Chapter VIII

Discussion and Conclusion
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The present investigation has not only brought to light a rich plethora of archaeological heritage in the form of varieties of archaeological sites and remains, but also probably for the first time has highlighted the cultural personality of the area. The area is geographically divided broadly into two major distinct divisions following the submergence area of both the mega dams i.e. Narmada Sagar Dam and Sardar Sarovar Dam. The Narmada Sagar Dam submergence area that constitutes district Khandwa (erstwhile East Nimar district) comprise mostly hilly tracks and rocky barren land with dry deciduous forest and a narrow strip of fertile cultivated land in the form of alluvium along both the banks of the Narmada. In contrast to this the Sardar Sarovar Dam submergence area that constitutes districts Khargone and Barwani (both part of erstwhile West Nimar district) and district Dhar comprise mostly a large stretch of alluvium in the form of fertile land confining to both the banks of the Narmada. Interestingly these broad distinct geographical features in both the areas have played a major role in patterning the various archaeological sites across the landscape both in time and space. The patterning of sites as noticed in NSP area shows a large number of prehistoric, historical and medieval sites, but almost complete absence of chalcolithic site. In contrast to this the SSP submergence area is dominated with chalcolithic sites with succeeding historical occupations. Strangely hardly any prehistoric site has been noticed in SSP area except few as at Chichili and Khaparkhera. The NSP area was suitable for the prehistoric occupations probably because of availability of raw material and also suitable environmental conditions for the prehistoric hunter-gatherer to thrive in the area. But certainly this area was not appropriate for an agricultural based economy of chalcolithic community and also non-availability of large pasture land for domestication of animals. Whereas the SSP area i.e. downstream of the Narmada where the fertile alluvium lies on both the banks has supported both the agriculture and domestication based economy of chalcolithic community. It is noteworthy to remark here that concentration of chalcolithic occupations in central India is confined to the lower reaches of the Narmada where long stretches of cultivable and pasture land is available on both the banks of the Narmada. Further it seems plausible that following the chalcolithic sites the historical sites flourished in the lower reaches of the Narmada and subsequently it started moving towards the upstream of the river which is now noticed in NSP area.
The highlights of the prehistoric remains of the area has established beyond doubt that it has the continuous human occupations right from Acheulian to Mesolithic cultural phase. As regards the Upper Palaeolithic site is concerned mention may be made of the site at Khaparkhera. Here it is probably for the first time the evidence of ostrich egg shell manufacturing site has been brought to light. The radiometric date obtained from the charcoal from the layer has dated the site to $15,680 \pm 350$ yrs BP (A 9446). Besides, ostrich egg shell beads at different stages of manufacturing, this site has also yielded the evidence of drills for making holes in beads. Use of fire is also seen from the charcoal and burnt red patches.

The most significant aspect of Nimar area is the chalcolithic cultural evidence which is unique when compared with the evidence that has come so far from the central India. The following cultural features that characterises the Nimar chalcolithic are as below.

1. The Nimar chalcolithic sites are mainly based on both agriculture and cattle breeding economy. This has been evidenced from the grains recovered from chalcolithic levels besides large volumes of faunal remains. The study of the faunal remains from Pipri has shown that besides cattle breeding, hunting of wild animals also formed part of the food economy. The evidence of different size fish hooks establishes that fishing also formed part of food economy.
2. Chalcolithic sites in Nimar area are mostly confined to the fertile alluvial track on both the banks of the Narmada in the Sardar Sarovar Dam submergence area.
3. The site ranges from seasonal to permanent nature of occupation. For example Pipri, Utawad, Karondia and Newarakheri are probably seasonal occupation, where as Chikhalda (Mohanty et. al. 1999; Mohanty and Ota 2009), chichli and many other sites are regular occupation. These seasonal occupied sites were the chalcolithic people with pastoral based economy and moving with animal heard and settling on the available bad land topography that supports good pasture land in the alluvial tract.
4. The most noteworthy characteristic feature of Nimar chalcolithic is the occurrence of dwelling pits. A variety of dwelling pits both in size and shape have been noticed. All the floors are circular in shape and vary both in diameter and depth. Some of the dwelling pits have stepped to get down to the bottom. One of the dwelling pits noticed at Pipri has the lime painted floor. Some of the
pits have shown the evidence of repeated use. Besides the dwelling pits, circular sunken floors have also been noticed. Some of the sunken floors also contain fire places.

5. Evidence that is unique to Nimar chalcolithic culture is occurrence of community fire places as evidenced both at Utawad and Pipri. This probably suggests a band or group occupation.

6. Symbolic human burials with palash leaf impression on the bottom of the burial pot as found at Utawad are another significant evidence.

7. The most striking evidence that has come is the use of heavy duty lithic artefacts on quartzite alongside microliths. This evidence has come from Pipri and Utawad. This occurrence of larger size lithic artefacts on quartzite in good numbers has probably come for the first time from any of the chalcolithic sites in the country. These heavy-duty stone artefacts comprise utilised flakes, varieties of scrapers and choppers etc.

