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PALAEO LITHIC SITE AT VENKATAGIRI (ANDHRA PRADESH) - A CASE STUDY

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

**ABSTRACT**

The prehistoric Archaeology is derived Palaeolithic, Mesolithic and Chalcolithic in general. As per the art factual and geological sources, the stone age is divided into Early or Lower palaeolithic, middle palaeolithic and upper palaeolithic. Because of a great change in the climate during during the plstocene period, a physical environment came into existence in which man emerged for the first time. The earliest remains so far discovered prove Africa to be the original home of mankind.

The palaeolithic site at Venkatagiri has explored earlier by Manlae and Sudarsan. Both of them have collected Early and Middle Palaeolithic implements from the site. In the southern coastal Andhra, prehistoric situations are known from most of the river vallies. The areas are drained by the Suvarnamukhi river, were explored by Dr. M.L.K. Murthy of Deccan college of Pune. The intensive explorations were conducted by the Dept. of Ancient Indian History and Archaeology, Acharya Nagarjuna university under the guidance of Prof. B.R.Subrahmanyam has brought to light a rich palaeolithic settlements in this region. This site which is explored previously have been taken into consideration for the present study.

Palaeolithic implements occurred all along the bank of the Swarnamukhi river within the preceeding village. But the implements are found more in number on the left bank of a stream. All these features are vividly discussed in the present paper. By taking in to consideration of the flake scars, the present site may be designated as Late Acheulean

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INTRODUCTION

When the prehistoric Archaeology in India is devided or grouped into palaeolithic, Mesolithic and Chalcolithic. It is generally understood that man first knew the use of stone, but not copper or iron. In this stone age, other perishable objects like bone and wood might have been used, but as only stone has survived, it is called by the most prominent object or artifact of period. According to the geological and artifactual evidence, this stone age is divided into a) Early or Lower palaeolithic b) Middle palaeolithic and Upper palaeolithic for which stratigraphical as well as cultural evidence is available from a number of regions. Geographically three stone ages wre fairly widespread almost co-extensive, baring high lands and thickly forested regions and purely coastal or deltaic regions. Because of great change in the climate during the Pleistocene period, there came into existence on earth each a physical environment in which man emerged for the time. The earliest remains so far discovered prove African to be the original home of mankind.

Prehistory starts with the Early stone age or Lower palaeolithic when manis supposed to make his debut in India and gradually made stone tools for his security and living . These early tools made of quartzite are crude and they can be classified into handaxes and pebble tools. People Of Early stone age lived along the banks of the rivers and at the foot of low hills for raw material in order to prepare the tools. The of number of Bos and Eleohas was larger in comparision with other animals. The time and duration of this early stone age in India may be placed between Lower pleistocene and upper pleistocene.

The first clue to the existence of the middle stone age or middle palaeolithic culture by stratigraphy and typology was obtained at Nevasa. As definite proof of independent existence was obtained from Nevasa, it was called Nevasian. From both the chronological and typological significance, it is now finally known as Middle Palaeolithic. Taking the techniques, typology, raw material and stratigraphy into consideration, this culture is different from the preceding and succeeding ones. The tools of this culture are of flake culture and they are smaller than those Early palaeolithic culture. They are of different types such as scrapers, borers or awls, points, small choppers, small handaxes, very rarely small cleavers, burins or burin facet tools. Scrapers were generally such as agate, chert, jasper and chalcedony. It succeeds the handaxe industry and precedes blade and burin industry.

The upper Palaeolithic is the most controversial and least known phase of Indian History. This culture consists of blades and burin tools. Tools of this type were discovered even earlier, but as a component of district culture they were recognised by R. B. Foote. Excavations and explorations in various places of Andhra Pradesh have yielded definite, stratigraphical, archaeological evidence to designate this culture as upper palaeolithic.

THE SITE ITS ENVIRONS

Venkatagiri is a small taluk head quarter town in Nellore District. This referred to prehistoric site earlier by Manlae and Sudarsan. Both of them have collected early and middle palaeolithic implements from the site. It is because of fact that early and middle palaeolithic implements were collected by them in regular stratified horizons. That this locality invited that the attention for the purpose of the present work.

The Swarnamukhi river which originates in this beyond flows through the village dividing into two parts. Palaeolithic implements occur all along the bank within the preceding of the village. But the implements are found more in number on the left bank of the stream, a little downstream of the temple. The stratigraphy exposed the selection of the locality on the artefact collections therefore are described below.

The Venkatagiri town is situated in the front of the Tirumalai hills. Consequently the river is supplied with the ample load carried on the bed. This explains the huge quantities of pebbles present in the valley. It is further observed that a fortified majority are quartzite pebbles derived from the Cuddapah formations in the Tirumalai hills. The pebbles are all well rounded and water worn there by indicating that it was a water laying deposit. Lower palaeolithic implements are collected from the surface from site conglomerate. Where the middle palaeolithics occur on the top of the loose gravel wherever the overlying silt has been washed away.

