

A Review of Paleolithic Sites in Nagpur District of Vidarbha Region, Maharashtra, India

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Abstract

This research paper presents a thorough examination of the evolution of Paleolithic studies in Nagpur district since India's independence. By meticulously compiling data from a range of scholarly sources, including journals, PhD theses, Master's Dissertations, and articles, we construct a comprehensive narrative of the region's Paleolithic research landscape. This historical overview offers insights into the progress made in understanding early human cultures in the Nagpur district and reveals significant archaeological findings over time. Through a meticulous analysis of this multifaceted historical record, our paper contributes to a deeper understanding of the rich archaeological heritage of this region and underscores the importance of ongoing Paleolithic research in advancing our knowledge of human prehistory.

Keywords: Paleolithic, Vidarbha, Nagpur District, Exploration, Naikund.

Introduction

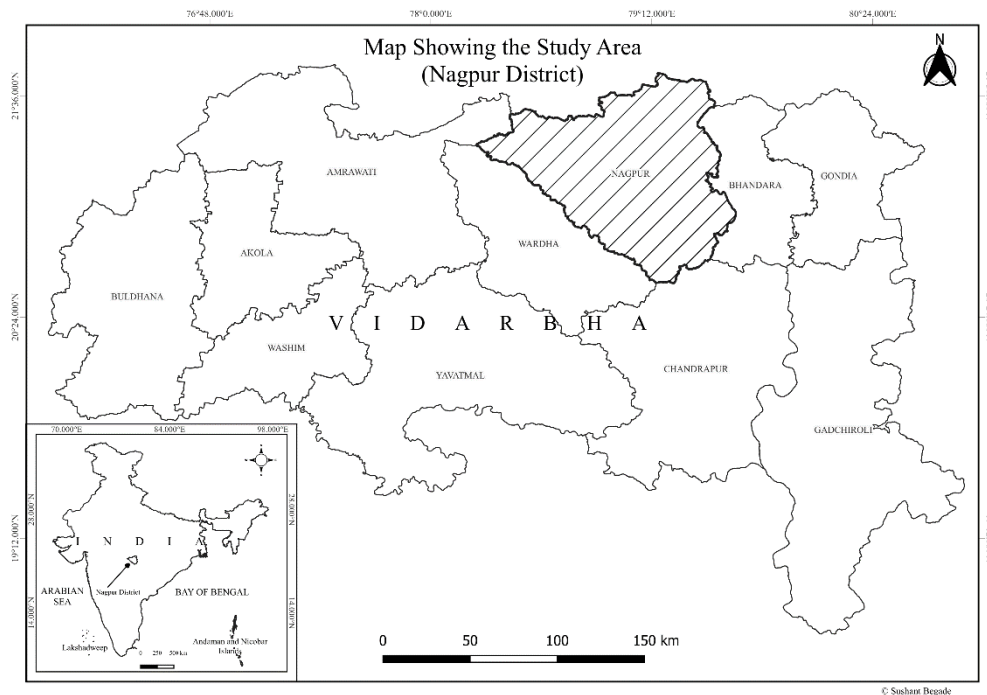
In India, over the past six decades, there has been a significant focus on studying the regional aspects of early human history. This concerted effort has led to the exploration of various smaller regions, each of which has unveiled intriguing discoveries. Among these regions, Maharashtra stands out as particularly promising when it comes to understanding Paleolithic cultures. This part of the country has provided compelling evidence spanning from the Lower Paleolithic to the Upper Paleolithic period.

The Nagpur District of the Vidarbha region of Maharashtra has a very rich record of Paleolithic culture. The explorations initiated by the Archaeological Survey of Indian (Prehistory Branch) in 1959-60 laid the foundations of Paleolithic research in this region. Koradi (IAR 1959-60: 31) became the first Paleolithic factory site in this region. Since after findings of palaeoliths at Naikund (IAR 1977-78:37), Kola Suran (IAR 1984-85: 52), Borgaon (Pandey 1985: 121-133), Dattawadi (IAR 1995-96: 57-58), etc, explorations in this region are moving at a pace.

This paper summarizes the post-Independence history of Paleolithic research in Nagpur district. It serves as a meticulous compilation of Paleolithic sites documented in various sources such as journals, PhD theses, Master's Dissertations, and other scholarly articles. Together, these sources provide a comprehensive narrative of the archaeological exploration and discoveries in this captivating region.

