

Archaeological Significance of the Garhwal Himalayan Foothills of Uttarakhand

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Abstract: The Himalayan foothills of Garhwal Central Himalayas stand as a testament to the rich tapestry of human history, offering a wealth of archaeological insights waiting to be discovered or explored. The Central Himalayan foothills of Garhwal have frequently served as a significant archaeological potential, where numerous ancient sites have been unearthed from prehistoric to historical periods, proving without a shadow of a doubt. Since ancient times, this region has been the focus of human activity. This paper aims to provide an extensive overview and examine the profound significance of this area which is between from Yamuna River in the Dehradun District and to Khoh River in the Kotdwar, Pauri District from an archaeological perspective. This article will also seek to determine the period to which the archaeological sites discovered thus far in this foothill area pertain and their respective locations. Moreover, it will outline the areas that necessitate future archaeological surveys for a comprehensive understanding of the ancient history and archaeology of this region.

Keywords: *foothills, central Himalaya, prehistory, central Himalaya, archaeological potential*

Introduction

Uttarakhand is representative of the topographical and physical features that fall under its territorial jurisdiction. Uttarakhand's topography includes a wide variety of geographical characteristics, such as hills, peaks, crests, and precipices, all of which are surrounded by the magnificent Himalayas. Uttarakhand's terrain is characterized by an abundance of lush vegetation, glaciers, lofty high peaks,

and a vast network of active rivers. Indeed, it is commonly known that the slopes and highlands of the Kumaoni-Garhwal region are said to be the 'Abode of Gods and Goddesses'. The Himalayan foothills rise steeply from the Bhabar. Foothill means a hill or low mountain at the base of a higher mountain or range of mountains, when discussing the foothills of the Garhwal Himalayas, the Babar and Terai regions of the Himalayas are included in this region. The whole Haridwar district, the Dehradun district, and the Kotdwar region of the Pauri district are included in this region, which is a component of the broader geographical area. It also covers the Rishikesh region in the Tehri district, which means the area from the Khoh River in the east to the Yamuna River in the west (Karan,1966). Topographically, the foothill area appears between the river Yamuna and Shiwalik Hills and the Haridwar region, major parts of this area are plain valleys between the Himalayas and Shiwalik Hills (Singh, 2014). The Shiwalik range commonly known as the outer Himalayas is located between the Great Plains and the Lesser Himalayas. The average elevation of Shiwalik hills is 1500-2000 meters, and Uttarakhand covers 12.51% area of Shiwalik (R.P Yadav, 2015).

With their fabulous and magnificent naturalistic environments, the Garhwal Himalayan foothills are a beautiful and fascinating combination of unbeatable natural beauty and remarkable cultural variety that is amazing and engaging. These foothills also hold immense historical significance that is deeply rooted in the annals of time, testifying to the region's rich and diverse cultural heritage. All of these factors combine to make this place truly remarkable and unmatched, offering a plethora of experiences that are sure to leave visitors and researchers alike in awe and wonder.

Archaeological Importance of the Region

The archaeology of the Garhwal Himalayan foothills provides insights into the rich cultural history and human habitation in this region over thousands of years. While the archaeological exploration of this area is ongoing, several significant findings contribute to our understanding of the past (Nautiyal,1969). In Uttarakhand, it is a well-established fact that the majority of the archaeological sites have been discovered and documented in the Central Himalayan region, which serves as a testament to the rich cultural and historical heritage of the area (Katoch,2019). However, it is worth noting that there have also been significant excavations and explorations conducted in the Himalayan foothills of both Garhwal and Kumaon, shedding light on the lesser-known equally fascinating aspects of the region's archaeological landscape. The exploration of these sites in the Himalayan foothills of Garhwal has revealed a multitude of valuable artefacts, structures, and other archaeological remains, making it abundantly clear that this area holds immense potential for further exploration and excavation (Naithani,1994). It is essential to acknowledge the significance of these archaeological sites in both the Central Himalayan region and the Himalayan foothills of Uttarakhand, as they offer invaluable insights into the historical, cultural, and societal developments that have shaped the region over centuries. The thorough investigation and documentation of these sites not only enrich our knowledge of the past but also serve as a foundation for future research and preservation efforts, ensuring that this invaluable cultural heritage is safeguarded and celebrated for generations to come.

Prehistoric Implements

Prehistory refers to the era that occurred before recorded history, as described by Paul Tournal (1833), who introduced the concept of pre-historique to explain his findings in the underground caves of southern France. Later, the term 'Prehistoric' was introduced by Daniel Wilson in 1851 (Chippindale,1988).

