

Chalcolithic Cultures of India

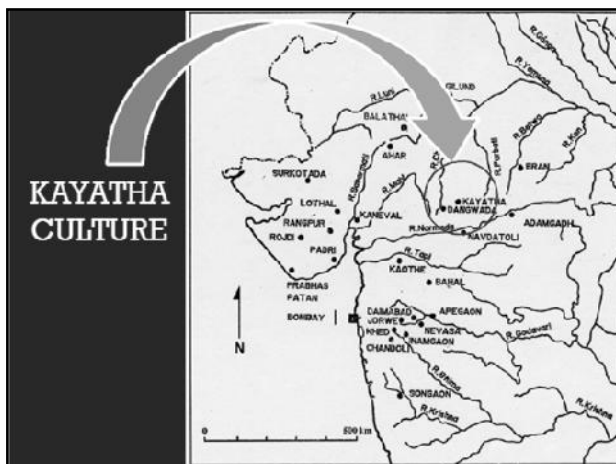
भारत की ताम्रपाषाणिक संस्कृतियाँ



Dr. Anil Kumar
Professor

Ancient Indian History and Archaeology
University of Lucknow
anilkumararch@gmail.com
Kumar_anil@lkouniv.ac.in

- The discovery of the Chalcolithic culture at Jorwe in 1950 opened a new phase in the prehistory of the Deccan.
- Since then a large number of Chalcolithic habitation sites have been discovered as a result of systematic exploration not only in the Deccan but also in other parts of the country bringing to light several regional cultures.
- Large scale excavations have been conducted at Ahar and Navadatoli, both are Chalcolithic sites.
- Most of these cultures are post Harappa, a few like Kayatha are contemporaneous Harappa.
- An important feature is their painted pottery, usually black-on-red.
- The people subsisted on farming, stock-raising, hunting and fishing.
- They used copper on restricted scale as the metal was scarce.
- They were all rural culture.
- It is enigmatic that most of these settlements were deserted by the end 2nd millennium B.C.
- The Chalcolithic cultures such as Ahar, Kayatha, Malwa, and Jorwe are discussed further.

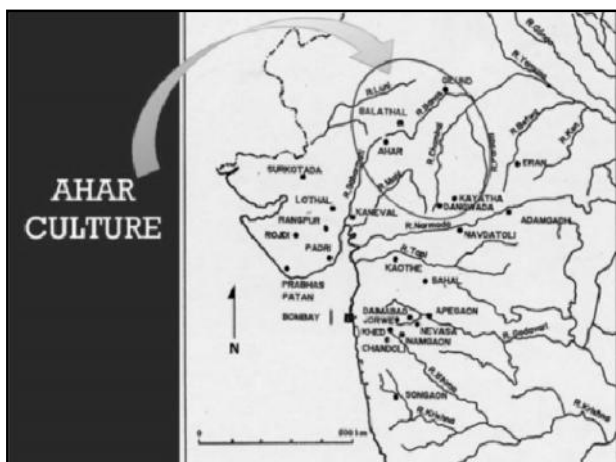


Kayatha Culture

- ✓Out of over 40 sites of Kayatha Culture, two of them namely Kayatha and Dangwada have been excavated.
- ✓This Chalcolithic culture was named after the type site Kayatha, in Ujjain dist., Madhya Pradesh.
- ✓The excavation was due to the joint collaboration of Deccan College, Pune and Department of Ancient Indian History, Culture and Archaeology, Vikram University, Ujjain.
- ✓They lived in small huts having well-rammed floors.
- ✓The **main ceramics** of Kayatha- Chocolate-slipped, incised, sturdy and well baked Kayatha ware.
- ✓The **important shapes** are: convex sided jars and carinated dishes, occasionally pots were decorated with linear designs in black pigment.
- ✓Radiocarbon dates suggest a period of 2000 to 1800 BC.

- ✓The types are bowls, high and short-necked storage jars with globular profile and basins.
- ✓A red painted buff ware, a concave necked pot with a bulging body, with or without carination, a dish or shallow bowl and a basin, most probably constituted table ware.
- ✓Some bowls, basins and globular pots represented combed ware.
- ✓Use of both copper and stone tools was found.
- ✓A cache of copper has been found, as well as two exquisitely made copper axes, cast in moulds.
- ✓A specialised blade industry existed as seen from evidence of mass production of chalcidony blades.
- ✓Ornaments like two bead necklaces have been found. Beads were manufactured from semi-precious stones.

