

Interplay Between the Villages in the Neighbourhood of Nevasa During Indo-Roman Trade

KUMARI ABHILASHA AND P.D. SABALE

Deccan College Postgraduate and Research Institute, Pune

Abstract: The early historic period in Maharashtra (circa 3rd century BCE-4th century CE) represents a phase of urbanization, socio-economic complexity and the emergence of long-distance trade networks. Maharashtra's archaeological record; rock-cut caves, fortified towns, ports, inscriptions and coins hoards provides significant evidence of its participation in Indo-Roman trade. This trade linked the Deccan plateau with the Mediterranean world, creating a dynamic interface between local economies and global exchange systems. As western Maharashtra was less focused archaeologically so a detailed field work was done in Mula, a tributary of Godavari. The research had a major aim to explore the role of the land and their people who resided in the region in the bygone days and also aims to understand the contribution of the villages in the region during the Indo-Roman trade. This brought to light a couple of site that had early historical affiliations as the basin is very close to Nevasa that shows its remarkable contribution during the Indo- Roman times. This paper is an effort to understand the blurred picture of an era approx. 2000 years BP. in the Mula, a major tributary to Godavari.

Keywords: Early history, Indo-Roman, Mula, Kotul, Agriculture, Phytolith.

Received : 15 September 2025

Revised : 11 October 2025

Accepted : 16 October 2025

Published : 30 December 2025

TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:

Vijay Kumar (2025). Bead Workshops as Specialised Craft Quarters in Indus Urbanism. *Journal of History, Archaeology and Cultural Heritage*, 2: 2, pp. 89-96.

Prologue

India during the Indo-Roman trade was, in the southern half, majorly ruled by the *Satavahanas* who left behind some political dialogues in the form of inscriptions, coins and other cultural material that may define their land of rule. *Pliny the Elder* says that there were thirty walled cities during *Satavahana* period and were laid out with fortification (Jones 1963). Several localities undertaken for research brought to light its association with the cultural assemblage corresponding to this time frame; associated to the early historical period in Maharashtra. These sites include Ter, Paithan, Kolhapur-Brahmapuri, Nevasa, Nasik, Karad, Sirwal, Wai, Junnar, Bhon, Bhokardan, Limb etc. Sites like Adam, Kaundinyapura, Puani, Ter, Nagardhana and Chandankheda were fortified by mud rampart with moat surrounding it (Joglekar *et.al.* 2003-2004).

Periplus of the Erythraean sea mentions a couple of localities which have been identified as important centres during the course of time. These localities have some very important places located in Maharashtra i.e. Calliena (Kalyan), Semylla (Chaul), Parthan (Paithan), Tagara (Ter) etc. They

served as important entrepots and served as maritime nodes. The discovery of Roman gold and silver coins in western Maharashtra reflects bullion influx. The Buddhist rock-cut caves at Junnar, Nashik, Karla, Bhaja, Ajanta served as mercantile, religious and socio-political centres.

Though several sites associated with the early historic archaeological records have been discovered and worked over, majority of them lies in Vidarbha region. Where as from western Maharashtra the rock-cut Buddhist caves belonging to early historic period have been found at several places on the trade route running during that period but the actual habitation sites are scanty (Joglekar *et.al.* 2003-2004). Though a lot of early historic sites have been reported for last sixty years, very few were taken into consideration for an archaeological dig and an interdisciplinary study. For this we planned to explore Mula and locate the cultural sequence and study the site in detail, in order to fill the gap. Mula remained a region of research gap so an effort was taken to highlight the settlement in Indian subcontinent near trade route which was a means for international trade in ancient world which was being conducted from the western coast. The study is an effort to highlight the growth of early world communities and powers with special reference to India and Rome, and the role of Maharashtra in the scenario.