STONE AGE INDUSTRY

The prehistoric site of Venkatagiri has yielded Lower palaeolithic and middle palaeolithic tool types. The lower palaeolithic industry consists of 1) hand-axes 2) cleavers 3) discoids 4) choopers 5) flakes 6) levalloisium cores 7) levalloisium flakes and picks. The middle palaeolithic industry on the other hand has the following tool types: 1) Miniature hand-axes 2) Scrapers 3) Borers 4) Cores 5) Levalloisium flakes and 6) Flakes. All the tools are found on the bed in the riverine deposits. These tools may have been involved when the gravel was in the formation under circumstances. It would be natural to expect water worn specimens in the collection.

For the manufacture of the both early and middle palaeolithic tool types preferred the prehistoric man. Among the quartzites, we find brown grey pale green and dark brown varieties. Further it is observed pale green and grayish varieties are fine grained than the others. Such fine grained quartzites were specially preferred for the manufacture of Middle palaeolithic artifacts. Various techniques were used for purpose of fabricating the early and middle palaeolithic tools. The techniques that could be identified on the implements are a) the hammer stone technique b) soft hammer technique c) prepared core technique d) retouching.

The artefacts collected on the site may be broadly divided in two categories taking techno-morphological factors into consideration. The broad divisions are Early palaeolithic and Middle palaeolithic tools. These tools are shown under the following tables:

TYPOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF THE ARTEFACTS

Table – I: EARLY PALAEOLOTHIC ARTEFACTS

S.No.	Tool Type	Total	%
1.	Hand – Axes		
	a) Pointed	12	16.43
	b) Broad Pointed	4	5.47
	c) Long Pointed	1	1.38

	d) Triangulate	5	6.83
	e) Oval	4	5.47
	f) Long Oval	1	1.38
2.	Cleavers	1	1.38
3.	Choopers	1	1.38
4.	Discoids	2	2.73
5.	Pick	1	1.38
6.	Flakes	3	4.10
7.	Levolloisn Cores	5	6.83
8.	Levolloisn Flakes	3	4.10
	Total	43	58.86

Table – II: EARLY PALAEOLOTHIC AFTEFACTS :

S.No.	Tool Type	Total	%
1.	Miniature Hand – Axes	4	5.47
2.	Serapers	13	17.80
3.	Borer	1	1.38
4.	Cores	4	5.47
5.	Flakes	7	9.58
6.	Levolloisn Flakes	1	1.38
	Total	30	41.10

TABLE – III: EARLY PALAEOLOTHIC ARTEFACTS

S.No	Tool Type	Maximum			Minimum			Average Size		
		L	B	T	L	B	T	L	B	T
1	Hand – Axes									
	a) Pointed	13	8.5	4.4	7.7	5.3	2.0	10.18	6.48	3.25
	b) Broad Pointed	13	10.2	4.8	8.2	5.5	2.5	10.82	8.20	3.85
	c) Long Pointed	8.5	4.3	2.4	8.5	4.3	2.4	8.50	4.30	2.40
	d) Triangulate	10.7	8.2	5.4	7.5	6.1	3.1	9.54	7.01	3.82
	e) Oval	11.0	8.3	3.3	7.5	6.0	2.2	9.12	7.17	2.72
	f) Long Oval	9.3	5.3	2.2	9.3	5.3	2.2	9.30	5.30	2.20
2	Cleavers	8.7	5.8	2.9	8.7	5.8	2.9	8.70	5.80	2.90
3	Choopers	11.0	6.4	4.0	11.0	6.4	4.0	11.00	6.40	4.00
4	Discoids	7.9	7.3	4.0	6.90	6.8	2.5	7.40	7.05	3.25
5	Pick	9.9	7.0	3.9	9.90	7.0	3.9	9.90	7.00	3.90
6	Flakes	11.6	6.1	2.6	6.20	4.3	1.1	8.50	5.13	1.96
7	Levolloisn Cores	9.0	5.3	2.5	6.20	4.4	2.2	7.70	5.00	2.32
8	Levolloisn Flakes	5.8	5.4	1.8	5.30	3.7	1.0	5.60	4.56	1.33

TABLE – IV: MIDDLE PALAEOLOTHIC ARTEFACTS

S.No	Tool Type	Maximum			Minimum			Average Size		
		L	B	T	L	B	T	L	B	T
1	MINI ATURE HAND – AXES :									
	a) Broad Pointed	7.2	5.5	2.8	7.2	5.5	2.8	7.2	5.5	2.8
	b) Long Pointed	7.6	4.2	2.2	7.6	4.2	2.2	7.6	4.2	2.2
	c) Long oval	6.5	4.5	2.2	6.3	3.7	1.9	6.4	4.1	2.05
2	SCR APERS	9.1	5.2	2.7	4.9	2.9	0.9	7.5	4.54	2.12
3	BORER	4.0	3.5	0.4	4.0	3.5	0.4	4.0	3.5	0.40

4	CORES	7.5	5.5	4.5	5.0	3.6	1.9	6.1	4.17	3.17
5	FLAKES	8.3	4.3	1.8	4.9	2.5	1.0	6.17	3.41	1.30
6	LEVOLLOISN FLAKES	7.5	7.2	3.9	7.5	7.2	3.9	7.50	7.20	2.90

Conclusion

From the description in preceding chapters it is amply clear that the lower palaeolithic assemblage at Venkatagiri is dominated by the presence of Hand-axes which constitute 42.6% of total. Therefore Venkatagiri may be an Acheulean site. The nature of the Acheulean industry whether lower or upper may be determined by taking into consideration the flake scars count and the T/B of the hand-axes.

