INTRODUCTION

Cuddapah district lies between 13° 43' and 15° 14' Northern Latitude and 77° 55' and 79° 29' Eastern Longitude covering an area of about 5,935 square miles. It is enclosed by the Nallamalais on the north, Velikondas on the east, Palakondas on the south and Arvamalais on the west, all the mountain ranges belonging to the Eastern ghats. The interior plain region is studded with isolated ridges and clusters of hills giving rise to many beautiful valleys. These hill ranges are formed of massive quartzites or quartzitic sandstones and slates or shales belonging to the Cuddapah system. The important rivers draining the region are the Pennar, Papagani, Cheyyair and the Sugiloru. The area receives an average rain fall of 2773". The vegetation grown in the above valleys is of Dry deciduous and Tropical thorn forests type.

The richness of the prehistoric cultures was little known until the present study took place. Some isolated discoveries had earlier been made. The first discovery of pre-historic relics in the form of palaeoliths was made by C.A. Oldham in Rayachoti taluk as far back as 1864. Then Robert Bruce Foote who covered the southern part of the district in his geological survey revisited (1891 A.D.) a few of Oldham’s sites and made fresh finds. He collected palaeoliths from the laterite gravels in the central part of Rayachoti taluk and found a factory site of a flake culture at Vemula which he assigned to the Neolithic period. The district Gazetteer of Cuddapah published in 1965 mentions the discovery of palaeoliths from Kalsapadu, Chitval and Pallampur by one Macleod, possibly a contemporary Civil servant.

The prehistoric studies in the adjoining Kurnool district by R.B. Foote, and later by R.C. Durkitt and L.A. Cammiade brought to light the palaeolithic and mesolithic cultures. A systematic survey of the
same region, recently, by Dr. K. Isaac yielded much new evidence in support of the cultural sequence earlier proposed by Burkitt and Cammias. In the Nellore district F.D. Manley had made a vast collection of palaeolithic implements from the laterite gravels. In the south, near Madras, R.B. Foote had discovered evidence of Acheulian culture as early as the sixties of the last century. Further evidence for this culture was brought to light by the work of De Terra and Paterson in 1935. But Cuddapah region remained unexplored all these years.

Therefore, the writer undertook a systematic exploration of the district. The aim was to bring out, little known pre-historic cultures to light and reconstruct the cultural sequence of the district against the background of those known from Kurnool, Nellore and Madras.

The scope of the present study was confined to stone age cultures. Explorations were carried out along the rivers Sagileru and its tributaries, and Penneru, Kundair, Papagini and Cheyyair. Forty-six stone age sites in the vicinity of 28 villages were located. More attention was paid to the river Sagileru and its tributaries which have exceptionally well preserved implementiferous deposits. Stone artifacts belonging to Early and Middle Stone Ages are lying on the banks all along the course of Sagileru. At many places such as Vaddemamu the artifacts are spread all over the region between the hills and the foothills. The collection of stone tools was made from selected spots at a number of places.

Of the 46 sites discovered 34 yielded Early Stone Age artifacts; of these seven have stratified deposits (T. 1) while the rest are either from river beds, alluvial surface or foot hills. Middle Stone Age tools were found at 20 sites. At four of these, they are found in stratified deposits while at the remaining they occur on surface. Eight of the surface sites are very rich and appear to be factory sites. The Late
Stone Age culture is known from four sites of these only. One site has stratified deposit while two are factory sites.

The Early Stone Age culture includes typical Sahanian pebble tools and flake choppers, bifaces, unifaces, cleavers, discoids and retouched flake tools. The pebble choppers, however, part and parcel of the Abbevillian-Acheulean tradition. The raw material is mainly quartzite but quartzitic sandstone has also sometimes been used. These rocks are locally available in the shape of waterworn pebbles and chunks derived from quartzites and quartzitic sandstones of Cuddapah system.

The Middle Stone Age is a flake culture and includes edged and pointed tools made on flakes. A few bifacial tools are also present. Quartzite persisted as the chief raw material in this culture except at Vemulaa where chert of various colours, available as pebbles derived from the conglomerates, has been used. Thus unlike the Godavari and Narmada valleys there was no significant change in raw material during the Middle Stone Age in Cuddapah area.

The tool types in the Late Stone Age culture comprise blades, blunted back blades, a variety of scrapers and burins. The raw material is chiefly quartz. Occasional use of chert and quartzite is also noticed. Quartz is locally available in the shape of small pebbles derived from veins occurring in shale. The industry is non-geometric in character.

The evidence for all these cultures is derived from surface and at a few places, from river deposits. To find out their stratigraphical relationship and to know the extent of implementiferous gravel deposits, river sections at three places were scraped: one on the right bank of the Segileru near Sandipalle, and two near Vaddemaram on the Bodhineru.

The section at Sandipalle showed three distinct implementiferous gravels each sealed by a sand deposit of white calcareous nature.
sequence of layers is as follows:

The basal gravel resting directly on the weathered bed rock (shale) contained pebble tools, crude bifaces, cores and flakes, all of Early Stone Age. They were heavily weathered to a dull white colour. This gravel is overlain by a coarse white calcareous sand (I). A thin layer of second gravel overlies the coarse sand (I). This gravel yielded Middle Stone Age artifacts, mainly retouched and unretouched flakes. Overlying this gravel (I) is another calcareous coarse sand (II). This layer is covered by another gravel (III) which yielded Late Stone Age artifacts. A brown silty sand (III) seals the third gravel.

This is the only site so far discovered in South India where a continuous cultural sequence from Early Stone Age to Late Stone Age is known in a stratified context.

One of the two sections (nullah) scraped on the right bank of the Bokkineru, a tributary of the Sagileru near Vaddemamu had the Early Stone Age artifacts superficially struck up in the boulder conglomerate. The tools are patinated to a dull white colour.

Another section on the right bank of the Bokkineru itself showed two gravels each sealed by a sandy silt. The lowermost deposit is a boulder conglomerate (I) which is highly cemented in its lower part. It yielded Early Stone Age artifacts consisting of cores, flakes, pebble tools, bifaces and cleavers. This conglomerate is overlain by a silty sand (I). Another gravel (II) composed of very small to medium size pebbles overlying the silty sand (I) contained Middle Stone Age artifacts. They include retouched and unretouched flakes. Finally a brown sandy silt (II) sealed the second gravel. On the top of this silt were found Late Stone Age artifacts.
Detical analysis of handaxe group of tools including cleavers was undertaken on the lines adopted by D.J. Roe (1964: 245–269) for his study of British Palaeolithic Cultures. The inferences derived from the present study do not agree with those of Roe. Statistical comparisons have been made between Early, Middle and Late Stone Age retouched flake tools. Vemul industry has been treated separately because of its distinctive raw material and size of the tools, to show its differences from the Middle Stone Age industries from the rest of the district and from the Late Stone Age industry.

The noteworthy points of the study are: (1) the distinct character of the above three cultures is confired by the stratified depositions; (2) the Early Stone Age industry is mainly a biface tradition; (3) the Middle Stone Age is a flake culture; (4) the typology differentiates the Middle Stone Age from the Early Stone Age industry; (5) the Late Stone Age culture is distinguished by both its raw material and typology from the earlier cultures.

A detailed treatment of the geographical and archaeological evidence collected during the study is given in ensuing chapters.