Previous work

B. P. Bopardikar (ASI) has reported early historic sites from Ahmednagar in the seasons 1958-59. Manori-Renapur and Vambori from where he collected dull red ware and red-slipped ware. H.D. Sankalia and Z.D. Ansari discovered black and red pottery at habitation mound of Mahenduri which is 4 miles to the west of Akola and situated on the bank of river Pravara (IAR 1959-60). Again in two continuous seasons, 1959-60 and 1960-61. Archaeological survey of India carried out the exploration under the direction of B.P. Bopardikar and reported a number of Early Historic sites which included Pimprivalan, Manjrikanger-budruk, Manjrikanger-Khurd, Deolali Tilapur Kopre, Pathre-Khurd, Kolhar- Khurd, Chincholi, Pimpalgaon-Fungi, Songaon, Nimbhere Kanadgon, Kesapur, Brahman gaon-bhand and Chandegaon. The ceramic includes black-slipped ware (IAR 1959-60:29-30).

In Rahuri and Parner taluka of Ahmednagar various early historic potteries were reported by B.P. Bopardikar, characterised by Black and Red wares, red ware were noticed at Astagaon, Bhalaumi, Daradgaon, Ganjibhovo, Gatewadi, Hongo, Jategaon, Lonikolyachi-Haveli, Mahisgaon, Nighol, Palwe- khurd, Rayalale, Sirkanegaon, Sultanpur, Thadi, Vadner-Budruk, Vaghunde-Khurd Valwane and Wavrat. S.S. Parekh of Archaeological Survey of India reported early historical wares at sites Kaothe and Tisgaon of Sangamner taluka (IAR 1986-87:58).

Nevasa was excavated in 1954-56 under the direction of H.D.Sankalia and assisted by S.B. Deo, Z.D. Ansari, S. Ehrhardt (1960). Period IV here belonged to Early historic period (2nd century B.C- 1st century B.C) and late early historic (Indo-Roman) period (500 BC -200 AD) was evidenced by brick structures with pebble foundation, thick black and red pottery, red slipped ware and coins of Satavahana king. It was the only single excavated site of Ahmednagar district where early historic settlement remains are found.

The other early historic settlements were recorded by Vishwanath Kamble (2017). These sites include Sanvatsar, Kokamthan, Varigaon, Phulthamba, Suregaon, Kolgaon-Sangwi Kopargaon all in Ahmednagar district of Maharashtra.

Study Area

The study area is located in the Ahmednagar district of Maharashtra. The focus area for research was Mula river basin which is a parallel stream to Pravara and these two are the major tributaries to Godavari.

Exploration

The study area was explored under six seasons i.e. June 2015, December 2015, June 2016, June 2019, April 2022 and November 2022. This was a detailed village to village survey which brought to light over seventy sites with different cultural affiliations.

Role of local hinterlands in Indo-Roman trade

Periplus mentions the import by Roman that was done from Indian hinterlands. These import products include ivory, spices, pearls, glass, aromatic and medicinal herbs, food grains like wheat. Indo-Roman trade involved the exchange of spices, textiles, gems etc. from India for Roman gold, glass and wine. Export from India included spices like pepper and textile, gems ivory and exotic animals like peacocks and parrots. Roman demands for Indian goods drove the trade. Cimino talks about the exports of animals and birds from India to Rome and analyses a silver plate found in Lampsacus (Turkey) with depictions of Indian animals like parrot and tigers, leopard, dog, fowl (Cimino 1994).

Periplus mentions that large ships started from Barygaza to the Persian Gulf loaded with 'Sandalwood and timbers of teakwood and ebony'. Masts and yardarms may have been exported from India to the Roman Empire (Sidebotham 1986). Finds of teakwood pieces at the Roman-Egyptian port-site of Quseir indicates Indian timber exports to the west (Sidebotham 1986; Gupta 1997).

Satavahana inscription at Naneghat describes the yield of export products and the responsible community of traders who handled them. These export items included flowers, perfumes, gold smith, oilmen, pottery, stone mansion, cloth, bamboo, hydraulic machines etc. (Mirashi 1981, Ray 1986, Faucoinnier 2012,).

It has been mentioned in Naneghat inscription that cloths were donated (Mirashi 1981). Periplus of the Erythraean sea has mentioned the supply of cotton to Barugaza. Pliny mentions the long history of cotton trade going on in India by mentioning Theophrastus during whom the trade of cotton existed in India. This pulls back the history of cotton trade to 300 B.C. Spindle whorls found from the archaeological sites of Adam, Nasik and Nevasa shows that some sort of indigenous weaving industry was thriving.