The Study Area

The Nagpur District of Vidarbha Region in Maharashtra comprises 14 sub-districts. It covers 9892 Km² area. The study area falls under two major river systems (*viz.* Wainganga and Wardha) and their tributaries (*viz.* Kanhan, Pench, Kolar, Sur, Aam, Maru, Chandrabhaga, Nag, Jam, Vena, Bor, and Bawanthadi, etc).



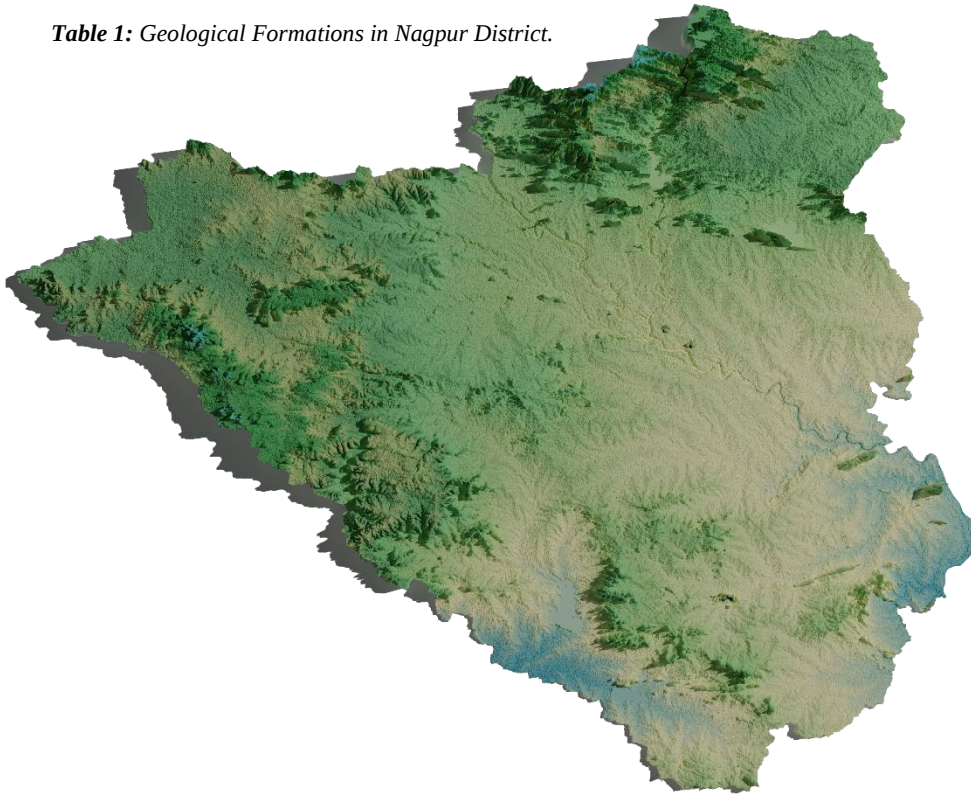
Map 1: Highlighted portion of the map showing the study area (viz., Nagpur District).

Topographically, the study area possesses varied topography due to a complex geological setup. The northern and north-western part of Nagpur district forms an inlying spur of the Satpura range, which shows plateaus and hillocks landforms and has the highest altitude of 652m AMSL (Map 2). The central part of the district lies on an undulating plain intersected by streams and rivers. The eastern and southern parts of the district have vast pediplain with gentle slopes towards the east and are also occupied by the Wainganga River basin.

Geologically, the rock formation in the study area is underlain by the Archaean rocks to the north and east and younger sedimentary rocks like Lameta and Gondwana, being embedded by flows (Deccan basalt) to the west and south. The major formations in the study area are shown in Table 1 (Geological Survey of India 2021; District Survey Report Nagpur 2022-2023).

Age	Formations
Recent	Alluvium
Upper Cretaceous to Lower Eocene	Deccan Basalt (Traps) associated with Intertrappean sediments
Cretaceous	Lameta Beds
Carboniferous to Permian	Gondwana Group: 1. Kamthi Formation 2. Talchir Formation
Archaean	Streaky Granitiegneisses Sausar and Sakoli series of metasediment

Table 1: Geological Formations in Nagpur District.



