

ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS ALONG MIDDLE AND LOWER
COURSE OF MAYURKSHI RIVER: A SYSTEMATIC SURVEY
(CHALCOLITHIC TO MEDIEVAL PERIOD)

Research Synopsis Submitted by

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INTRODUCTION

The Mayurakshi river valley has a long history as well as archaeological evidences in the nearby settlements. The proposed research work aims at studying the development of archaeological settlements from chalcolithic to medieval period in the middle and lower course of the river. The middle and the lower course of the river will be surveyed extensively and intensively to understand the emergence as well as the development of sites in the river valley. The archaeological past will be studied in relation to past landscape. On the basis of published archaeological material there is no doubt that the area is potentially very rich for archaeological settlements. The Chalcolithic phase in West Bengal is roughly dated to middle of second millennium BC to about 500 BC which marks the emergence of village communities. The Early Historic period roughly constitutes the broad chronological span of 600BC -500 AD. The medieval in this study area is kept as a broad marker as there is yet no standardization of pottery or other cultural assemblages to distinguish between various stages of Medieval period in this part of the study area.

STUDY AREA

The study area encompasses the floodplains of the Mayurakshi river along with its tributaries and distributaries covering portions of districts of Birbhum and Murshidabad in the middle and lower courses (toposheets i.e. 73M/9, 73M/13, 79A/1). This course of river basically divided into three physiographic units i.e. Upper, Middle and Lower course on the basis of its physiographic as well as landscape characteristic. The places having 50 to 300mts. are denoted as Upper Basin, middle basin represents 25 to 50mts. and less than 25mts. denoted as Lower part of Basin. The availability of the fertile soil near river banks helps the emergence and development of the villages both sides of Mayurakshi River. The geomorphological formations are Lalgarrh and Rampurhat formations which are actually lateritic beds and older alluvium tracts which often intersect at various junctures of the landscape. This older alluvium deposit is found to the richest area of archaeological settlements. In case of Birbhum and Murshidabad districts, the Rampurhat formation in older alluvium deposit is called Kandi formation (Bhattacharya and Bannerjee). As multidisciplinary approach is very important in a systematic archaeological survey, geological and geomorphological background of explored sites will be taken into consideration for understanding the context and nature of sites. In the middle course left bank of Mayurakshi River the presence site Kotasur is very important to reconstruct the archaeological past of study area. The site (Latitude:23° 58' N Longitude:87° 45'E) situated in this region will serve as a type site of the study area.

GEOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUND OF MAYURAKSHI RIVER

The Mayurakshi River originating from Trikut hill, about 16 kilometres from Deoghar in Jharkhand State. It flows through Jharkhand and flows through Birbhum and Murshidabad Districts in West Bengal and ultimately meets into Hoogly River. The total length of the river is 250 Kilometers. The Birbhum district is well drained by a number of rivers and rivulets running in nearly every case from west to east with a slight southerly inclination. The 'Mor' or Mayurakshi river enters Birbhum from the Santhal Paraganas near the village of Haripur and flows through the centre of the district from west to east, passing two miles north of Suri and forming the southern boundary of the Rampurhat Sub-division. It leaves the district a little east of Gunutia and joins Dwarka which itself is a tributary of the Bhagirathi. There are some tributaries of Mayurakshi river i.e. Bakreswar, Brahmani, Dwarka and Kopai etc. All the distributaries of the Mayurakshi take off from the left bank. Before mixing with river Bhagirathi two major tributaries river 'Kopai' and the river Dwarka mixed with Mayurakshi near 'Chiruti' and near

Talgram respectively in West Bengal. In the eastern portion of its course it gives off distributaries known as Kama and Manikarnika Nalas. The river unites with the river Ajoy at Chapla in Dubrajpur then. The Bakreswar rises at the hot springs of the same name west of Siuri and after following a zig zag course eastwards, and receiving one by one the waters of almost the rivulets of south Birbhum, joins the Mayurakshi beyond eastern boundary of the district.

PREVIOUS WORKS

A few prehistoric sites were investigated by the Directorate of Archaeology, West Bengal. University of Calcutta, Kolkata and Visva Bharati. These explorations reflect the gradual development from the acheulian industry to the microlith industry (Chakraborty 1993, 1999, 2001, 2003). The concentration of Mesolithic hunter-gatherer in Birbhum was more along the banks of the rivers Ajay, Bakreswar and Kopai (Chakraborti 1993,1998-99,1999-2000,2001).