It is quite evident that Maharashtra is even today a significant cotton producing region in India. Several districts including Ahmednagar, Nasik, Dhule, Jalgaon and Nandurbar are known for its cotton production. Ahmednagar contributes to Maharashtra's overall cotton production, accounting for nearly 25% of the country's total output. The district is known for its basaltic lava flows, often associated with black cotton soil, which is ideal for cotton cultivation. Deccan-trap provided semi-precious stones for export to Rome as well as to the other manufacturing centres within India.

Early Historical sites in Mula.

"The people of the deccan were aware of the art of paddy transplantation and in the first two centuries of the Christian era, the area between the Krishna and the Godavari, especially at the mouths of the two rivers, formed a great rice bowl. The people of the Deccan also produced cotton. In foreign accounts, Andhra is considered to be famous for its cotton products. Thus, a substantial part of the Deccan developed a very advanced rural economy. According to Pliny, the Andhra Kingdom maintained an army of 100,000 infantry, 2000 cavalry and 1000 elephants. This presupposes a large rural population and apparently the peasants produced enough to support this military strength" (Sharma 1977).

Periplus mentions the import of wheat by Roman from Indian hinterlands that was imported for the Sailors at the Ship to Rome. Excavated sites of Ter (Kajale 1974), Nevasa (Sankalia 1950), Bhokardan (Deo and Shastri 1973), provides the carbonised grains of wheat which shows the wheat production in the region. Such kind of elaborate external trade would not be possible without a regional trade network which is much evident by the discovery of over dozen early historical sites in Maharashtra alone. Several archaeologists have contributed immensely towards a deeper understanding of the early historical settlements in the province and its role that it must have played in the Indo-Roman trade. The goods exported must have belonged to different places which would have been gathered at the centre which was specialized in the occupation of that particular commodity e.g. spindle whorl from Ter. It has been mentioned that cotton was collected from Ter.



Showing the Indo-Roman trade route around Mula (Sarde 2020)

Similarly, an effort was taken to understand the role that the Mula river valley played during the Indo-Roman trade. Whether there is any unrecognized site like Nevasa that acted as a regional center or probably there was any site of similar time period that might have played its part as the contributor of material goods from far of lands, or to be more specific as a “third order settlement.” Mula river is a parallel stream to Pravara which owns the most remarkable sites like Nevasa, Junnar, Naneghat etc. around, so it was quite obvious to conduct a research in the basin to understand the role it played in the cultural and economic amelioration of the past. Out of discovered seventy sites seven sites show early historical (Satavahana) affiliations which shows the existence of these sites during the Indo-Roman trade. These sites include Kotul, Ambi Khalasa, Chas, Mhaisgaon, Nandgaon, Chanda. These association can be seen in the form of Satavahana potteries, bangles and terracotta beads.

Satavahana bangles and pottery sherds have been found from all these sites. There are two exceptional sites Kotul and Chanda. At Kotul we could find intact mound showing early historic affiliation while at Chanda we could see a new wall built with Satavahana bricks. During the first season exploration of Mula, during the village to village survey a habitation mound was located in Kotul a village in Akole taluka of Ahmednagar (Abhilasha and Sabale 2016). Later the site was