Map 2: Digital Elevation Map of Nagpur District

The present climate of the study area is characterized by hot summers, cold and dry winters, and well-distributed rainfall with an average of 1064.1 mm (District Survey Report Nagpur 2022-2023).

Paleolithic Research in Nagpur District

Paleolithic sites have been reported since the mid-20th century in the Nagpur District of the Vidarbha Region of Maharashtra. Many institutions and research scholars have contributed to these explorations, which are as follows:

Archaeological Survey of India (Prehistory Branch): In 1959-60, under the direction of Dr. R.V Joshi, Koradi was the first palaeolithic factory site which was discovered, where flakes and flake-blades with plain and narrow striking- platform were picked up from the low-lying hill, near Kali temple (IAR 1959-60: 31). In the same year, thirty-five artefacts of a scraper-flake-blade assemblage were picked up in situ in the cemented sandy gravel resting on the weathered Deccan trap on the Wuna river near village Khairi (IAR 1959-60: 33). In 1961-62, B.P Bopadikar found middle palaeolithic tools comprising points and scrapers in the loose gravel of Sand nullah at Nawegaon, Dhamangaon, Maroli and Bhamiwara (IAR 1961-62: 101). Another exploration undertook under Dr. R.V Joshi accompanied by B.P Bopadikar, S.D Kulkarni and Nawathe near the village Nawegaon Kheri, in which a trench dug out in the portion of Pench river yielded middle palaeolithic tools from a thin silty layer and gravelly rubble (IAR 1969-70: 24). In 1985-86, under the direction of B.P Bopadikar assisted by N.G Nikoshey, J.S Dubey and N.K Nimje carried out exploration along with river Wainganga and located lower, middle and upper palaeolithic sites at Ambhora Khurd, Itgaon, Maundi, Khabri, Jamgaon, Mohdura and Nawegaon (IAR 1985-86: 58), except Ambhora Khurd remaining all sites are now submerged in a Gosikhurd Irrigation project on Wainganga river. In 2013-14, N.G Nikoshey assisted by G.L Kakade, K.M Girhe and N.K Nimje conducted explorations in Kalmeshwar and several 26 more villages of several talukas in Nagpur district and reported them as middle palaeolithic sites (IAR 2013-14: 77-79).

Archaeological Survey of India (Excavation Branch I, Nagpur): In 1959-60, series II tools (cores, flakes, points, and scrapers) on chalcedony, chert, and jasper were discovered near the village Waddhamna on Nagpur-Amravati Road (IAR 1959-60: 72). In 1961-62, B.K. Thapar recovered Middle Paleolithic tools near Junapani and Phetri from the cairn-filling of the excavated megaliths, indicating cairn material was collected from the neighboring sites of Middle Paleolithic culture (IAR 1961-62: 101). In 1988-92, under the direction of Dr. Amrendra Nath, excavated Adam in which four Paleolithic handaxes were reported. They were made on basalt and quartzite (Dr. Nath A 2016: 207-208).

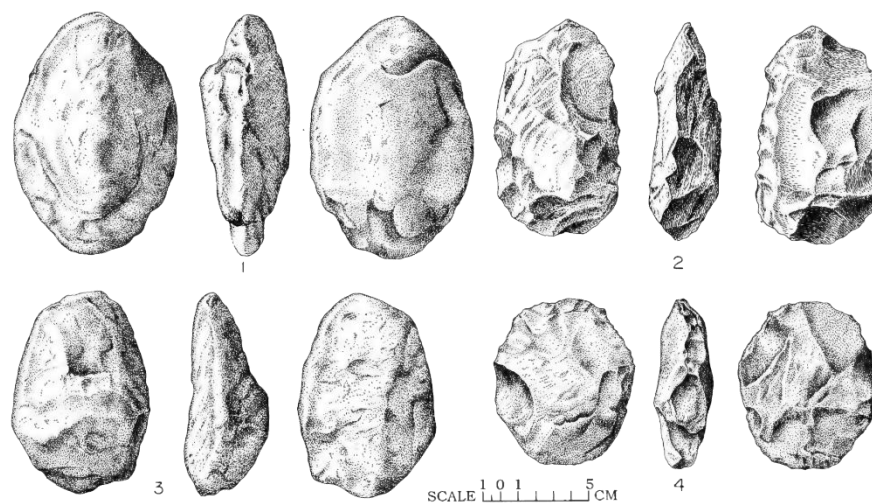


Figure 1: Handaxes from Adam (Source: Dr. Nath A 2016: 207-208)

Archaeological Survey of India (Central Circle): In 1968-71, Lai Chand Singh discovered upper paleolithic sites at Bhokara (IAR 1968-69: 17) and Gawasi (now Ashokban) (IAR 1970-71: 24).