Prehistorians construct their interpretations of the distant past by examining different types of tangible artefacts. In the context of India, the prehistoric period encompasses a duration ranging from 0.6 to 0.7 million years. The more recent estimations for the Palaeolithic locations of Isampur in Karnataka and Attirampakkam in Tamil Nadu extend this timeframe to 1.2 or 1.5 million years.

While prehistoric remains have been found in the Shiwalik region from many sites in India, Pakistan, and Nepal. (e.g.). In India, some Neolithic polished tools have been reported from Malpur, Gudpath, Amoggharota, Kurro, Mah, Dayalachak, and Kootain the foothills and Shiwalik in the Jammu region (Monica,2015). In 1956, Lal reported proto hand-axes or Abbevillian hand-axes with Soanian tools from the Beas – Banganga Valley of Himachal Pradesh in India. In the 1970s, Mohapatra and colleagues reported some polished Celts and small flake tools from the Kangra district in Punjab (Mohapatra, 1964). From 1977 to 1980, Mohapatra and colleagues delineated 63 Soanian and 21 Acheulian findspots from the upper Shiwalik of Himachal Pradesh. (e.g.) Chandikotla, Jat War, Sabaur, Jhanrian, Karura, Grahi, Kangra, Kot, Lalwan, Khui, Aitbarapur, and Daulatpur most of the artefacts reported from here were cleavers (Mohapatra, 1981). In 1981 Mohapara reported the first classic Acheulian biface on the Shiwalik frontal range around Hosiyarpur in Punjab (Chauhan, 2003).

The Shiwalik Hills are known for their remains of fossil primates, which made them known worldwide as one of the most important evolutionary Centers of the sub-human primates. The fossil remains of anthropoid apes of the Shiwalik region are broadly distributed in the period between the middle Miocene to early Pleistocene.

Prehistoric tools have also been reported from some sites in the central Himalaya of Uttarakhand e.g. Alaknanda Valley (Tiwari1981-82), western Ramganga Valley (Kharakwal 1998-99), and Nautiyal and Khanduri mentioned in their paper that, the proximal part of a Neolithic axe and other broken tools have also been found from Purola in Uttarkashi district(Nautiyal, Khanduri e. t. all 1989), The existence of stone tools, such as Chopper- Chopping and cleavers, in river valleys and terraces indicates that early humans in Uttarakhand relied on local natural resources and had a nomadic lifestyle(Chauhan, 2003). Rock paintings and engravings portraying humans, animals, and symbols have been discovered in various locations in Uttarakhand, enhancing our comprehension of the cultural and possibly ritualistic dimensions of prehistoric life (Joshi,2019). Ongoing archaeological research continues to enhance our understanding of the prehistoric era in Uttarakhand, providing insights into the complexities of early human societies in the foothills of the Himalayas.

The foothills region of Garhwal in Uttarakhand seems to be very promising. Still, only a few prehistoric tools have been found from Kalsi on the banks of River Yamuna in Dehradun District (IAR,1953) and from the banks of River Ganga in the Bahadarabad region of Hardwar District. In 1953 Y.D Sharma excavated the Bahadarabad site in the Haridwar district and reported a Palaeolithic settlement here and the settlement's indications extended down to a depth of three feet (Tiwari,1980). Choppers, scrapers, flake tools and most importantly microliths have also been found here, which were made of pebbles flowing in the river Ganga, most of which are made of quartzite. Unusable chunks that were left over after round pebbles were broken to make tools have also been noticed in several places It is so obvious that Stone Age settlement in this region existed for a long period due to the discovery of implements from various ages in various layers at the same site (Dabral,1998). In 1961-62 Das reported some stone tools including Choppers and Handex from a terrace of the Yamuna River near Kalsi in the Dehradun district (IAR, 1961-62). Later on, Joshi also reported some pebble tools from here in the late 1970s (IAR 1969-70, Tiwari,1980).

From the above description, it is obvious that if a deep archaeological exploration is conducted in big river valleys e.g. Yamuna, Song, and Ganga rivers in Dehradun and Haridwar districts, Khoh, Ravasan and Malini Rivers in Kotdwar, Pauri District and their tributaries in the foothills of the Garhwal Himalayas, then there is a strong possibility of many archaeological sites coming to light.

