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RESEARCH ARTICLE

A PRELIMINARY ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION OF RANASAHU VILLAGE, BALASORE, ODISHA

^{1*}Dr. Sikhasree Ray, ²Ms. Jeenapriyanka Jethi and ³Rajendra Patra

^{1,2}Assistant Professor, Dept. of History & Archaeology, Fakir Mohan University, Balaosre, Odisha

³Research student, Dept. of History & Archaeology, Fakir Mohan University, Balaosre, Odisha

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ABSTRACT

The transition from Neolithic to the Early Medieval period covers a vast span of time and witnessed significant cultural, social and technological changes across different regions. It's important to note that the transition from the Neolithic to the Early Medieval period was not a uniform process, and different regions experienced these changes at different times. The present paper is intending for a comprehensive overview of an archaeological site in Balasore district of Odisha, which has given the surface findings ranging from Neolithic to Early Medieval period, highlighting key findings, methodologies and significance of the total findings. Beginning with Neolithic period, characterized by the shift from hunting-gathering to agriculture, this prominent site has provided insights into early human settlements. The site has evidenced fortification, Eolithic tools and other materials and several pottery belonging to Chalcolithic to early medieval period shedding light on the emergence of settled communities. This archeological site spanning from Neolithic to early Medieval period offer invaluable insights into diverse aspects of human History. The study enables us to comprehend the evolution of social structure, technological advancements, artistic expressions and cultural exchanges across different regions of Odisha. Systematic excavation and analysis of this site will unravel the mysteries of our ancestors, illuminating the tapestry of human existence throughout the ages.

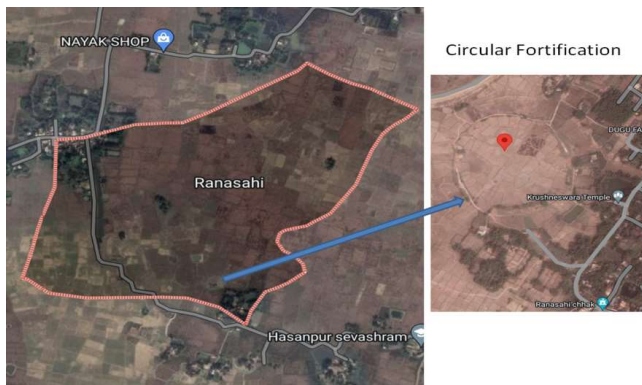
INTRODUCTION

The subcontinent's history is vast and varied, with numerous site that provide valuable insights into cultural, social and technological developments of different eras. The human history starts much before that is time of Stone Age culture people which basically known as Prehistoric period, when the human were leading hunter gatherer life. The transition started during Neolithic period, also known as the New Stone Age that lasted from around 7000 BCE to 2,000 BCE in Indian subcontinent when the region saw the transition from a hunter-gatherer lifestyle to settled agriculture. This agricultural revolution brought about significant changes in social organization, technology and cultural practices. Following the Neolithic period, many regions entered into the introduction of metals like Copper, bronze and Iron respectively which were characterized by the widespread use of tools and weapons of these metals. This period gradually not only saw the development of advanced metallurgical techniques but also the rise of complex societies. The Iron Age which followed the Bronze Age and is marked by the adoption of iron tools and weapons, which were more durable and widely available. This period witnessed significant cultural and societal changes, including the rise of large-scale empires and the emergence of urban centers. Then the subcontinent entered into period when the history of various ruling dynasties began that continued up to the early medieval period that is up to 14th-15th century CE. The transition from Neolithic to the Early Medieval period covers a vast span of time and witnessed significant cultural,

social and technological changes across different regions. It's important to note that the transition from the Neolithic to the Early Medieval period was not a uniform process, and different regions experienced these changes at different times. The specific archaeological sites and cultural developments within this broad timeline can vary significantly based on geographical location and cultural context. The present paper is intending to study such type of site known as Ranasahi village in Balasore district, one of the coastal district of Odisha which has evidenced the cultural sequence ranging from Neolithic to Early Medieval period.