Archaeological Survey of India (South-Western Circle): In 1981-82, S.N Raghunath located upper palaeolithic sites at Umred, Sadeswar, Gondpimpri, Bori and Adyal, in which tools are short blades and scrapers on chalcedony and agate (IAR

1981-82: 49). In same year, R.C Agarwal and Amarendra Nath collected middle palaeolithic tools (viz. borer-cum-scrapers, side scrapers, triangles, arrowheads, fluted cores and discoidal cores) at Hingna, tools were made on green jasper and chalcedony embedded in black cotton soil mixed with kankar (IAR 1981-82: 96).

Archaeological Survey of India (Aurangabad Circle): In the course of exploration of submergence area of lower Wunna Irrigation Project, M. Mahadevaiah noticed middle palaeolithic sites in Dhudhala, Jaipur, Borgaon, Khursapur, Kawadpur, Ridhora and Salai Rani (IAR 1985-86: 58).

Deccan College and Post-Graduate and Research Institute, Pune: In 1977-78, Professor R.V Joshi, Dr. G.L Badam and Rakesh Pandey explored the river Pench near Naikund and collected 327 middle and upper palaeolithic tools from river section, tools consist scrapers, burins, points, borers, knives, choppers, blades and flakes made on chert, chalcedony, agate, jasper and quartz, the tools were similar to those usually found in Wainganga basin (IAR 1977-78: 37; Pandey R.P 1981: 223-230). In 1984, during the excavations of megaliths by Professor S.B Deo, K Paddayya reported middle palaeolithic localities yielding scrapers, borer, points, blades, cores and flakes at Pipla and Telkamthi adjoining to these megalithic sites (Paddayya K 1984: 91-98). In subsequent year, R.P Pandey reported upper palaeolithic tools at Borgaon from the vicinity of megalithic burials (Pandey 1985: 121-133). In 1994-95, during the course of survey of river Kanhan (near Kamptee) several stone artefacts and well-preserved fossil of *Bos namadicus* were collected by G.L Badam and team, also rich assemblage of palaeolithic tools were traced at Wadi and Dattawadi area (IAR 1994-95: 55). In next year's continuation of exploration, they reported middle palaeolithic tools (flakes, scrapers and core made on chert and chalcedony) near Kamptee Cantonment area (IAR 1995-96: 56-57). In 2017-18, geomorphological investigations carried out around the site of Nagardhan, in which Joglekar and Imchen reported over hundred lower and middle palaeolithic tools, which consists handaxe, cleaver, scraper, chopper, flakes, points, blades and cores etc, mainly made on quartz (Joglekar 2017: 114-117; Joglekar and Imchen 2018: 261-275).

