Chapter I

Problem and Methodology
THE PROBLEM

The Malwa in Central India is known to be archaeologically very rich that played a major role in shaping the history of the Central India. Within the Malwa region, the ‘Nimar’ or ‘Nimad’ forms a smaller portion towards the south-western portion of the region. Somehow the Nimar area within the broader geographical Malwa Region has so far remained out of systematic and intensive archaeological investigation till the mega dams on the Narmada was envisaged. It was in fact to certain extent a boon in disguise. It was when the Narmada valley development project was initiated that it was realised that a major portion of the Narmada would be submerged. It was a known fact that the cultures that developed along the Narmada were responsible for shaping the history of Malwa in general and Nimar in particular. It was therefore realised to some extent that these mega dams on the Narmada would likely drown several archaeological sites and the country would lose very valuable information to reconstruct the past.

As regards the archaeological heritage on the Narmada valley is concerned it has been studied for last several years. In spite of this very little is actually known about the archaeology of the Narmada keeping in view the vastness of archaeological potential of this area. However, the uniqueness of the Narmada is best known for the following:
1) It is considered to be the richest in archaeological sites both in forms and nature among all river valleys in the country.
2) It has yielded a continuous archaeological succession from the Lower Palaeolithic to the present.
3) There is a great variety of archaeological cultures represented that played a major role in shaping the history and culture of the country.
4) It has exposed a very long palaeo-environmental record, and
5) It is considered the second richest palaeontological region in India. In fact the only hominid find spot in India comes from the Narmada Valley

Keeping this in mind the present investigation was initiated in the dam submergence area of Narmada Sagar and Sardar Sarovar on the Narmada as part of salvage archaeology operation.
METHODOLOGY

The methodology that was followed for the present investigation/study is based on three aspects.

1. The area was hardly known for archaeological remains because of lack of intensive investigation.
2. Since most parts of Nimar was coming under submergence of Narmada Sagar and Sardar Sarovar Dam constructions; as part of archaeological impact assessment, it was essential to undertake salvage operation of archaeological sites.
3. A major portion of the Narmada River proper was to be submerged that was considered as one of the richest area for archaeological remains. Therefore losing a major portion of the Narmada proper is a loss not only to the archaeological heritage of the country, but also a permanent loss for reconstruction of Indian history in general and central Indian history in particular.

The first thing that was followed was intensive exploration in the model of village to village survey in the submergence area of both the mega dams i.e. NSP and SSP. During the exploration the sites were observed for various types of archaeological remains and recorded. Besides, emphasis was also given to explore beyond the revenue area of villages. Such explorations have helped in bringing to light the prehistoric sites and also flimsy looking archaeological sites beyond the revenue jurisdiction of a village in the forest areas, river and tributary banks, barren lands etc.

Keeping in view limited time available in hand, it was decided to go for prioritization of the sites that can be studied on a priority basis. To understand the importance or value of the sites, site ranking analysis for certain sites were also carried out. This in fact helped in deciding the priorities of the site that are required to be studied first. This analysis of ranking of sites has been done with a view to assess ‘potential sites’ that are going to be submerged. The judgment process for ranking of sites is based on the concept of ‘Site Discrimination’ for which the criteria that have been taken into consideration include survival, potential, amenity value, documentation (archaeological), group value (association) and group value (clustering). Besides, the
‘Class Characterization’ part of the judgment process involves the criteria such as period (currency), period (representativeness), rarity and diversity (form).

Based on the site ranking analysis carried out for certain number of sites in the SSP submergence area, initially four sites were taken up for limited excavation that includes Pipri, Utawad, Newarakhedi and Khaparkheda.

Since the dams on the Narmada was a national project, besides the Archaeological Survey of India, the State Department of Archaeology, Museums and Archives, Government of Madhya Pradesh was also involved in salvaging the archaeological remains of the area. The data that have been generated by this department are published with a very preliminary report. All these published materials have also been utilised for better understanding of the archaeological remains of the area.

The significance of the present study following the above methodology has prompted us to think on two aspects i.e. (i) Archaeological heritage assessment of the area getting modified, and (ii) the archaeological personality of the area i.e. “Nimar”. Summarising the outcome of the present investigation is the intensive exploration, excavation and understanding the archaeological background of the area, and the significance of salvage archaeology. Systematic and intensive search has in fact made us realised that a planned intensive investigation through exploration can only help us in locating flimsy looking sites in an area which otherwise would have been difficult to locate such sites. This in fact facilitate in understanding the ‘small site archaeology’. Therefore the present study could understand the Chalcolithic culture of the area from a different perspective and therefore intends to term as “Nimar Chalcolithic” with a distinct cultural traits such as dwelling pits, use of heavy duty lithic artefacts alongside microliths, a distinct burial custom etc. Besides, it has tried to initiate the discussion on the existence of Iron Age in the area as noticed at Khaparkhera.

As regards the salvage archaeology is concerned it has prompted us to think that the dimension of archaeological heritage destruction which is now very common all over the country for various reasons where landscape is being modified previously undreamt of pace. Of these dam projects are one such initiative that in fact destroys and also modifies a vast patch of land very fast. Hence a solution is required to be developed both in terms of legislation and bringing a change in the attitude of the professionals and public.