The site: Ranasahi village is located at the Chandipur Tehsil of Balasore district. It is situated at a distance of 8.4 km from district Headquarters and 12km away from the Chandipur Sea Beach (Map 1). The River Budhabalanga flows near the area and a tributary of Budhabalanga called "Nua naei" is flourishing just 2km away from the village Ranasahi. The village contains a fortified site which is known as Kainphulia. The site contains circular defensive rampart wall covering an area of 270 m or 2906.25 sq ft (Fig. 1). The site is now used by the villagers as the agriculture field and is under cultivation. The site was first time reported by Dr. Anam Behera, from department of Ancient cultural archaeology in Utkal University who has reported some of the Neolithic artifact, like Celt, Muller, passel and some pottery. The present study is the extension work of the Dr. Behera done by the author of Department of History and Archaeology, Fakir Mohan University. This is a completely preliminary study to

understand cultural sequence, nature of the site and the habitation of the site.



Map.1



Fig.1

Limitation of the study: The study has been done on the basis of Surface findings only which has come up as the result of plowing the field. Hence these artifacts lack the contextual information provided by stratigraphic layers, which are crucial for understanding the spatial and temporal relationships between artifacts. It is also difficult to trace out the original context of these artifacts, original location, association with other artifacts, or the activities they were once part of. Hence, in the absence of any stratigraphical context, the study has been done very carefully and the chronological framework has given on the basis stylistic or typological analysis. It is a preliminary survey method to identify areas of archaeological potential, guide future excavation strategies, or study large-scale patterns of human settlement. Despite the lack of original context of the artifact, the site has given general human occupations of the site which ranged from Neolithic period up to Early Medieval period.

Findings: Ranasahi. In Ranasahi we found round fortification and some Neolithic artifact like Celt, Muller, Passel and scrap.

Celt: Celt is a Neolithic stone tool, which is characterized by its shape, typically resembles an elongated wedge or axe head. It is a ground stone toll which was shaped by grinding or polishing instead of chipping or flaking. This polished stone axe or adze had designed for attachment to a wooden shaft and probably mainly used for feeling trees and shaping wood. In some time it was used for weapon and agriculture. The Celt found from the site Ranasahi measures appears highly polished patented and made of quartzite stone (Fig.2).



Fig.2

Polishing stone: Polishing stones were typically made from a hard, abrasive material such as sandstone, granite, or basalt. They were often handheld and had a smooth, flat or slightly concave surface. By rubbing the surface of a material against the polishing stone, early humans were able to grind away rough edges, create smoother surfaces, and shape objects according to their needs. In the Neolithic period, polishing stones were employed in a variety of tasks. They were used for shaping and finishing stone tools such as axes, adzes, and arrowheads. By polishing these tools, their cutting edges could be sharpened and made more effective. Polishing stones were also used to refine bone tools, making them more functional and aesthetically pleasing. The use of polishing stones during the Neolithic period represents a significant advancement in tool technology and craftsmanship. It allowed early humans to create more refined and precise tools, which in turn contributed to the development of more complex societies and the advancement of various industries, including agriculture, construction, and crafts. Two polishing stone has been reported from the site (Fig.3 & 4).



Fig.3



Fig.4.

These polishing stones are made in Red quartzite sand stone, its slab broken from one edge (comparatively older breakage).

The slab was broken from middle edge in 90 degree, which is a comparative recent breakage. The slab is used for polishing and grinding activity which is clearly visible from the station mark on the surface. Edge of the slab of both are rounded in nature.

Core: The site has yielded a block of raw material from which flakes, blades have been struck, in order to produce blanks for tools (Fig.5).



Fig.5.

In this artifact core depression mark can be seen clearly, in one of edge except that flake and scar can be seen also surface. This stone is red quartzite sand stone; patination can be seen on the surface.