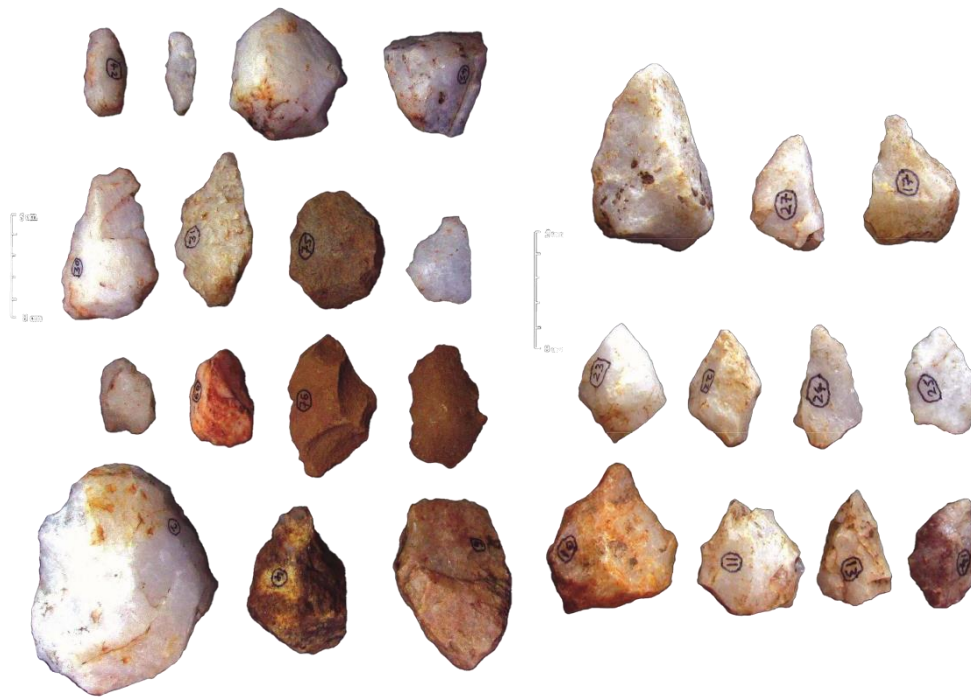


Figure 2: Middle Palaeolithic Tools from Nagardhan.

(Source: Joglekar and Imchen 2018: 261-275)

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In 1977-78, Professor A.M Shastri collected middle palaeolithic tools from the bed of a small nullah and the adjoining fields at Ajni (in Nagpur City) (IAR 1977-78: 81). In the same year, he also discovered middle palaeolithic tools at Mahurjhari from the bed of a small rivulet flowing on the north of the village (IAR 1977-78: 101). In subsequent year, Dr. Chandrashekhar Gupta also noticed Lower and Middle palaeolithic tools at Mahurjhari, where lower palaeolithic tools only represent by choppers, found in the nullah flowing through the fields of village, whereas middle palaeolithic site yields blades, scrapers, flakes and core from the left bank of rivulet flowing on norther border of village (IAR 1979-80: 104). In 1984-85, Dr. Chandrashekhar Gupta discovered lower palaeolithic tools at Umred and Kola Suran

hill range (IAR 1984-85: 52). In 1994-95, Dr. Ismail Kellellu did exploration and discovered few lower and middle palaeolithic localities within the Nagpur city. At Nandanwan colony, tool comprising scraper, points, borers, choppers and handaxe were collected from earth dug out for constructing a well at a depth of 9.14 m below surface and all tools made on chert (IAR 1994-95: 57). In the Methodist church compound typical middle palaeolithic tools collected from surface (IAR 1994-95: 57). A trench laid for water pipeline in Bajaj nagar, yielded a small handaxe on quartzite and chopper, scrapper, points, blades and borers made on chert in stratified context (IAR 1994-95: 57). In subsequent year, under the direction of Dr. Chandrashekhar Gupta and Dr. Ismail Kellellu assisted by Pradeep Meshram, C.N Saharkar, Damodar Aglave, Jagdish Ramdam, Mukta Mohite, Vandana Khedikar and department students carried a trail excavation at Dattawadi, in which middle palaeolithic stone tools were recovered and tools are entirely made on locally available smoky-white chert and without any encrustation suggesting the site have been a factory site (IAR 1995-96: 57). In 2014, Dr. Prabash Sahu and his student Siddharth Gharde reported twenty-seven middle and upper palaeolithic tools from Sawali Khurd. Tools were classified as scraper, borer, point, blade and burin and they were made on chert and jasper (Sahu P 2019). In 2018, K.S Chandra, contributory lecturer of department reported similar kind of lower palaeolithic tools reported previously at Nandanwan, which consists handaxe, cleaver, blade and burin made on chert (Chandra K.S 2018: 1-17). In 2019, in the research for master's dissertation, department student Vivek Raut reported several lower, middle and upper palaeolithic sites at Bina Sangam, Mahuli, Sihora, Kirnarpur, Sukali and Mokhedi etc, all sites are on the banks of Kanhan river (Raut 2018-19: 21-29).



Figure 3: Palaeolithic Tools from Dattawadi.

