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RESEARCH ARTICLE

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UNVEILING PREHISTORIC HUMAN OCCUPATION IN BALASORE DISTRICT OF ODISHA, INDIA: A PRELIMINARY STUDY IN KUANRAPURAMAHAL REGION

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ABSTRACT

This article presents the findings of a preliminary investigation conducted to explore the Stone Age culture in Kuanrapuramahal in Balasore district, located in the state of Odisha, India. The study aimed to shed light on the prehistoric human occupation of the region and provide insights into the technological, subsistence, and cultural practices of Stone Age communities. Through a combination of field surveys, artifact analysis, environmental studies, and chronological dating, this investigation sought to establish the preliminary understanding of the Stone Age culture in Balasore district in general.

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INTRODUCTION

Balasore district, located in the eastern state of Odisha, India, is rich and diverse, with evidence of human occupation dating back to ancient times. Balasore is the coastal district of Odisha which lies in the Northern Odisha. This region has witnessed the presence of various cultures and civilizations over millennia, leaving behind a wealth of archaeological sites and artifacts. The archaeology of Balasore district provides insights into the history, culture, and socio-economic aspects of the region. It has evidence of prehistoric human occupation, particularly from the Neolithic onwards. Numerous Neolithic artifacts have been reported in different parts of the district, though most of them have not been seriously studied. These artifacts suggest the transition period from hunter-gatherer to settled community. The historical period in Balasore district is marked by the influence of various dynasties and kingdoms. The region witnessed the rule of the Kalinga dynasty, followed by the Mauryas, Guptas, Bhaumakaras, Sailodbhavas, Somavamsis, Eastern Gangas, and Gajapatis. The archaeological remains from this period include temples, forts, palaces, and other architectural structures. Balasore district is home to several ancient temples and sacred sites that hold

religious and cultural significance. These temples showcase architectural styles and artistic traditions prevalent in different historical periods. Archaeological research and exploration are ongoing in Balasore district by the author, continually uncovering new insights into its past. These archaeological findings and studies contribute to a deeper understanding of the historical and cultural significance of the region within the broader context of Odisha's heritage. Although Balasore is rich in culture and heritage, no such experts have yet focused on the region's early prehistory that is the stone age culture. The likelihood of stone age settlement and sites, however, is increased by the natural context of the region, which includes several river and her tributary that flows in the Balasore district, 8.1 km of coastal seabed, and mountain slopes. This geographic singularity provides information and also raises the question of whether stone age culture sites will exist in Balasore. Additionally, the Balasore district borders Mayurbhanj, Keonjhar, Bhadrak, etc., where Stone Age culture sites have already been reported with the exception of Bhadrak. From the exploration, the author was able to trace out one of the Stone Age culture site which has given the evidence of several artifacts.

The site and Geographical Context: Balasore district contains Two Sub-division i.e. Balasore and Nilagiri. The place Nilagiri is located

in the western part of Balasore (Map 1). The area mainly comprises hills and plateau with laterite being the main soil type. The area consists of many small parts of mountains around the main hill. The present archaeological exploration was conducted one of the foot-hills of Nilagiri Mountain which has given the evidence of Stone Age cultural materials scattered in all over the site. The study area is near to the popular tourism place as well as a picnic spot of Balasore known as 'Blue Lake'. The study area is a portion of Nilagiri Hill locally known as 'Kuanrapura Mahal' (Lat. 21°54" Long. 86°78"). Kuanrapura Mahal – Blue Lake which is approx. 17 km from the main city of Balasore in the Nilagiri hill ranges. From last many decades the area is been under stone quarry. Continues legal and illegal quarries have created a lake namely blue lake. Near the lake in the quarry cuttings a greyish-sandy clay deposit capped with gravelly lateritic brownish soil comprising artifacts were noticed, except that in and around the area a few more artifacts were noticed on the surfaces which were further collected through random sampling.

revealed a variety of open air sites in the pedepains and foothills of the Nilagiri Hill range, spreading over an area of about 3634 square kilometres. The district is mainly drained by two major river systems, namely the Budhabalanga and Subarnarekha in the northern part of the district. The Budhabalanga River is originated from the Eastern slops of Similipal massif and Nilagiri mountain range of Odisha. The site lies in between the Budhabalnga River and the Sono River is main tributary of Budhabalanga River.