- People lived in small huts with well-rammed floors and wattle and daub walls supporting a thatched roof.
- A mixed economy was practiced as seen from evidence on subsistence farming, stock raising and hunting-fishing.
- Barley and wheat were grown. Domesticated animals included cattle and sheep/goat.
- Interestingly, horse remains have been found from the Chalcolithic level at Kayatha.
- As no antecedent stages of this culture are found in the Malwa region, the opinion that the Kayatha culture—the earliest chalcolithic culture in the Malwa region— had developed elsewhere.
- Following which people migrated with the culture to this region.
- The sudden end of this culture is ascribed to an earthquake.
- The presence of a sterile layer between the levels of the Kayatha and the succeeding Ahar culture points to a hiatus between the two.



Ahar Culture

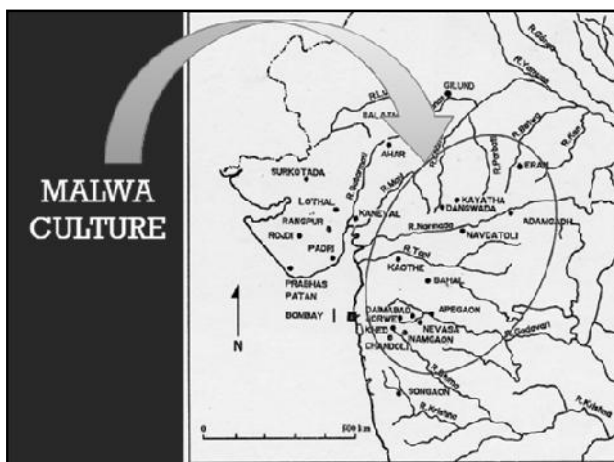
- About 91 sites have been discovered in south eastern Rajasthan, traditionally known as Mewar region, all these sites are located on the banks of the river Banas and its tributary.
- Major excavated sites are Ahar and Balathal in Udaipur district, Gilund in Rajsamanad district, Ojjiyana in Bhilwara district Rajasthan.
- Ahar culture had a rich ceramic tradition consisting of Tan ware, thin Red ware, Black and Red ware and Grey ware. Shapes include dishes, dish on stands and globular
- Excavations at Ahar revealed a two-fold sequence of cultures of which the **Period I** is Chalcolithic and the second **Period II** is early Historic.
- Available radio-carbon dates (calibrated) suggest a time bracket of 2025 BC— 1270 BC for the Chalcolithic phase.
- The ancient mound of **Balathal** is located on the eastern fringe of the village Balathal in Udaipur district, on the west bank of a river locally known as Kataranadi. The excavations were conducted at the site from 1994-2000 by Deccan College, Pune, in collaboration with Institute of Rajasthan Studies, Rajasthan University, under V.N. Misra.
- This site also revealed habitation deposits belonging to cultural periods like Ahar.
- A series of radio carbon dates place the Chalcolithic culture at Balathal between the beginning of 3rd millennium BC and 1500 BC.

- **Balathal** is perhaps the most-extensively researched site of this culture, the ceramics having been subjected to detailed studies.
- Based on the material culture of Balathal, and a comparative study with that of the other sites has divided the Ahar culture into **four phases** like **Early Ahar/Balathal phase, Transitional Phase, Mature Ahar phase and Late Ahar phase**.
- The **Early Ahar phase** has so far been noticed only at Balathal.
- It is marked by mud and mud brick houses with hearths in some.
- The material culture is characterised by eight types of wares, the potters having already invented the inverted firing technique of black and red ware and that of reserved slip ware.
- In the inverted technique at the time of firing the pots are places in an inverted manner, so that the parts, which did not get any oxygen became black, while the portion which had access to oxygen became red.
- A Sturdy Red ware and Red Slipped ware and painted Buff ware are noticed.
- Beads of steatite and terracotta have been obtained in good numbers. A few stone implements are also found.
- The faunal and floral remains indicate a mixed economy.