(Source: Department of A.I.H.C and Archaeology, R.T.M.N.U)

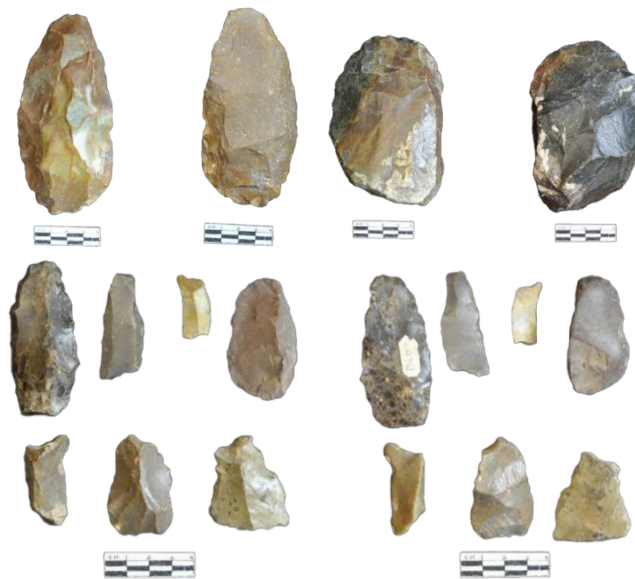
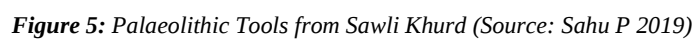


Figure 4: Palaeolithic Tools from Nandanwan locality in Nagpur City.

(Source: Chandra K.S 2018)



Reported Palaeolithic Sites in Nagpur District

The map displays the geographical distribution of reported Palaeolithic sites within Nagpur District. The district is bounded by 79°24'0" E to 79°36'0" E longitude and 19°24'0" N to 19°36'0" N latitude. Major rivers shown include the Pravara, Wardha, and Wainganga. The city of Nagpur is centrally located. Numerous sites are marked with black dots and labeled, including Deoli, Mendha, Wadgaon, and many others. The map also shows major roads and the city of Nagpur. A scale bar indicates distances up to 30 km. An index map of India shows the location of Nagpur District in central India. A north arrow is present in the top right corner.

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- Palaeolithic Sites

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Sr. No.	Site Names	Geo-coordinates	Culture	Reference
1	Adam	20°59'58" N, 79°27'04" E	LP	Dr. Nath A 2016: 207-208
2	Adyal	20°48'57" N, 79°31'46" E	UP	IAR 1981-82: 49
3	Ajni	21°07'05" N, 79°04'31" E	MP	IAR 1977-78: 81
4	Ambhora Khurd	21°00'40" N, 79°35'46" E	LP	IAR 1985-86: 58
5	Ashti (Nimji)	21°10'56"N, 78°52'8" E	MP	IAR 2013-14: 77
6	Bajaj Nagar	21°07'38" N, 79°03'41" E	MP	IAR 1994-95: 57
7	Bena Sangam	21°15'52" N, 79°09'53" E	MP, UP	Raut 2019: 21
8	Bhamiwara	21°09'53" N, 79°27'58" E	MP, UP	IAR 1961-62: 101
9	Bhokara	21°13'40" N, 79°03'58" E	UP	IAR 1968-69: 17
10	Borgaon	20°51'07" N, 79°03'24" E	MP	IAR 1985-86: 58
11	Borgaon (Buzruk)	21°20'46" N, 78°55'33" E	UP	Pandey 1985: 121-133
12	Bori (Majara)	20°46'05" N, 79°06'15" E	UP	IAR 1981-82: 49
13	Chakdoh	21°17'05" N, 78°44'59" E	MP	IAR 2013-14: 77
14	Chargaon	21°15'12" N, 78°44'53" E	MP	IAR 2013-14: 77

15	Dattawadi	21°09'22" N, 78°59'23" E	UP	IAR 1994-95: 55
16	Deoli	21°26'10" N, 78°26'50" E	MP	IAR 2013-14: 81
17	Dhamangaon	21°11'10" N, 79°25'46" E	MP, UP	IAR 1961-62: 101
18	Dhanoli	21°2'22" N, 79°15'52" E	MP	IAR 2013-14: 77
19	Dhudhala	20°53'55" N, 79°02'02" E	MP	IAR 1985-86: 58
20	Gawasi	21°22'49" N, 79°19'07" E	UP	IAR 1970-71: 24
21	Gondpimpri	21°04'15" N, 79°35'25" E	UP	IAR 1981-82: 49
22	Hingna	21°04'21" N, 78°57'34" E	MP	IAR 1981-82: 96
23	Jaipur	20°53'10" N, 79°02'00" E	MP	IAR 1985-86: 58
24	Jalalkheda	21°23'03" N, 78°25'11" E	MP	IAR 2013-14: 82
25	Junapani	21°11'53" N, 78°59'56" E	MP, UP	IAR 1961-62: 101
26	Kaldongri	21°00'10" N, 79°06'38" E	MP	IAR 2013-14: 77
27	Kalmeshwar	21°14'06" N, 78°55'34" E	LP, MP	IAR 2013-14: 78
28	Kamptee	21°13'26" N, 79°11'20" E	MP	IAR 1995-96: 56-57
29	Kawadpur	20°48'44" N, 79°04'43" E	MP	IAR 1985-86: 58