Map. 2. Close view of Bluelake

Lithic Assemblage composition: The site has given the evidences of 14 Artefacts and belongs into Middle Paleolithic. The Artifacts consists of mostly Handaxes, Cleaver like and Scraper, the artifact has been found in a very erosion context, totally 40 artifact are collected from the Foothill (Fig.2), Hill slope (Fig.3) and Hill top (Fig. 4). Majority of the Lithic Assemblage are prepared on raw material locally available and most dominating type is quartzite.



Fig. 2.

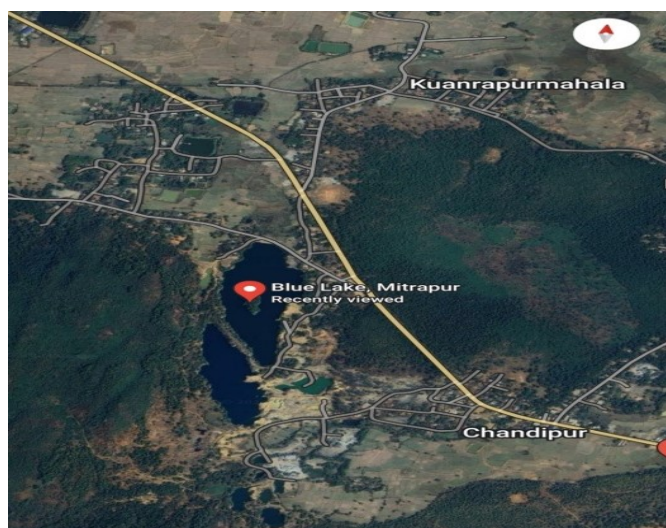


Fig. 3.



Map 1. Location of Nilagiri in Balsore

Physiographical Features of the Study Area: The site which lies near the area called as Kuanrapura Mahal. The area is famous for the tourist point of view and the site lies near the tourist place called Blue lake (Fig.1). The place is near about 10 km away from Nilagiri town and 12 km away from Remuna Block (Map 2). The present study area is height from 6 meter away main highway road.



Map. 2. Location of the Bluelake

Environmental Setting: Sono river Valley, a significant tributary of the Budhabalanga River in the Northern Balasore hill region, have



Fig. 4.

The details of the tools has given in the following table.

Sl.No	REG. No.	LENGTH (cm)	BREADTH (cm)	THICKNESS (cm)	BLANK TYPE	TYOPOLOGY
1	KPM-BLK/2023/01	12.5	9	6.7	CORE	CORE
2	KPM-BLK/2023/02	12	5.7	7	CORE	HAMMER
3	KPM-BLK/2023/03	15.7	9	5.4	CORE	HANDAXE
4	KPM-BLK/2023/04	13.7	8	5	FLAKE	KNIFE
5	KPM-BLK/2023/05	15	6.6	4.8	NATURAL	NATURAL
6	KPM-BLK/2023/06	12.5	6.7	3.3	FLAKE	POINT
7	KPM-BLK/2023/07	11.2	4	2.1	FLAKE	FLAKE
8	KPM-BLK/2023/08	16	11.5	6.7	CORE	HANDAXE
9	KPM-BLK/2023/09	15	7	4.2	UNCLEAR	CLEAVER LIKE
10	KPM-BLK/2023/10	13.3	7.1	5.5	HAMMER	HAMMER
11	KPM-BLK/2023/11	12.3	9.8	4.1	FLAKE	CLEAVER LIKE
12	KPM-BLK/2023/12	15	7 (UPPER), 2.8 (LOWER)	4	FLAKE	FLAKE
13	KPM-BLK/2023/13	12.2	8.4	3.4	FLAKE	SCRAPER CUM KNIFE
14	KPM-BLK/2023/14	10.8	9	7	HAMMER/ CORE	HAMMER/CORE

KPM-1: It is a core tool consisting of Cortical core with two flake scar. This too appears highly weathered and patinated.