- The **second phase**, also identified at Balathal is a transitional one which did not have a long time span.
- In the upper layers the Mature Aharian gradually became prominent.
- **The Mature phase** witnessed a large number of settlements and the emergence of a few key sites and many satellite sites.
- A uniform settlement pattern is seen at all sites with certain additional features at some sites like a fortified enclosure at Balathal.
- Houses were now made of stone, mud and mud brick.
- At Balathal the fortified enclosure is centrally located and surrounded by the residential complex.
- Features associated with the houses are hearths, storage pits, saddle querns and small storage jars.
- Industrial activities were marked in mass production of ceramics, metal works, and development of bead industries.
- Beads are made in shell, bone, ivory, semiprecious stones, steatite and terracotta. The diagnostic wares of this period are the black and red wares, red and grey wares.
- Refinement of technology is seen at this stage with the invention of fast wheel.
- A large number of new shapes and forms emerged during this period.

- The evidence of rice has been noticed at Ahar in the form of impressions on potsherds.
- The other crops cultivated during this period were wheat, barley, millet/bajra and jawar.
- Faunal remains of domesticated species like cattle, buffalo, goat, sheep, pig, dog and fowl have been recovered from excavations.
- The wild animals hunted were sambhar, nilgai, chital, blackbuck and wild boar.
- The evidence suggests mixed economy of cultivation and hunting gathering.
- As for social organisation one cannot rule out the presence of specialised classes of craftsmen.
- But, on the basis of the limited nature of evidence it is not known whether it was a chiefdom society.
- The evidence of fortification at **Balathal** implies that there may have been internecine conflicts.
- A large number of bull figurines appearing in large number from the end of the mature Ahar phase has been ascribed with ideological meaning, but nothing concrete can be said.

- The Ahar people lived in large stone-built houses and their settlements were quite extensive as at Ahar and Gilund.
- Nearly 35 **C¹⁴ dates**, mainly from **Balathal**, clearly established the duration of this culture from 3500 to 2000 BC

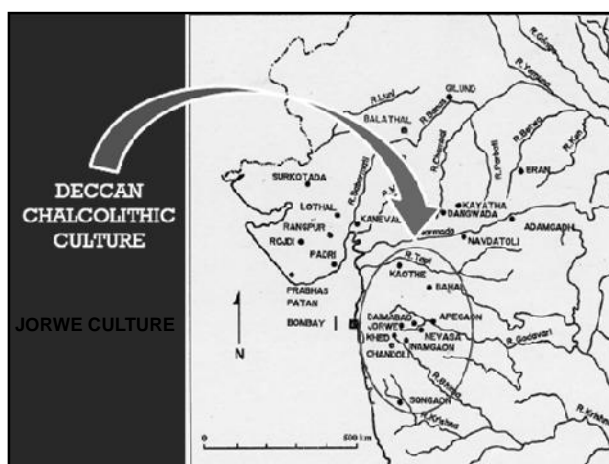


- The Malwa culture is the most predominant Chalcolithic culture of central India, with a wide distribution of sites almost all over Malwa region.
- It was first identified in the excavations at Maheshwar, on river Narmada.
- Navdatoli on the opposite bank also revealed great potential and was subsequently excavated.
- Other excavated sites of this culture are Nagda, Kayatha, Eran etc.
- On the basis of calibrated dates the Malwa culture is placed in the bracket of 1900-1400 BC.
- Malwa region lying to the east of the Banas valley and Aravalli hills forms a distinct geographical unit, forming a link between the Indo-Gangetic plain and the peninsular region. Two great river systems, the Chambal and the Narmada traverse the region.
- There were two parts of occupation at Navdatoli, enclosed by a fortification wall. Perhaps in historical times the centre shifted to Maheshwar.
- At Nagda, a mud rampart has been recorded, a feature also seen at Eran.
- At Nagda, the houses seem to have been laid out in rows along the road and by lanes.
- The use of mud-bricks and fired bricks at Nagda is significant as they are absent at other Malwa sites. The houses were multi-roomed with a chulah (Hearth/oven) bearing four arms.
- The floors were rammed hard, and there were several floor levels indicating periodic repair and re-laying. There were pebble platforms as well.