Protohistoric and Historical Significance of the Region

The Copper Hoard Culture has been identified as the oldest culture in the upper Ganges valley (Katoch,2019). This culture encompasses a rich history of copper refining sites, where various artefacts such as spearheads, celts, rings, and bangles were discovered (Dabral,1998). Notably, in the year 1951, excavations in Bahadarabad yielded a plethora of these tools, shedding light on the technological advancements and craftsmanship of the people who inhabited this region. Moreover, alongside these remarkable findings, red pottery resembling the renowned OCP was also unearthed, further adding to the cultural significance and diversity of this ancient culture (Katoch,2019). In addition to the archaeological site of Bahadarabad, a total of eight copper artefacts of similar nature were discovered and documented in the Almor district in 1986. Furthermore, similar findings were also made in the Bankot region, located in the Pithoragarh district, in 1989(Agarwal and Kharakwal,1998). Currently, these specific tools uncovered in Bankot are meticulously preserved and housed in the State Museum of Almor. However, the existence of these andromorphic tools has given rise to various hypotheses, with no consensus regarding their purpose or the reasons behind their creation.

Apart from this, it is noteworthy to mention that the remnants of this particular period have not yet been unearthed from any other locations situated in the Garhwal Himalayan foothills. However, it is interesting to highlight that numerous sites dating back to the megalithic period have indeed been unearthed and documented from the Almore region in the Kumaon division (Agarwal and Kharakwal,1998). It is indeed quite fascinating and astonishing to observe that the occurrence of megalithic burials(from Malari in Chamoli district Almor and Pithoragarh districts), PGW (from Thapli in Tehri district and Purola in Uttarkashi district), and Copper-Hoards & OCP(Bahadarabad in Haridwar district and Bankot in Pithoragarh district) in various regions of the Garhwal and Kumaon Himalayas has been documented(Dabral, 1998), however, it is intriguing that no such remains have been unearthed thus far from the foothills of Garhwal. This enigmatic observation raises the possibility of two potential explanations for the absence of these archaeological findings in the aforementioned region. Initially, as a result of the limited scope of archaeological investigations in this region, such remains have not been brought to attention. Also, it is worth noting that humans did not inhabit this foothill region during the Protohistoric period, and the second argument poses a certain level of challenge in terms of acceptance, as the presence of not only prehistoric remains but also early historical remains in this region has been established. Moreover, the Doon Valley and the foothill areas exhibit all the necessary characteristics to support human inhabitation, thus rendering them highly suitable in every aspect.

Early Historical significance of the region

The foothills of Uttarakhand operate as a merging point of the ancient time of Uttarakhand, where valuable insights into the presence of numerous dynasties are obtained through the study of archaeological remnants. The early history of the region can be described as a collection of fragmented pieces of information. Our knowledge is limited to several archaeological records (Agarwal and

Kharakwal,1998). However, the beginning of this historical period remains a complex issue. A significant portion of it is based on mythological traditions (Nautiyal,1969). Nevertheless, certain texts make mention of the Kiratas as the initial inhabitants in the area surrounding the origins of the Ganga and Yamuna rivers (Circar,1951). The Kolas and Khasas were the first groups of migrants, while the Sakas, the Rajya Kiratas, the Tanganas, the Kunindas, the Nagas, and the Hunas have also been

While the evidence is limited, the proximity of Uttarakhand to the influence of the Mauryan Empire implies that there may have been some impact on the foothill's region. Furthermore, it is possible that Buddhism, during the period of Mauryan rule, might have extended to certain areas of Uttarakhand, although further investigation is required to substantiate this claim. Archaeological sites like Kalsi, situated near Dehradun, contain inscriptions that can be traced back to the 3rd century BCE, a period that coincided with the reign of Emperor Ashoka. These inscriptions yield valuable insights into Ashoka's edicts and administrative strategies. The existence of such inscriptions indicates the political and administrative assimilation of the region into the Mauryan Empire. Kuninda coins also have been found in Muni-Ki-Reti in Rishikesh, Kashipur in Almora district, and Mordhwaj in Bijnor district in U.P (Tiwari,1981-82). In 1992 Yaudheya's coins were also reported from Mordhwaj and Rishikesh. Based on Prayag Prashasti Dabral states that the Yaudheya's territory was west of the foothills of the Himalayas, but he has doubted whether Yaudheya's reached the Shiwalik region or not (Dabral,1996).