KPM-2: It is a core tool consisting of highly weather the top layer is flaking out two small flakes in one of the end is noticed, most probably because of the Hammer activity.

KPM-3: It is a core tool consisting of highly weather pointed and sharp edge.

KPM-4: It is a flake tool consisting of greyish-brown patination on the surface proximal edge is use as a knife as edge three flake scar is visible on dorsal face diffused bulb.

KPM-5: It is a natural tool consisting of natural.

KPM-6: It is a flake tool consisting of dorsal face has four flake scar and brownish patination ventral face has blackish patination prominent bulb.

KPM-7: It is a flake tool consisting of debiter flake of reduction sequence diffuse bulb

KPM-8: It is a core tool consisting of six flake scar and highly weather pointed tool.

KPM-9: It is an unclear tool consisting of one end of the artefact has cleaver like edge.

KPM-10: It is a Hammer tool consisting of three small size flake and battering marks noticed of the end.

KPM-11: It is a flake tool consisting of highly weathered three flake are on the dorsal face, diffused bulb blackish patination on the ventral face.

KPM-12: It is a flake tool consisting of debiter flake of reduction sequence diffused bulb.

KPM-13: It is a flake tool consisting of three flake scar on the dorsal face prominent bulb and broken striking platform distal end is use as working edge.

KPM-14: It is a Hammer/Core Hammer/Core tool consisting of one flake is noticed on the surface which most have served to shape the Hammer.

Lithic Assemblage: All the artifacts found in the site were in weathered condition still the flake scars are visible, a blackish patination was noticed in some of the artifacts, further the artifacts are classified in following categories:

Artifact Type	Number of Artifacts	Length	Width	Thickness
Handaxe	3	15.7	9	5.4
Cleaver like	4	12.3	9.8	4.1
Scarper cum knife	3	12.2	8.4	3.4
Knife	4	13.7	8	5
Point	2	12.5	6.7	3.3
Core	2	10.8	9	7
Flake	4	11.2	4	2.1

Handaxe: Three handaxes were found as part of the assemblage, all the handaxes were core based. Mean dimension length-15.7, width-9, and thickness-5.4. Mostly in weathered condition but the flake scars are visible clearly, total 5-6 flake scar were observed in all the handaxes.

Cleaver like: Four cleavers like flake based artifacts were found in the area. Mean dimension of length-12.3, width-9.8, and thickness-4.1. Dorsal face is consisted of 3-4 flake scars.

Scraper cum Knife: Three scrapers cum knife with blackish patination were found, mean dimension of length-12.2, width-8.4, and thickness-3.4. All the three are end flake based 3-4 flake scar retouches on three edges were observed.

Knife: Four knives comparatively fresh in condition edges are damaged flake based artifacts 5-6 flake scar. Mean dimension length-13.7, width-8 and thickness-5.

Point: Two flake based points partially patinated were found with mean dimension length-12.5, width-6.7, and thickness-3.3.

Core: Two cores highly weathered condition one with 3 flake scar another with 2 flake scar.

Flake: Four debitage unused flake highly weathered. Mean dimension length-11.2, width-4, and thickness-2.1.



DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

On the basis of the typological analysis of the tool found from the site seems to have belonging to the end of lower Paleolithic period and mostly dominating characteristics of Middle Palaeolithic period. The artifacts contents mostly Choppers and Cleavers types tools with heavy partition and in some cases water closing monks can be also seen, the artifacts recovering soil is are reddish-yellow soil which is lobby pebbly contains. Artifacts are mostly from the secondary contest during the quarrying activity, this Pebbles sign artifacts uses as the natural stones were separated and deposited at separated area from the blocks stones. The Natural Stone observations suggests there are two kinds of stones naturally available in the area, one comes in a block patterns which is highly Queried in the recent time, the second type of stones is a 'Cobble' size over shaped stone. It is weathered and coming from Colluvium sense. This stone type is particularly used for making stone artifacts, till now. The stone artifacts which have been recovered are mostly form recent queried sites. Some of the pebbles were noticed to have quarts formation in side then. The present research emphasizes the need for further research and analysis to gain a more comprehensive understanding of prehistoric human occupation in the region and to enrich the understanding of the Stone Age culture in Balasore district.

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