EARLY PALAEOOLITHIC ARTIFACTS : -

S.No.	Hand-axes types	Average number of flake scars	T/B
1.	Pointed	15.3	0.47
2.	Broad Pointed	15.0	0.47
3.	Long pointed	13.0	0.58
4.	Triangulate	15.5	0.54
5.	Oval	18.2	0.37
6.	Long Oval	16.0	0.40

MIDDLE PALAEOOLITHIC HAND – AXES :

S.No.	Hand-axes types	Average number of flake scars	T/B
1.	Broad Pointed	13.0	0.47
2.	Long pointed	19.0	0.52
3.	Long Oval	17.0	0.53

From the above table it is clear that many of the handaxes (31) are upper Acheulean character. Therefore the Venkatagiri industry is an upper Acheulean. But the presence of Levulloid element and also miniature handaxes and cleavers in the makeup of assembly needs exploration. Normally the miniature tool types and Levulloid technique are taken as indication of middle palaeolithic industry. But in the present context the presence of middle palaeolithic may be discounted on the ground that there are not many typical middle palaeolithic tool types such as scrapers, points, borers etc., in the assemblage. Therefore the assemblage cannot be taken as a typical middle palaeolithic. Instead of taking about the consideration it would not be far wrong to describe the Venkatagiri assemblage as essentially upper Acheulean character. But the presence of Levulloid element in substantial extent would require a qualifying term such as Levulloid Acheulean.

To bring out the different association of Levulloid technique with a late Acheulean industry, it is the important contribution of the Venkatagiri terrace site. In Andhra Pradesh upper palaeolithic sites are known in great numbers. Bearing perhaps to the north most districts, Srikakulam and Vijayanagaram upper Acheulean sites are widely distributed in Andhra Pradesh.

In West Godavari Commode reported the presence of lower palaeolithic handaxes in the bud of Godavari near Polavaram. The East Godavari district Cammade has mentioned the occurrence of palaeolithic handaxes at Ramachandrapuram and Jaggayyapet, Nandigama of Krishna district. Robert Bruce Foote, Rev. Manley, T.S.R. Murthy have discovered a large number of palaeolithic sites in Guntur, Prakasam and Nellore. Cammade and Burkitt published in their classical articles the discoveries of four climatic changes and contemporary stone age industries. The series of these tools are essentially lower palaeolithic.

In Guntur district Soundara Rajan discovered the quantities of lower palaeolithic implements at Nagarjunakonda, Karempudi belonging to upper Acheulean in character. Outside of Coastal Andhra upper Acheulean handaxes were discovered by Thimma Reddy at around 25 sites in the area of Sagileru and Bokkineru valleys. Some of the sites occurred in well stratified contexts. In Nalgonda, Mahabubnagar and Warangal districts handaxes and other implements are upper Acheulean in character. So the above details could be enough to make it amply clear that the upper Acheulean industry are widely distributed in Andhra Pradesh. K.D. Benerji discovered the lower palaeolithic implements at more than 200 sites in the areas of Satyavedu, Nagulapuram, Nagari and Veligonda hills. He was also investigated in the areas of Narmada river and Sabarmathi valley and discovered the evidence of lower palaeolithic

industry in A.P. belong to upper pleistocene. Although no palaeolithic implements have been discovered by him in the lower Narmada vaaey, such discoveries had been made earlier by H.D.Sankalia and Zuener in the Sabarmati and Mahi rivers.

The middle palaeolithic tools are ordinarily collected in the different parts of South India. The best examples are furnished by Navasa in Maharastra and Kurnool in A.P. In Kurnool district several middle palaeolithic sites are known. Just as in Kurnool in Venkatagiri as well the middle palaeolithic artefacts were made and different varieties of quartz consequently their tools look longer in size than these made by crypto-crystalline silica elsewhere in South India such as Maharastra. In general the middle palaeolithic site in South India belong to this category when named such or not. The continuity of the acheulean levollois in to the frame work of middle palaeolithic and denote a general continuity of tool tradition.

In comparison with the early acheulean sites like Chirki, Hunsgi which gave a mean value for the ratio of $T/B=0.55$ and have less than 10 flake scars, the present assemblage with more than 15 scars and T/B ratio less than 0.50 may be designated as Late Acheulean. So the present site, VENKATAGIRI described as Late Acheulean.

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