Passel: A Neolithic pestle refers to a tool used for grinding or crushing substances, typically in food preparation, during the period. The pestle is often paired with a mortar, which is a bowl or receptacle in which the grinding takes place. Neolithic communities relied heavily on agriculture, and the use of pestles and mortars became crucial for processing various food items. Using a pestle and mortar, Neolithic people would place grains, seeds, or other plant materials in the mortar and use the pestle to crush and grind them into a finer consistency. This process was important for tasks such as grinding grains into flour, pounding herbs and spices, or crushing seeds for oil extraction. The invention of the pestle and mortar allowed for more efficient food preparation and processing, enabling Neolithic communities to diversify their diet, store food for longer periods, and explore new culinary techniques. The tool was an essential part of the Neolithic toolkit and contributed to the development and advancement of early agricultural societies.



Fig.6

This passel (Fig.6) is broken from half, it was made on quartzite stone. In this artifact grinding mark clearly visible on

the surface. It was a very smooth stone, which gives information about ancient people developed technology.

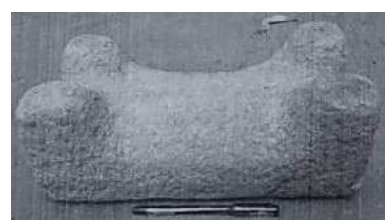
Grind stone: A Neolithic grindstone refers to a specific type of stone tool used for grinding or milling during the Neolithic period. Neolithic grindstones were typically larger and more refined compared to earlier stone tools. They were usually made from hard, coarse-grained rocks like basalt, granite, or sandstone. The grindstone consisted of a flat or slightly concave surface, often with a central depression or basin, and it was used in conjunction with another stone or material. These grindstones were utilized for a variety of purposes. One of the most important uses was grinding grain, such as wheat, barley, or millet, into flour. This process involved placing the grain on the flat surface of the grindstone and using another stone or a handheld grinder (known as a mano) to move back and forth or rotate, grinding the grain into a fine powder. In addition to grain processing, Neolithic grindstones were also employed for grinding other materials. They were used for shaping and smoothing stone tools, like axes or adzes, as well as grinding pigments for artistic purposes or preparing medicinal substances. The development of Neolithic grindstones played a vital role in the advancement of agriculture and food production. Grinding grain into flour allowed early farming communities to process and store food more efficiently, leading to the growth of settled societies. It also enabled the creation of more specialized tools and the development of various crafts and industries.



Fig.7.

This artifact (Fig.7) was made in quartzite stone and it was a cubical shape. In this tools clearly visible grinding mark on surface.

Quern: A Neolithic Quern is a type of stone tool used for grinding grain. A Neolithic quern consists of two basic components: a lower stone called the quern, and an upper stone called the handstone or muller. The quern is a flat, horizontal, or slightly concave stone with a central hole. Neolithic querns were essential tools for early farming communities as they allowed the processing of grains into flour, which could be used for making bread and other food items. They were commonly used during the Neolithic period before the advent of more advanced milling techniques.



Courtesy: Dr. Anam Behera

The site has given an intact piece of quern (fig.) having four and flat rectangular surface. The top portion is flat.

Miscellaneous Object: The site of Kainphulia has evidence two type of miscellaneous object from the exploration one is Hopscotch (Fig.8) and another is an unidentified object (Fig.9).

Hopscotch: Hopscotch is one type game played by the Children. Though various early historic sites has given the evidence of this artifact, but are very limited in number and yet the exact origins of hopscotch in ancient India. The game of hopscotch involves drawing a diagram on the ground with a series of numbered squares or rectangles. Each player takes turns hopping or jumping through the squares, usually on one leg, following a specific pattern or set of rules. The objective is to successfully complete the course without stepping on the lines or losing balance. Hopscotch was not only a fun pastime for children but also served as a way to develop balance, coordination, and agility. It encouraged physical activity and social interaction among children, as they took turns and competed against one another. In ancient India, hopscotch was likely played in various forms and variations, adapting to different regional customs and preferences. The game has evolved and been adapted over time, incorporating cultural elements and local variations.

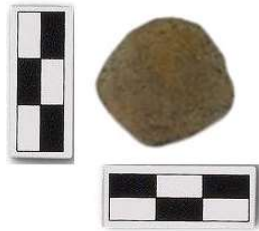


Fig.8

This play item found from the site is almost circular in shape and appears to be much abraded in nature.