The knowledge about the transitional period from Mesolithic to Chalcolithic is very superficial and the Neolithic stage in the district is not distinctly identified. The evidence of protohistoric sites in Birbhum and elsewhere in West Bengal is furnished by plain and painted BRW potsherds. The term BRW sites are interchangeably used to denote the protohistoric/chalcolithic settlements. The first BRW site to be excavated in Birbhum was Mahisdal on the bank of Kopai (IAR-1963-64). The other excavated BRW sites in the district are Nanur(SAS.9), Haraipur (IAR-1965-660. Bahiri (Chakrabarti and S.J. Hasan,1982), Hatikra (IAR-1967-68) and Kotasur (IAR-1965-66). Excavation revealed that all these BRW settlements in Birbhum practiced agriculture and hence settled on the older alluvium flood plains of the rivers namely Ajay, Mayurakshi, Kopai and Bakreswar.

The survey undertaken by the University of Calcutta(IAR-1975-76)in the Mayurakshi-Bakreswar river valleys has revealed quite a few BRW sites with microlithic tool-kits in the Mayureswar, Suri, Sainthia, Bolpur, Nanur, Dubrajpur and Illambazar subdivisions. Between Ganutia and Kotasur, especially near the old course of the Mayurakshi near Sainthia a large number of BRW sherds were found. Explorations in the long stretch of older alluvium area between the Mayurakshi and Bakreswar have yielded a number of sites like Sridharpur, Kulura, Rasulpur, Ikra, Haripur, Ajinos, Abinaspur, Ushagram, Kaspai ,Januri, Rajnagar, Kultura, Chatra, Maldipi, Keora and Hattigra, all adjacent to each other, which presumably indicates that the Chalcolithic settlements grew up more

or less in a cluster(Roy, 1978). Only one reported BRW site, Kherur is mentioned in Murshidabad Distict (Chakrabarti,Gautam Sengupta,R.K.Chattopadhyaya and Nayanjot Lahiri,1993)

In all these sites ceramic types including BRW, black painted buff ware, chocolate ware, burnished red ware, burnished black ware have been found mainly along with a large number of microliths. However, detailed reports about these sites are lacking.

As compare to BRW settlements, the early historic settlements are few in Birbhum. The only note worthy settlements is Kotasur(Latitude:23° 58' N Longitude:87° 45' E) located on the left bank of the Mayurakshi river, which now flows about 8km down south from the settlement. The Kotasur site is a fortified settlement with a canal like ditch protecting the fortification wall and encircling the settlements (Chakrabarti. et.al 1981; Chattopadhyaya 1993-1994). Excavation was carried out at the site in 1985 and continued in 1986-87 by the Department of Ancient History, Culture and Archaeology, Visva Bharati University, Santiniketan under the guidance of N.C. Ghosh and Arun K.Nag. Five broad periods of cultural deposits have been identified at the site starting from the NBP period and continuing almost to eight century A.D.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

1. Location of Archaeological sites in study area.
2. Systematic documentation of the study area.
3. To emphasize on the development of the sites from chalcolithic period to medieval period.
4. To understand the locational criteria of the excavated site Kotasur and its importance in the region
5. Analysis of the artifact assemblage derived from the explored sites(surface collections) and a comparison with the excavated material of Kotasur
6. Reconstruction of past landscape through geoarchaeological studies in which archaeological sites developed.
7. To understand inter-site variability among sites within this region.

METHODOLOGY:

- Use of Toposheets to locate villages
- Intensive and extensive village to village survey

- Village to village interview and questionnaire survey
- Detailed documentation of artefactual assemblage found in each village and classifying there to reconstruct the chronology
- Reading literary sources-primary and secondary of the study area
- Museum study to make comparisons with surface explored remains
- Ethnographic studies among present day potter and ironsmith communities to draw probable analogies with the past.

So it can be classified into three stages-

Pre field work stage: This stage includes the collection of information and data regarding the river and the archaeological record through literature survey and reconnaissance survey. This stage also included the preparation of research framework and methods.

Fieldwork stage: During this stage the collected data or information will be verified by the field investigation or the primary survey among the villagers. An attempt will be made to understand previous existence of the river and its locational criteria of the settlements as well as archaeological evidences.

Post field work stage: During this stage field record are to be sorted and analyzed. And finally interpretation to be made in the thesis to have an understanding of a regional settlement system.

CHAPTERISATION

Chapter-I: INTRODUCTION

- Defining the proposed problem.
- Aims & objectives of the research.
- Methodology.
- Previous research.
- Lacunae of Previous research

- Archaeological background of the region.

Chapter-II: ECOLOGICAL BACKGROUND OF THE REGION

Chapter-III: ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS ALONG THE RIVER VALLEY

- Notion of sites
- Distribution of sites
- Chronology

Chapter-IV: ANALYSIS OF ARTIFACT ASSEMBLAGES.

- Pottery
- Miscellaneous artifacts.

Chapter-V: KOTASUR IN A REGIONAL PERSPECTIVE.

Chapter-VI: RECONSTRUCTION OF MAN-LAND RELATION OF THE REGION

Chapter-VII: CONCLUSION

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