fluvial studies on Bakreswar will be studied to understand the relation of river to location of the surroundings sites and their chronology.
2. Explorations will be undertaken along the river in an objective and systematic manner.
3. Descriptive classification of pottery which is the main artefact of the sites will be made. An attempt will be made to conduct petrographic analysis of the ceramics specially of excavated assemblage of Hatikra along with some samples from the explored sites for comparative analyses to understand ceramic availability in terms of raw material and technique of manufacture.
4. A special emphasis will be given to the Hatikra excavation material and recording and analysis of the artefacts of Hatikra.

Scope of Further Research

Hatikra is excavated in 1985, this site very important for BRW culture. But the excavation is very small scale. If further excavation occurred there may be chance of come to light of further remains. Paharpur and Kusumjatra are also interesting small scale sites. Systematic documentation of these sites will give an idea about the settlement system of Bakraswar river valley in relation to Hatikra. Petrographic analyses will be interesting to throw light on the provenance and manufacturing techniques of ceramics especially of the chalcolithic period.

Tentative Chapterization

1. Introduction
2. Environment
3. Archaeology of Bakreswar river valley
4. Hatikra- Site and Materials
5. Hatikra and Surroundings
6. Settlement System
7. Conclusion

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