

Chalcolithic Age in India - Features and Importance

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Chalcolithic Age in India: Different regions of the Indian subcontinent experienced the emergence of numerous regional cultures by the second millennium B.C., which were distinguished by the use of copper and stone tools. Thus, these societies are known as chalcolithic societies. The Chalcolithic Age is a transitional phase between the Neolithic and the Bronze Age where humans began to use copper as a material for tools and weapons.

Chalcolithic cultures are named based on their location such as Banas culture in Rajasthan, Kayatha culture in Madhya Pradesh and Jorwe culture in Maharashtra.

Chalcolithic Age

This period followed the **Neolithic Age** and marked the emergence of metal usage, particularly copper and low-grade bronze.

- The Chalcolithic culture, also known as the "stone-copper phase," was characterised by the utilisation of copper and stone and lasted in India from approximately 2000 BC to 700 BC.
- This culture was prominent during the pre-Harappan period but was also present in various regions during the post-Harappan period.

Important Chalcolithic Sites

The largest site of the Chalcolithic period is Daimabad (mainly part of the Jorwe Culture), situated on the left bank of the Pravara River.



Features of the Various Chalcolithic Cultures in India

Culture Name	Features
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Ahar Culture	Also known as the Banas culture, it is one of the earliest Chalcolithic cultures in India. Most sites of this culture are located in the Banas Valley in southeastern Rajasthan, known as Mewar. - Mineral Deposits and Copper Supply: • Sites are found to be rich in mineral deposits and were believed to supply copper to the Harappan sites. - Sites and Excavations: • Over sixty Ahar culture chalcolithic sites have been discovered. Important among them are Balathal, Gilund, Ojiyana, Pachamta, etc. ◦ Balathal is the most extensively studied chalcolithic site of the Ahar culture. • Excavations at Balathal revealed cultural deposits and a time bracket of the 3rd millennium BC to 1500 BC for the Chalcolithic phase. - Phases and Material Culture: • The Ahar culture is divided into four phases: Early Ahar/Balathal, Transitional Phase, Mature Ahar, and Late Ahar. • The early Ahar phase identified at Balathal includes mud and mud brick houses, eight types of pottery, an inverted firing technique, and diverse beads. • The transitional phase marked the transition to the Mature Ahar phase, as seen through ceramic types. - Settlement Patterns and Industrial Activities: • Stone, mud, and mud brick houses were built, and fortified enclosures were present at some sites. • Mass production of ceramics, metalworking, and bead industries developed during this phase. - Agriculture and Economy: • Rice cultivation along with wheat, barley, millet, bajra, and jawar. • Mixed economy of cultivation and hunting-gathering, with domesticated animals and hunting of wild species. - Cultural and Ideological Aspects: • Bull figurines appearing in large numbers during the mature Ahar phase have symbolic significance. - Decline and Termination: • The farming culture of southeastern Rajasthan declined due to the inhospitable climate by the end of the second millennium BC.
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Kayatha Culture	The culture is named after the chalcolithic site Kayatha, located in Ujjain district, Madhya Pradesh. Most of these settlements are situated along the tributaries of the Chambal River. Its ancient name is Kapitthaka, the birthplace of Varaha, a celebrated astronomer. - Ceramics: • The pottery types of bowls, high and short-necked storage jars with a globular profile, and basins, as well as chocolate slipped ware, were distinctive. • The majority of pottery (about 60%) consisted of coarse, handmade red/grey ware. - Tools and Ornaments: • Both copper and stone tools were used by the Kayatha culture. • Ornaments, such as two bead necklaces made from semi-precious stones, were discovered. - Lifestyle and Economy: • The inhabitants resided in small huts with thatched roofs, well-rammed floors, and wattle and daub walls. • A mixed economy was practised, evident from the evidence of subsistence farming, stock raising, and hunting-fishing. • Crops like barley and wheat were cultivated. • Domesticated animals included cattle and sheep/goats. • Notably, horse remains were found at the Chalcolithic level in Kayatha. - End of the Culture: • Earthquake is considered as a cause for the sudden end of the Kayatha culture.
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Malwa Culture

It is a prominent chalcolithic culture in central India and widely distributed throughout the Malwa region flourished between **1900-1400 BC**.

- First identified by the excavations at **Maheshwar** (on the bank of Narmada), which is the ancient **Mahishmati**.

- Malwa culture sites flourished mostly on the banks of the tributaries of **Narmada**.

- Settlement Patterns:

- In Malwa culture, chalcolithic sites are mostly found on the tributaries of the main rivers, avoiding flood-prone areas.
- The settlement pattern consists of numerous small villages and a few larger villages.
- Notable Malwa culture chalcolithic sites (villages) include **Navdatoli, Nagda, Kayatha** and **Eran**.
- Nagda shows houses laid out in rows along roads and bylanes, with unique mud ramparts.
- Multiple phases of chalcolithic culture were found at Navdatoli, with round huts and rectangular houses.