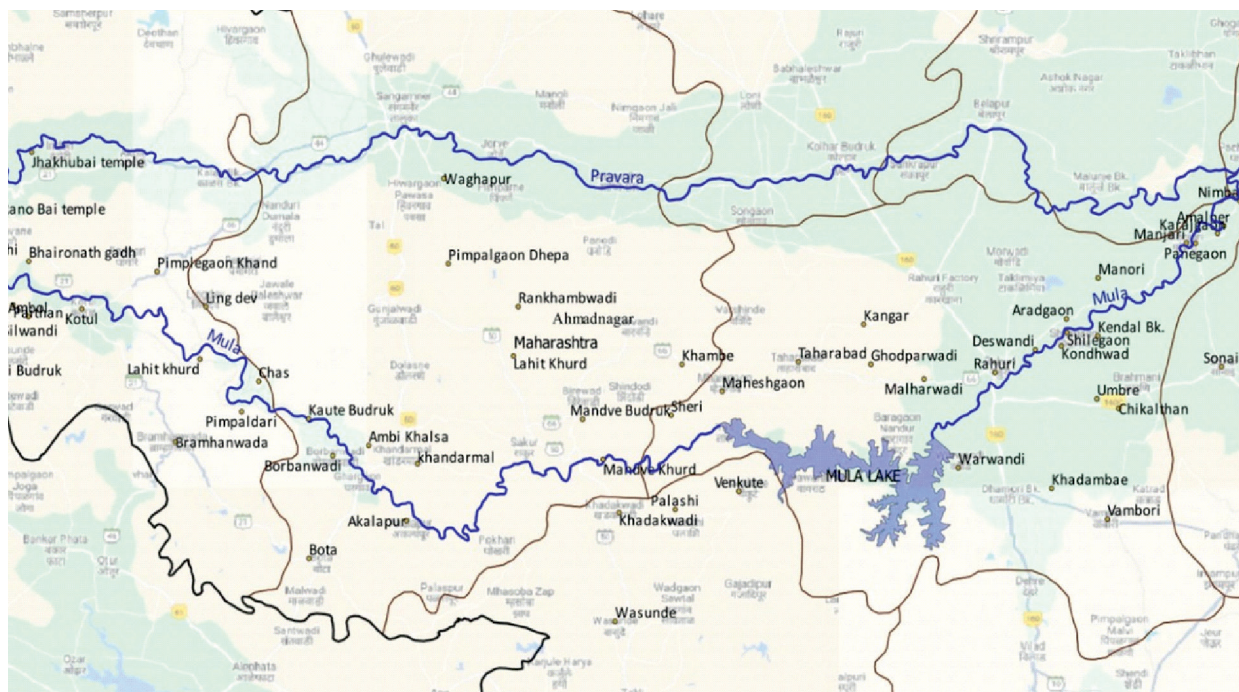


Fig. 1: Showing early historic sites in Mula river basin(GIS).