30	Khairi	21°12'59" N, 79°09'18" E	LP, MP, UP	IAR 1959-60: 33
31	Khursapar	20°48'40" N, 79°03'42" E	MP	IAR 1985-86: 58
32	Khursapar	21°18'55" N, 78°48'23" E	MP	IAR 2013-14: 78
33	Kirnapur	21°10'04" N, 79°20'14" E	LP, MP, UP	Raut 2019: 28
34	Kohali	21°16'01" N, 78°48'33" E	MP	IAR 2013-14: 78
35	Koradi	21°14'58" N, 79°07'03" E	LP, MP, UP	IAR 1959-60: 31
36	Lakholi	21°16'46" N, 78°41'24" E	MP	IAR 2013-14: 78
37	Lonara	21°11'39" N, 78°51'28" E	MP	IAR 2013-14: 78
38	Mahuli	21°24'49" N, 79°11'10" E	MP, UP	Raut 2019: 22
39	Mahurjhari	21°13'32" N, 79°00'38" E	LP, MP	IAR 1977-78: 81; IAR 1979-80: 104
40	Maroli	21°09'41" N, 79°26'55" E	MP,UP	IAR 1961-62: 101
41	Mendhala	21°19'49" N, 78°22'40" E	MP	IAR 2013-14: 83
42	Methodist Church	21°07'34" N, 79°05'32" E	MP	IAR 1994-95: 57
43	Mohkhedi	21°06'13" N, 79°25'44" E	LP, MP, UP	Raut 2019: 29
44	Nagardhan	21°20'10" N, 79°18'55" E	LP, MP	Joglekar and Imchen 2018: 261-275

45	Naikund	21°22'02" N, 79°11'42" E	MP	IAR 1977-78: 37
46	Nandanwan	21°08'19" N, 79°07'39" E	LP.MP	IAR 1994-95: 57; Chandra K.S 2018: 1- 17
47	Navegaon	21°10'14" N, 79°26'19" E	MP, UP	IAR 1961-62: 101
48	Nawegaon Khairi	21°27'48" N, 79°10'17" E	MP, UP	IAR 1969-70: 24
49	Pachgaon	21°01'19" N, 79°10'02" E	MP	IAR 2013-14: 78
50	Pardi	21°16'50" N, 78°46'43" E	MP	IAR 2013-14: 78
51	Phetri	21°12'15" N, 78°59'18" E	MP, UP	IAR 1961-62: 101
52	Pipala (Bhadao)	21°24'19" N, 78°50'43" E	MP	Paddayya 1984: 92
53	Ramgiri	21°18'05" N, 78°45'31" E	MP	IAR 2013-14: 77
54	Ridhora	20°51'50" N, 79°03'44" E	MP	IAR 1985-86: 58
55	Salai Rani	20°49'53" N, 79°03'31" E	MP	IAR 1985-86: 58
56	Sawli Khurd	21°17'12" N, 78°52'16" E	MP,UP	Sahu P 2019
57	Selu	21°12'19" N, 78°53'54" E	MP	IAR 2013-14: 78
58	Shedeshwar	20°44'48" N, 79°07'08" E	UP	IAR 1981-82: 49