Unidentified Object: Another findings of the site is one oval shaped object having linear groove designs, which is quite uncommon in any of the archaeological site. From the shape and appearance it seems probably it has been used for the toiletry item. Yet the conclusion has not drawn as it is under the thorough study.

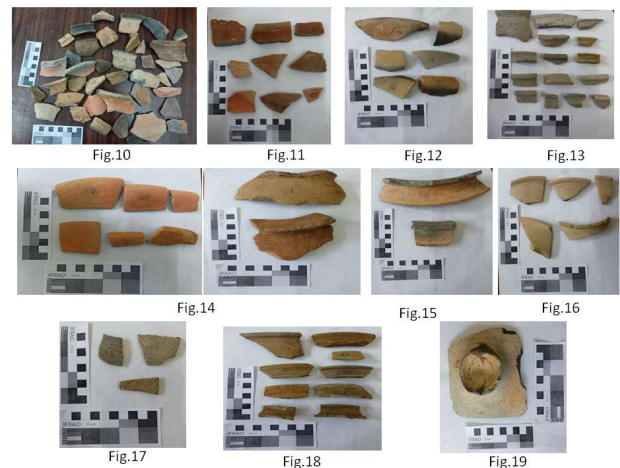


Fig.9

Ceramics: Ceramics from Neolithic to Early medieval period in different regions display diverse styles, techniques and cultural influences. The site of Ranasahi has given the evidence of many various types of ceramics belonging to various periods (Fig.10) which o the basis of typology and texture seems to be belonging to the following period:

- Chalcolithic period
- Iron Age
- Early Historic
- Early Medieval

The ceramic types included, Black slipped ware, red slipped ware (Fig. 11), black burnished ware (fig.12), grey ware (Fig.13), red ware (Fig.14), black and red ware (Fig.15) etc. Some of the pottery especially blacks burnished ware and few of the red slipped ware shows the evidence of Iron Age in the site. The most frequent type of pottery is red ware and grey ware. Grey Ware refers to ceramics with a grayish color that were produced during different periods in Indian history. The ceramic fabric found from the site ranges from coarse to fine, and the fragments are found plain and devoid of any decoration. As Grey Ware ceramics are found both plain (Fig.16) and decorated(Fig.17) with different cultural tradition, the ceramic analysis will be carried out later to understand the associated culture. Similarly Red ware found from the site suggests probably belonging to various periods. The various type and shape of the rim (Fig.18) found from the sites suggests the inhabitant of the site probably used various type of vessels like bowls (Fig.19), Jars and pots both plain and decorated.



DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The Neolithic period saw a dramatic shift from hunter-gatherer to settled agriculture, whereas the early mediaeval period saw the development and fall of complex civilizations as well as the emergence of new political, economic, and cultural systems. The purpose of this article was to investigate and highlight the transition from the Neolithic to the Early Mediaeval periods, with an emphasis on the socioeconomic and cultural changes that occurred during this transformative period. This preliminary exploratory effort has yielded a substantial amount of evidence indicating continuous occupation of the site from the Neolithic to the Early Mediaeval periods, as the artifacts pertain to all of the cultural periods. Furthermore, the site is similar to the findings of all other sites that characterize similar cultural depositions, such as Durgadevi in Balsore district, Suabarei in Puri district, and Golbai Sasan in Khurda district. As previously said, the site appears to be extraordinarily rich in material culture relevant to all subcultures. To investigate the changes in subsistence patterns, agricultural practices, settlement patterns, trade and exchange networks, technological advancements, social hierarchies, political systems, religious beliefs, artistic

expressions, and other relevant aspects, proper scientific study and investigation, as well as archaeological excavation, are required. The study of these aspects will give light on the dynamics of societal evolution, the interaction of diverse influences, and the intricacies of cultural change over this time period. Comparing the findings and character of the site *Kainphulia* to those of Durgadevi, Suabarei, and Golbai Sasan will shed light on regional variations and changes during this transition era.

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