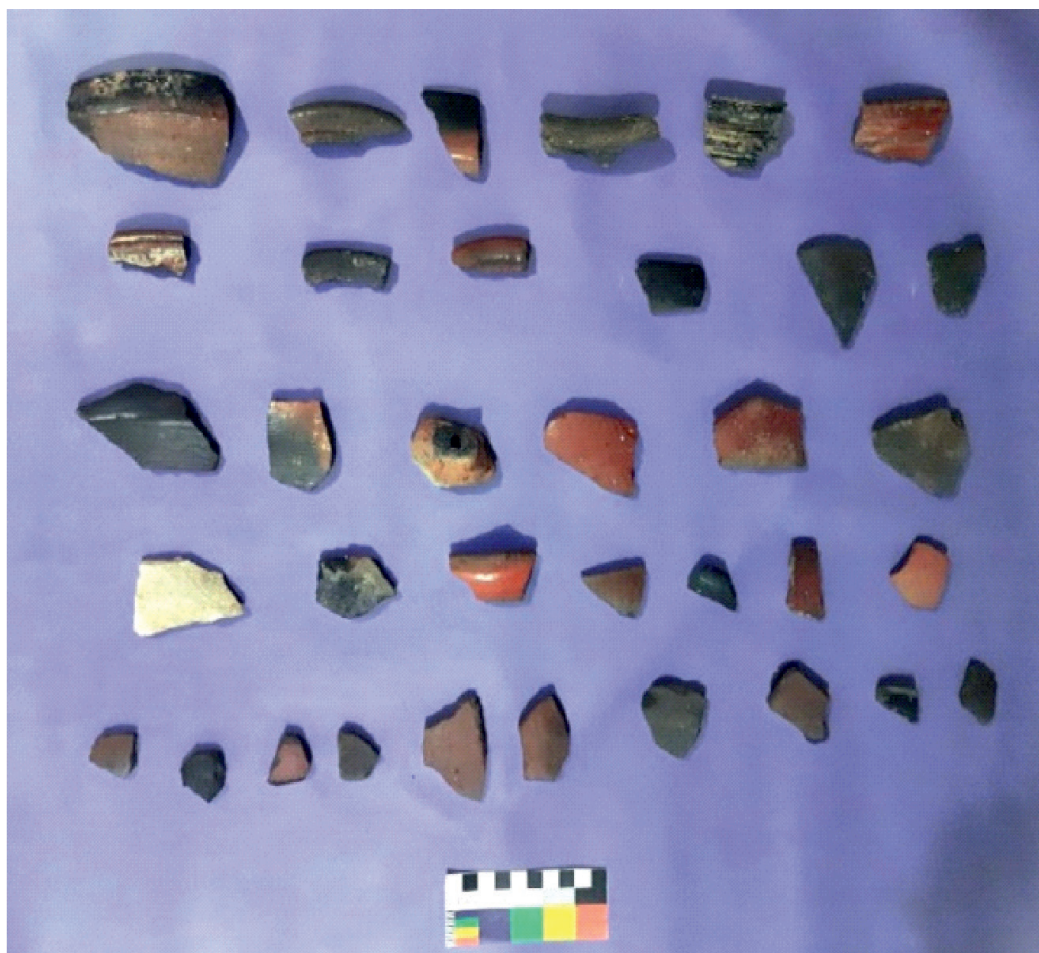


Fig. 2: Showing some selected pottery sherds from Mula river basin.

revisited again and samples were collected for further study. In 2022 the site was considered worthy for excavation, and under the direction of Prof. Pandurang Sabale the site got excavated in April 2022. The site falls near the ancient trade route very close to popularly known sites like Nevasa and Junnar and was considered for excavation due to its early historic associations. This value of the site gave an aspiration of detail understanding of the paleoenvironmental conditions of that particular layer. Therefore, four samples belonging to different period, from trench C1 was collected for Phytolith analysis and sent to the laboratory for analysis. This brought to light the type of vegetation that prevailed during different period. The phytoliths in the early historical layers was a combination of *Panicoid*, *Chloridoid*, *Festucoid*, *Elongate*, *Trichome*, *Bulliform* and *woody elements*. The detailed study of the phytolith type and count in different periods show a variation in the composition of Phytolith type in different period which shows the nature and evolution of the climate and vegetation during different ages.

However, it's important to mention that archaeobotanical remains of ancient period collected from the habitation deposit during the excavation shows remains of cereal like rice (*Oryza sativa* L.); millets such as Green/Yellow/ Bristley Foxtail millet (*Setaria* sp. Beauv. (cf. *viridis* Beauv., *glauca* auct. pl., *verticillata* (L.) P. Beauv.), kodo millet (*Paspalum scrobiculatum* L.), little millet (*Panicum sumatrense* Roth. Ex Roem. and amp; Schult. (syn. *P. miliare* auct. Pl.) and Sawa millet (*Echinochloa colona* ssp. *frumentacea* (Link) De Wet) and protein- rich pulses such as black gram (*Vigna mungo* (L.) Hepper), green-gram (*Vigna radiate* (L.) Wilczek), common / field pea (*Pisum arvense* L.) and horse-gram (*Macrotyloma uniflorum* (Lam.) Verdc.). Besides these, fruit seeds of Indian jujube (*Ziziphus mauritiana* Lam.) have been recovered from the site. The wild and weedy taxa comprise of *Chenopodium* sp., *Rumex dentatus*, *Sedge* (*Cyperus* sp.), *Fimbristylis* sp., etc. (Sabale et.al. 2022).

Very likely, the Phytolith composition of the early historic period shows an increase in Panicoid and Chloridoid while there is a decrease in woody elements. The phytolith studies is a powerful lense that provides us with the knowledge of the shifting ecologies from a natural forest to an agricultural land. The panicoid and chloridoid type of phytolith represents a cultivated landscape while the woody element is the representation of the forest that prevailed in the landscape. Therefore, it's quite evident that the landscape of Mula was favourable for agriculture as we can see through the Phytolith studies. While carbonised grain of wheat could be extracted from the excavation of Nevasa, Ter and Bhokardan it can be inferred that these were not the only sites to play their part in the Indo-Roman trade. These probably could have been the main centres where the smaller hinterlands would have contributed to their produce, bringing the larger portion of Deccan active in the global trade of that time, of course economic transactions was essential for life so people were doing their part for survival and material gain from what so ever they had.