- At **Navdatoli**, a number of structures were laid bare belonging to four different phases of Chalcolithic culture- Both round huts and rectangular houses were found together in each phase.
- Pit-dwellings were noticed in the first phase.
- Usually round huts were found in clusters of two, three or four.
- Rectangular structures were quite spacious with thick mud walls and wooden posts supporting the thatched roof. The floor was rammed hard.
- A burnt house belonging to the latest stage of the Chalcolithic phase has been recorded from Navdatoli.
- Storage jars and squarish pots have been found inside this house.
- Multi-roomed structures at Navdatoli are particularly evident from a house in phase II which is marked by rows of post-holes of which a double set of post-holes forms the back wall.
- The radiocarbon dates from Navdatoli suggest a period of 1800-1500 BC.
- The Malwa culture spread into Maharashtra by 1700 BC and some of the Malwa sites like Prakash in the Tapi valley, Daimabad in the Godavari valley and Inamgaon in the Bhima valley were quite extensive.

- At **Daimabad**, the excavator has identified craftsmen's houses and structures with religious affiliation.
- Large fire pits were found in house no. 54, identified as sacrificial altars; two-armed *chulahs* were also identified.
- At **Inamgaon** 20 houses of the Malwa period have been identified, they were large rectangular structures with a low partition wall in the middle.
- Inside the room were low mud walls with large fire pits and pit silos meant for storage. Circular pit dwellings also existed at Inamgaon.
- The subsistence practices and diet can be reconstructed from remains of carbonized grains of wheat, barley, jawar, rice, legumes, oilseeds and fruits.
- These are found at different sites due to ecological species types varied from site to site.
- Animal flesh also formed a part of the Chalcolithic diet.
- The material culture constituted chiefly of ceramic types, the Malwa ware forming the principal type. It was essentially buff or cream slipped with painted patterns in dark brown. A pottery kiln belonging to the Malwa period has been uncovered at Inamgaon. Other ceramic wares were white painted black-and-red ware of the Ahar culture, a cream slipped ware, a coarse red/grey ware and handmade storage jars. Dhavalikar drew parallels of some forms of Malwa ware from Navdatoli with forms found in West Asian sites.

- **Other components** of the material assemblage were blade tools, copper artefacts and beads of semi-precious stones.
- Stone rubbers, muellers, querns, grinding stones, hammer stones, sling stones and mace heads have been found pointing to mixed subsistence practices.
- **Religious beliefs** are reconstructed from fragmentary evidence.
- **Terracotta female figurines** of indistinct types have been found while a few examples of more definite forms exist.
- Representations of male figures in painted forms are seen in some wares.
- Terracotta bull figurines were either mere toys or associated with religious beliefs.
- Presence of a specific structure has been interpreted as fire alter, evidence of fire worship.
- The decline of the Malwa culture has been placed in around 1400 BC which coincided with that of Ahar culture as well.
- Dhavalikar suggests climatic deterioration for the end of these cultures.



- The **Jorwe culture** is the most important and characteristic Chalcolithic culture of Maharashtra, extending almost all over the present state, excepting the coastal strip on the west and Vidarbha in the north east.
- The culture is named after the **type site of Jorwe** is a village located on Pravara, a tributary of the Godavari River in Ahmadnagar district, Maharashtra.
- The culture was discovered in 1950-51. I
- In regions, such as, **Prakash** in the Tapi valley, **Daimabad** in the Pravara-Godavari valley and **Inamgaon** in the Bhima valley large centres of this culture were found.
- The work in Inamgaon was a breakthrough in Chalcolithic studies.
- The Early Jorwe houses were rectangular in plan while the Late Jorwe ones were circular.
- Dhavalikar ascribes the change in house plan to deteriorating economic condition of the people in the Late Jorwe period when the climate became more dry and arid. He also associated the two contrasting house plans to different ways of life, the Early Jorwe rectangular houses to a sedentary pattern, and the Late Jorwe circular houses to a semi-nomadic existence.
- A large number of Jorwe sites can be classified as villages.

- It was based on dry-farming with stock-raising and hunting-fishing as ancillary activities.
- A variety of crops were grown, and the Jorwe farmers have also been credited for practicing **crop rotation**.
- The principal crops were *barley*, wheat, *jowar*, rice, *ragi*, green pea, grass pea, lentil, and green and black gram.
- For the first time site-catchment analysis was carried out to understand the link between Inamgaon and its immediate surroundings.
- The Late Jorwe phase, however, marks the decline of agriculture.
- A fresh analysis of bones recovered from the Inamgaon excavations revealed that the number of bones of wild animals increased drastically in the later levels.
- From this evidence it was deduced that environmental degradation led to a change in subsistence strategies from agriculture to hunting in the Late Jorwe period.