Though there is certain affinity with the ceramics of Malwa cultures particularly painting designs, the other aspects as mentioned above seems to be different from the typical Malwa culture in the area. This prompts us to think in the line of regional variation which is unique to Nimar area and therefore may be termed as “Nimar Chalcolithic”. Probably this difference in cultural material is because of the economy and adaptation strategy to the local environment. However this is required to be further investigated in the light of present evidences to establish the existence of a distinct chalcolithic culture in the area.

The succeeding Iron Age phase which is very scanty in this area has only been evidenced from the excavations at Khaparkhera. This evidence has come in the form of two burials and some house remains. However future investigation can only substantiate and establish this cultural phase in Nimar area.

The historical evidence which is wide spread in the area establishes that the Nimar area in central Narmada valley was once most wide spread human occupation in this stretch of Narmada, probably because of the availability of extensive fertile land in central India. The evidence of a large number of coins, seals and workshop of gold smith and copper smith from the excavations at Khaparkhera shows that it was a trading centre probably connecting north and south peninsular India. Further the site at
Khaparkhera falls on the main trade route to south. The large coin hoards found at Pati (Bhatt 2007) in district Barwani, and from Barwani district headquarter (Sharma et.al. 2007) establishes the fact that the area was coming on the main trade route to south.

The excavation at Khaparkhera has established beyond doubt that the area is extremely rich in historical settlements. The noteworthy evidences that have come from the excavations at Khaparkhera include granary, house complexes, well laid drainage and sewerage system. Besides, the excavation has given the evidence of craft specialisation at this site that includes copper smith’s workshop. The evidence of gold smith can be presumed from the cold cast for manufacturing gold beads. Bone points were manufactured in large scale at the site.

The interesting feature that has been noticed as regards the location of the historical sites is that sites are located on both the banks of the Narmada at the point where river can be crossed easily either by boat or simple crossing by foot at the place of low energy rapids. This interesting phenomenon can be understood in the light of trading activities. This reminds the view of Allchin and Allchin (1962) who terms it as ‘archaeology of a river crossing’. It is described that wherever there is the convenient portion of a larger river where it can be crossed, sites used to be found on both the banks of the river. This situation has been noticed at Narmada as it can only be crossed at certain points only during historical period.

Besides the above evidences that highlights the personality of Nimar area, there are other archaeological evidences that have brought to light during investigation include number of temple remains, loose sculptures belonging to 12th and 13th century AD. Memorial stones and iron smelting sites have also been brought to light confining to NSP submergence area.

Lastly, the present investigation which forms part of the salvage archaeological operation in the submergence area of two mega dam projects on the Narmada has experienced the volume and nature of such destruction that takes place in such large scale dam projects. Presently, there are thousands of medium to large size dam projects underway in different parts of the country, and mostly on the main rivers and their major tributaries. These projects not only affect the landscape which will be inundated by the reservoir, but these also affect the surrounding regions through irrigation and canal networks, which in turn puts more and more land under intense cultivation and
supports a growing human population. All of these dam projects are government funded and sometimes internationally funded. (Ota 2000)

Almost all the dams so far built in the country suffer from the lack of cultural heritage studies. Take the example of the largest dam complex in the world, the Narmada, where literally thousands of archaeological sites are getting destroyed and also threatened to be destroyed due to submergence and other related activities. In spite of knowing this fact, neither thoroughly planned investigation has been carried out, nor is any substantial initiative being taken to salvage the remains properly. Narmada is not the only example in India. In fact over the last sixty years the same situation is being repeated all over the country. Numerous dam projects have had no survey whatsoever and we have no idea of the number of archaeological sites which have been destroyed, but their numbers must certainly run into the thousands. Only in one case, Nagarjuna Sagar in Andhra Pradesh, was there salvage operations of archaeological sites in the impoundment zone, including the moving and re-creation of temples. However, this was due to the fact that then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru took a personal interest in the subject.

Although the Narmada valley has been studied by archaeologists for over 60 years, its vastness guarantees that very little is actually known about the archaeology of the Narmada. When out of total stretch of over 700 km of the Narmada, more than 53% of the river valley will be submerged only due to two mega dams; then what would remain for the archaeologists and historians to reconstruct the history of the area would just a minuscule. The Narmada runs through steep foothill slopes and broad valley plains, but it is in the latter areas that most archaeological sites are to be found. But these are the very areas where dams are constructed. Therefore, it is estimated that about 65% of the areas with the highest archaeological potential will be inundated by the dams.

Unfortunately no specific legislation exists in India, either at the national or state level, for CHM in development projects. Consequently, the Archaeological Survey of India, the government agency responsible for the protection of India’s cultural heritage is almost powerless to stop the destruction at the hands of major development projects such as dams. Furthermore the public sector (e.g. museums, universities, societies) is indifferent towards rescue archaeology, probably so they can avoid controversies, since
their funding also comes from the government. Nevertheless, it is the public sector that has the best opportunities to educate and influence public opinion, although this has yet to occur. As for the private sector, archaeology is only considered to be a hobby, and they are also very indifferent toward the loss of the archaeological heritage.

Now it is high time that government, private sectors and professionals should seriously think for a strong legislation with the provision of archaeological heritage impact assessment that would record such archaeological remains before these are wiped out for ever in the name of development.