Conclusion

Therefore, it can be concluded that the Godavari basin as a whole served to the Indo-Roman trade and over hundreds of settlements played its part as contributors, some dealing with luxury goods, some with cotton while some were supplying grains as evident from several sites. The era of Satavahana was standing on such a higher edge because of the strong economy they oriented which was only possible due to the fertile land it possessed. India is the land of agriculture so also the land of villages which is the strength of India's economy at present and was also same in the past.

References

- Kumari Abhilasha, Kumari and Sabale, P. (2016). Preliminary Report On Geoarchaeological Exploration In Upper And Middle Reaches Of Mula River Basin – A Case Study From Ahmednagar District, Maharashtra. *Historicity Research Journal* ISSN : 2393-8900 Volume – 3, Issue - 2
- Chapekar, B.N. (1969). Report on Excavation at Ter (1958). Pune, Shri Saraswati Mudranalay.
- Cimino, R.M. (1994) b(ed.). *Ancient Rome and India*, New Delhi: Italian Embassy Cultural Centre.
- Cimino, R.M. (1994)a. The Indian Ivory Statuette from Pompeii, In *Ancient Rome and India* (R.M. Cimino Ed.), pp. 119-122. New Delhi: Italian Embassy Cultural Centre.
- De Puma, Richard Deniel 1991. The Roman Bronzes from Kolhapur, In *Rome and India: The Ancient Sea Trade* (Ed. V. Begley and R. D. De Puma), pp: 82-112. Madison: Univ of Wisconsin Press.
- Deo, S. B (1991)b. Roman trade: recent Archaeological Discoveries in Western India, In *Rome and India: The Ancient Sea Trade* (Ed. V. Begley and R. D. De Puma), pp- 39-45. Madison: Wisconsin University Press.
- Deo, S. B. and J. P. Joshi (1972). *Pauni Excavations*. Nagpur: Nagpur University.
- Deo, S. B. and M. K. Dhavalikar (1968). *Punar Excavations*. Nagpur: Nagpur University.
- Deotare, B. C. 2006. Preliminary Report on the excavations at Bhon and Paturda, Buldhana District, Maharashtra, *Bulletin of the Deccan college Post Graduate and Research Institute*, 64-65:87
- Deshpande, M. N. 1999. Satavahana Terracotta Art: with Special Reference to Ter, *The Age of the Satavahanas*, (Ed. Ajay Mitra Shastri), Vol-II: 471-479. New Delhi: Aryan Books International.
- Dhavalikar, M.K. (1999). *Historical Archaeology of India*. New Delhi: Books and Books Pvt. Ltd.
- Dhavalikar, M.K. (2002). *Environment and Culture: A Historical Perspective*. Pune: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute.
- Dhavalikar, M. K. 1988. *First Farmers of Deccan*. Pune: Ravish Publications. Dhavalikar, M. K. 1999. The Satavahana Epoch: An Ecological Perspective, In *The Age of the Satavahanas* (Ed. Ajay Mitra Shastri), Vol. I: 102-114. New Delhi: Aryan Books International.
- Dhavalikar, M.K. 1986. Nasik - A Yavana centre, *Journal of Asiatic Society of Bombay*, for 1981-84 56-59 (2):160-168.
- Dikshit, M.G. 1968: Excavations at Kaundinyapura. Bombay: Government of Maharashtra. *Topoi. Orient-Occident*. Pp. 75-109.
- Fauconnier, Bram (2012). *Greco-Roman merchants in the Indian Ocean: Revealing a multicultural trade*.
- Ghosh, A. 1973. *City in Early Historical India*. Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study. Gogte, V. D. 2003. Discovery of the Ancient Port of Chaul, *Man and Environment* 28(1):67-79.
- Gogte, V. D. 2004. Discovery of an Ancient Port: Palaepatmai of the Periplus on the West Coast of India, *Journal of Indian Ocean Archaeology* 1:124
- Gogte, V. D. 2007. Ancient Port at Chaul: Semulla of the Periplus of the Erythraean Sea, *Bulletin of the Deccan College Post Graduate and Research Institute*, Vol. 66-67:161-182.
- Gupta, Sunil.(1997). *Roman Egypt to Peninsular India (Patterns of trade)*.(Thesis- submitted to Deccan College Post Graduate and research Institute,Pune).
- J. Joglekar, J and Vaidya, S.(2016). A Note on the Recently Discovered Early Historic site at Pandhrewadi (Bavdhan), near Wai, Satara District, Maharashtra *Man and Environment* XLI(1): 114-118