59	Sihora	21°12'29" N, 79°14'28" E	MP, UP	Raut 2019: 25
60	Sonkhamb	21°16'19" N, 78°43'31" E	MP	IAR 2013-14: 78
61	Sukali	21°10'39" N, 79°21'30" E	MP, UP	Raut 2019: 28
62	Surgaon	21°01'11" N, 79°12'17" E	MP	IAR 2013-14: 78
63	Susundri	21°17'33" N, 78°48'54" E	MP	IAR 2013-14: 78
64	Tarabodi	21°15'23" N, 78°42'48" E	MP	IAR 2013-14: 78
65	Telkamthi	21°22'38" N, 78°51'16" E	MP	Paddayya 1984: 93
66	Titur	21°04'02" N, 79°15'33" E	MP	IAR 2013-14: 78
67	Ubali	21°16'02" N, 78°52'05" E	MP	IAR 2013-14: 78
68	Ukharwahi	20°55'15" N, 79°15'18" E	MP	IAR 2013-14: 79
69	Umred	20°51'04" N, 79°19'08" E	LP. UP	IAR 1981-82: 49; IAR 1984-85: 52
70	Umtha	21°20'26" N, 78°24'29" E	MP	IAR 2013-14: 83
71	Waddhamna	21°08'51" N, 78°58'05" E	MP, UP	IAR 1959-60: 72
72	Wadi	21°08'44" N, 78°59'14" E	UP	IAR 1994-95: 55
73	Walni	21°12'53" N, 78°31'19" E	MP	IAR 2013-14: 79

74	Waroda	21°15'52 N, 78°54'19" E	MP	IAR 2013-14: 79
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Table 2: Reported palaeolithic sites in Nagpur District (LP-Lower Palaeolithic; MP-Middle Palaeolithic; UP-Upper Palaeolithic)

The Palaeolithic Culture of Nagpur District

Explorations and Excavations conducted in Nagpur district established the palaeolithic cultural sequence, which is summarized here as:

- A. Lower Palaeolithic Culture:** Ambhora Khurd (IAR 1985-86: 58) and Adam (Dr. Nath A 2016: 207-208) stand out as the sole locations where researchers exclusively discovered lower palaeolithic tool assemblages. Intriguingly, researchers also identified lower palaeolithic assemblages at an additional 9 multicultural sites. In Nagpur district, handaxes prominently characterize the lower palaeolithic assemblage, coexisting with cleavers, choppers, cores, and flakes. These tools were crafted from various raw materials such as chert, basalt and quartzite etc.
- B. Middle Palaeolithic Culture:** In Nagpur district, researchers reported a total of 41 middle palaeolithic sites, and within 21 of these multicultural palaeolithic sites come across middle palaeolithic tool assemblages. These tool collections include a variety of implements such as scrapers, flakes, cores, borers, points, knives etc, all crafted from materials like chert, chalcedony, jasper, agate, and quartz.
- C. Upper Palaeolithic Culture:** The presence of a industry primarily characterized by blades and burins is notable in this region. Substantial evidence supporting this claim comes from reports in Borgaon (Pandey 1985: 121-133) and Dattawadi (IAR 1995-96: 57-58). Additionally, researchers reported 9 upper palaeolithic sites and 18 of these multicultural palaeolithic sites yielding upper palaeolithic tool assemblages. Among the tools found in these assemblages are scrapers,

flakes, blades, and burins, all crafted from materials like quartz, chalcedony, chert, and jasper, among others.

Among the 74 sites that have been reported, 22 of them have been identified as multicultural palaeolithic sites based on the analysis of their stone tool assemblage. It's noteworthy that the majority of these Palaeolithic sites in the region were found in proximity to riverbeds or water bodies, possibly due to the scarcity of suitable raw materials in other landscapes.

Observation and Conclusion

In addition to the richness of palaeolithic artefacts found in Nagpur district, it's worth noting that researchers have historically used various terminologies to describe these palaeolithic assemblages. Terms such as 'series I or II tools,' 'Stone Age tools,' or 'palaeolithic tools' have been used interchangeably. Furthermore, in several studies, details about tool types, tool density, site characteristics and descriptions have been lacking. This has sometimes led to confusion about the precise location and nature of these sites.

To enhance the quality of future research efforts, a multidisciplinary approach is imperative. This approach should encompass diverse disciplines such as palaeoclimate studies, systematic surveys, GIS mapping, techno-morphological studies, and analysis of tool use in their primary contexts. Additionally, comprehensive explorations and excavations are essential to amass an abundant cultural material repository, enabling a more thorough study of the palaeolithic people of Nagpur district in the Vidarbha region. By adopting these comprehensive strategies, we can delve deeper into the past and gain a richer understanding of the lives of our palaeolithic ancestors in this region.

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