- Structures and Artifacts:

- Houses were multi-roomed with well-rammed floors and thatched roofs.
- Various pottery types were discovered, including the distinctive Malwa ware, cream slipware, and red/grey ware.
- Copper tools and exquisitely made copper axes were found, along with a specialised blade industry.
- Ornaments, such as bead necklaces made from semi-precious stones, were also unearthed.

- Expansion:

- The Malwa culture spread into Maharashtra, with extensive sites identified in the Tapi, Godavari, and Bhima valleys.

- Chalcolithic diet:

- Carbonised grains of wheat, barley, jawar, rice, legumes, oilseeds, and fruits provided insights into subsistence practices and diet.
- Animal flesh was also part of the Chalcolithic diet.

- Material culture:

- Malwa ware, mainly Ceramic types, formed the material culture.
- Other material assemblages belong to blade tools, copper artefacts, and beads.

- Religious beliefs:

- Evidence of terracotta female figures, Terracotta bull figures and Painted male figures.
- Evidence of fire worship due to the finding of a structure interpreted as a fire altar.

- Decline and Interpretation:

Jorwe culture	is the most important chalcolithic culture of Maharashtra, spanning almost all of the state except for the coastal strip and Vidarbha. - Regional Centers: • 3 main centres - Prakash (Tapi valley), Daimabad (Godavari-Pravara valley), and Inamgaon (Bhima valley). • Inamgaon and Daimabad are the most excavated Jorwe culture sites (Prakash occurs in a highly fertile region for cotton, hence less excavated). • These 3 areas have a rich material culture. • Inamgaon excavation reveals structures like a granary and diversion channels. - Types of Sites: • Jorwe sites were classified as regional centres, villages, hamlets, farmsteads, and camps. - Subsistence Patterns: • Dry farming was the mainstay of Jorwe culture, with stock raising, hunting, and fishing serving as ancillary pursuits. • Crop rotation and a variety of crops were practised, including barley, wheat, jowar, rice, and pulses. - Material Culture: • Stone blade/flake industry and ceramic technology were significant aspects. • Painted pottery was wheel-made and well-fired, featuring forms like spouted jars and carinated bowls. • Metal technology was rudimentary, and lime-making was a flourishing industry. - Burial Practices and Religious Beliefs: • Child burials were found in urns, while adult burials had the portion below the ankles chopped off. • Unique burials, such as a four-legged urn burial with an adult skeleton, were discovered at Inamgaon. • Terracotta figurines provided insights into religious beliefs. - Decline: • Many settlements were abandoned at the end of the second millennium BC due to climatic deterioration.
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Ochre Coloured Pottery Culture	OCP pottery with larger fragments has been discovered at sites in the upper Ganga-Yamuna Doab. Key Sites were Ahichchhatra and Jodhpura (the only sites where the habitational deposit of the OCP has been found). - Association with Copper Hoards: • The association of OCP with Copper Hoards is found in different parts of northern and eastern India. However, there are differing views on whether OCP and Copper Hoards are separate entities or related to different cultures. - Development of OCP: • OCP from the upper Ganga basin shows similarities with pre-Harappan and Early Harappan artefacts from the Indus and Yamuna valleys. • The development of OCP is divided into stages, with the third stage marked by a drastic change in climate and migration to the upper Ganga basin and later the middle Ganga valley.
Painted Gray Ware (PGW) Culture	Painted Grey Ware (PGW) is a high-quality grey pottery with a thin fabric and sophisticated firing techniques. - Geographic Distribution: • PGW sites extend from the Bahawalpur region of Pakistan to Kaushambi near Allahabad in Uttar Pradesh, with sporadic findings in places like Vaishali, Lakhiyopur, and Ujjain. - Culture and practices: • Structural remains at PGW levels include wattle-and-daub and mud huts, with some sites showing evidence of unbaked and baked bricks. • Burials have been found at some PGW sites, and human skeletons were discovered in the Late Harappa-PGW interlocking stage at Bhagwanpura. • The subsistence base of PGW culture involved the cultivation of rice, wheat, and barley, with a possible practice of double cropping. • Limited evidence suggests the presence of kachcha wells for water supply, and animal husbandry was also practised. - Iron and Second Urbanization: • Iron objects are not universally present at PGW sites, but they are found in the Ganga-Yamuna doab region. • Iron artefacts primarily include weapons like arrowheads, spearheads, blades, and daggers, but some objects associated with carpentry have also been found. • Mature PGW phases have provided evidence of iron implements used in agriculture, such as sickles, ploughshares, and hoes.

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