- Kajale, M. D. 1973: Plant economy at Bhokardan, In Excavations at Bhokardan (Bhogavardhan) (Eds. S. B. Deo, A.M. Shastri, T.V. Pathy, O.P. Verma. G.B. Deglurkar, A.P. Jamkedkar, M.D. Kajale, and V.V. Rao), pp: 217-19, Nagpur: Aurangabad Universities.
- Kajale, M. D. 1974. Ancient Grains from India, *Bulletin of Deccan College Post Graduate and Research Institute*, 34(1-4):55-75.
- Kajale, M. D. 1975. A note on grain remains form excavations at Ter, *Bulletin of Deccan College Post Graduate and Research Institute*, 35: 62-64
- Kamble. Vishwanath. C.(2017). Early Historic Settlement Pattern in Godavari Basin, Ahmednagar district, Maharashtra. *Bulletin of Deccan College Post-Graduate and research institute*. Volume. 77 Pp. 290-295.
- Kulkarni Niranjan (2003). Early Historic Investigation in the Upper Krishna Basin: with special Reference to Karhad and Kolhapur, Unpublished PhD thesis submitted to Deccan College Post-graduate and Research Institute, Pune.
- Indian Archaeology a Review. New Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India. 1953-54: 37; 1954- 55:5; 1955-56: 1- 8; 1959-60: 25-30; 1960-61: 19-25; 1961-62: 28-29; 1966-67: 22; 1967-68: 31; 1968-69: 13; 1969-70: 17-18; 1985-86: 56; 2010-11; 2013-14. 2).
- Majumdar, R.C. (1960). *Classical Accounts of India*. Kolkata: Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyay.
- Mirashi, V.V.(1981). *The History and Inscriptions of the Satavahanas and the Western Kshatrapas*. Maharashtra State Board for Literature and Culture, Bombay.
- Ray. H.P.(1989) *Early historical trade: An overview*. Sage Journals, Volume 26, issue 4. Pp.387-403.
- Sabale, P.D.et.al. (2022). Preliminary Report On Kotul Excavation, District Ahmednagar (Maharashtra), Field Season: 2021-22. *Bulletin of the Deccan College. Post-Graduate and Research Institute* Vol. 82(ISSN-0045-9801)
- Sankalia, H.D. and M.G. Dikshit. (1952). *Excavations at Brahmapuri (Kolhapur) 1945-46*. Pune: Deccan College.
- Sankalia, H.D. and S.B. Deo. (1955). *Report on the excavations at Nasik and Jorwe*. Pune: Deccan College.
- Sankalia, H.D., S.B. Deo, Z.D. Ansari and Sophie Ehrhardt. (1960). *From History to Prehistory at Nevasa*. Pune: Deccan College.
- Sarde, Vijay (2020). Archaeological Remains of Early Historic and Medieval Period at Tirth Budruk and the Surrounding Area of Osmanabad District in Maharashtra. *Heritage: Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies in Archaeology* 8.2 (2020): 767-795
- Shinde, V.S., S.N. Rajaguru, Shweta Sinha Deshpande, Prabodh Shirwalkar, Pandurang Balkawade, P.P. Joglekar, Sushama. G. Deo, Salim Shaikh and Neha Kothari.(2002-03). *New Light on the History of Pune City: Results of an Archaeological Rescue Operation*, *Puratattva* 33: 52-63, 200-203.
- Shinde, Vasant, P.P. Joglekar, Ravi Jadhav and V. Naiknavare.2004. A Satavahana Period Shrine of Laxmi-Parvati at Siddhapur, District Solapur, Maharashtra, *Man and Environment* XXIX(2): 117.
- Sharma, R.S..(1977). *Ancient India*. National Council of Educational Research and Training. New Delhi-110016.
- Sidebotham, E. Steven. (1986). *Roman Economic Policy in the Erythra Thalassa (30 B.C.-A.D.217)*. Leiden E.J. Brill.
- Thakuria, Tilok.(2017). *Society and Economy during Early Historic Period in Maharashtra: An Archaeological Perspective*. *Heritage: Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies in Archaeology* 5 (2017): 169-190.