- At **Inamgaon** the stone blade/flake industry is substantially represented, occurring at all levels. C
- Considerable progress in ceramic technology is seen.
- The painted pottery was wheel-made and well-fired.
- Four pottery kilns** have so far come to light through excavations.
- The Jorwe black-on-red painted pottery is characterised by some forms of which the most important are the **spouted jar and the carinated bowl**.
- Other forms include storage jars, basins, cups and an occasional channel spouted bowl.
- The other important ceramic types are a coarse red/grey ware, a handmade ware, and a handmade red ware, the latter occurring in negligible quantities.
- Metal technology of the Chalcolithic people was in a rudimentary stage.
- Like in other aspects of material culture there was a marked decline in ceramics too in the Late Jorwe period.
- A noteworthy feature of the Jorwe culture is the mode of disposal of the dead.
- A substantial number of burials were exposed in Inamgaon and Daimabad.
- Many child burials were found in urns laid in pits.
- In case of adults, the portion below the ankles was chopped off.
- Among the Inamgaon burials the most important and unique is a four legged urn burial with an adult skeleton inside.
- Religious beliefs were reconstructed from the presence of terracotta figurines.
- A large number of the settlements were deserted at the end of second millennium BC for climatic deterioration.

- Deccan Chalcolithic culture is characterized by painted Black and red ceramics, developed copper technology and blade tool industry.

- Inamgaon yielded a variety of copper objects like bangles, pins, discs, rings, crescents, drills, antimony rods, chisels and arrowheads.

- At Daimabad, a hoard of four bronzes was discovered *i.e.* A chariot and bull, The elephant, standing on a platform, A rhinoceros standing on two horizontal bars over two sets of wheels, A water buffalo

Excavated Chalcolithic Sites in the Middle Ganga Valley

Sohagaura is situated at the confluence of Ami and Rapti rivers in Banasgaon sub-division of Gorakhpur district (U.P.).

Narhan is located on the left bank of the Ghaghra river, 28 km south-west of Sohagaura in Gorakhpur district of U.P.

Khairadih is a small village located on the right bank of the Ghaghra in Ballia district of U.P.

Sringaverpura is located on the left bank of the Ganga about 36 km northwest of Allahabad city of U.P.

Kakoria is located on the right bank of the Chandraprabha river in Chakia sub-division of Varanasi district of U.P.

Chirand is located in Saran district of Bihar on the left bank of the Ghaghra near the confluence of the Ganga and Ghaghra rivers.

Manjhi is on the left bank of the Ghaghra river, 19 km west of Saran district town of Bihar.

Chechar-Kutubpur is located in Chechar village at the confluence of the Gandak and Ganga rivers in Vaisali district of Bihar.

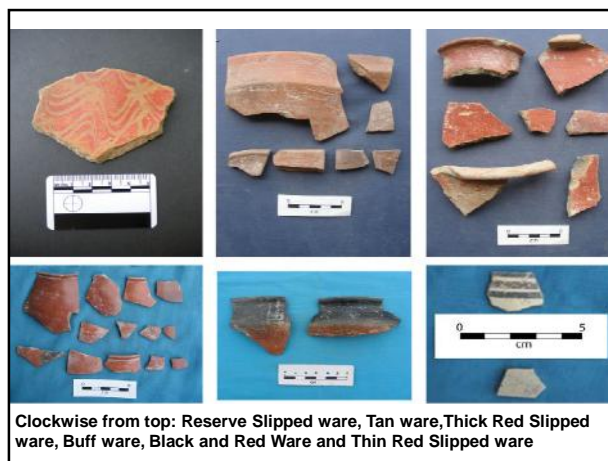
Oriup is situated on the right bank of the Ganga river in Bhagalpur district of Bihar.

Maner is situated at the confluence of the Ganga and Son rivers 32 km west of Patna city.

Sonpur is situated on the bank of Jamunai river in Gaya district of Bihar.

Taradih is located near the famous Mahabodhi temple on the bank of Phalgu river in Gaya district of Bihar.

Senuwar is located 7 km south of Sasaram town in Rohtas district of Bihar on the right bank of the Kudra river.



Clockwise from top: Reserve Slipped ware, Tan ware, Thick Red Slipped ware, Buff ware, Black and Red Ware and Thin Red Slipped ware