The Bharat Mandir temple in Rishikesh holds significant archaeological value (Puratatva no 8). Additionally, in the Dehradun district, the Jagatgram Asvamedha site showcases three Agnicayana Altars that bear a resemblance to an Eagle. Furthermore, two inscribed Bricks from the 3rd century C.E. have been discovered at this site, with Silverman's name etched upon them (Bakker, 2019, IAR, 1953-54,1961-62, 63-64). The excavation carried out by N.C Ghosh in 1973-75 at Virbhadra in Rishikesh has revealed pottery, bricks, and coins from the Kushana period. The first phase of excavation dates this site from 100 C.E to 800 C.E. It is evident from the excavation of the second level that this site was a pilgrimage destination for the Shaviet community, and its significance persisted until the Gupta period (Puratatva no 8: 180). During the year 2005-06, the Dehradun circle of the Archaeological Survey of India discovered a total of 15 silver coins during excavations near Lakhamandal. According to officials specialising in archaeology, these coins have been attributed to the Indo-Sasanians, (Naithani, 1994). Additionally, Naithani asserts that the Indo-Sasanian rulers extended their dominion to the Yamuna valley.

Tiwari and his colleagues carried out comprehensive archaeological surveys in the foothills of the Garhwal Himalayas in the 1990s and unearthed numerous historical sites which are described in the table below.

Archaeological sites in the Kotdwar region of Garhwal

Table 1: Archaeological sites in the Kotdwar region of Garhwal

<i>Archaeological Site</i>	<i>Findings</i>	<i>Name of Place or City</i>	<i>District</i>	<i>Estimated dates</i>
Kunwa Danda	Grey-ware (bowls and dishes), Black slipped ware, red-ware	Kotdwar	Pauri	600 BCE to 400 BCE
Panduwala	Red-ware (Bowls, spouted vessels, knobbed vessels, miniature pots and knife edge bowls) and some of the early medieval temple remains	Kotdwar	_____	

<i>Archaeological Site</i>	<i>Findings</i>	<i>Name of Place or City</i>	<i>District</i>	<i>Estimated dates</i>
Laldang	Idols portraying the deities Surya, Brahma, Uma Maheshwar, and Ganesha have been found here.	Kotdwar	_____	
Jagdev baba temple	The remains of the ancient temple are scattered around the present temple, and some sculptures have been reinstalled in the temple.	Kotdwar (Mawakot)	_____	Early medieval period
Mangolpura	A Brahma Deity with four arms, dating back to the tenth century, has been discovered from here.	_____	_____	_____

Hiuen Tsang embarked on a journey to India from 629 C.E. to 645 C.E. During his expedition, he extensively explored numerous villages and cities nestled within the majestic Himalayas. In his writings, Hiuen Tsang made mention of various locations he encountered along the way. For instance, he documented Sulokinna, also known as Strugh, where he observed the flowing river Ganga towards the east and the towering Himalayan Mountains to the north. Additionally, the Yamuna River traversed its border region. This particular place held great significance as a destination for Buddhist pilgrims, boasting approximately 100 Deva temples. Scholar Cunningham, in his analysis, refers to this place as Mauna, which lies close to Kalsi (Sharma, 1972). Hiuen Tsang, in his writings, referred to a location known as Mo-Yu-Lo. He stated that this place is situated on the eastern side of the Ganga River and contains a Dev Temple and five Buddhist monasteries. It is commonly believed by many scholars that this place is the present-day Haridwar (Watters, 1904). Another place mentioned by Hiuen Tsang is Ku-Pi-Sang-Na (Govisana). Here, he observed over 100 Buddhist monasteries and a climate similar to that of Mo-Yu-Lo. Cunningham identifies this place as the region surrounding modern Kashipur (Watters, 1904). If we consider Hiuen Tsang's descriptions in the context of Uttarakhand, these places hold significant archaeological value. The importance of these centres for Buddhism and Brahmanism during Hiuen Tsang's time suggests that their development was not sudden, but rather a gradual process that can only be traced through archaeological investigation.

Discussion and Conclusion

By conducting archaeological surveys and excavations in the foothills of Garhwal, a broad variety of archaeological materials has been uncovered from time to time, clearly establishing the fact that this area holds great archaeological potential. Archaeological remains, dating from the prehistoric period to the early historical period, have been discovered intermittently, thus prompting the immediate need for a comprehensive and meticulous archaeological investigation within this specific geographic region. Such investigation would aim to illuminate and provide a comprehensive understanding of the ancient historical and archaeological significance of this region. Further findings will probably deepen our understanding of the past as archaeological study in Uttarakhand's foothills continues. This information is useful not just for scholarly research but also for influencing current discussions on regional cultural preservation and sustainable development. With their archaeological riches, the foothills of Uttarakhand provide witness to the flexibility and tenacity of human communities in the face of shifting climatic conditions and cultural influences.

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