

# DISCOVERY OF THE REMAINS OF PREHISTORIC MAN IN NEPAL

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## A. Introductory

Toni Hagen, writing in 1960, noted that no investigations to trace the remains of the prehistoric man in Nepal had been made till that date, and indicated that 'numerous man-made and natural caves in the Thakkhola region were an incentive to do so'. He was no doubt obsessed with the idea of sinking in the elevation of the Himalayas that is supposed to have taken place around 700,000 years ago. The high elevation had caused the forests to die out in the higher altitudes, and the apes who had been dwelling among the trees were now forced to walk erect on flat grounds. This was the *raison d'être* of the upright gait of the anthropoid ape, leading to the evolution of man.

There is every reason in this context to find remains of the prehistoric man in the lower altitudes of the Himalayan region too, where the climate was still bearable and food supply was ample in the remote past.

To return to the geological phenomenon of the elevation of the Himalayas, it may be stated that, when subsequently the Mahabharat hills rose in the South, the rivers that had been flowing southwards suddenly formed large lakes in the midland valleys, owing to the disbalance caused by the upheaval. The lake of the Kathmandu valley was one of them. In course of time the entrapped waters cut their way through the double or sometime, triple barriers, including the Churia hills,

(branching out from the Siwaliks) the Mahabharat Lekh and the Siwaliks, and went lower down towards the south through the flat valleys, say of Chitwan, or Dang or entered the flats of the Tarai. The warmer climate of the sheltered valleys or of the Tarai were ideally suited for the habitat of the prehistoric man. The geological phenomenon of the drying of lakes, particularly of the Kathmandu valley, is said to have taken place as early as 200,000 years ago, resulting in the large-scale drainage of the rivers towards the south. If there are indeed any traces of the Stone Age Man in the higher altitudes, it is most likely, therefore, that they moved south not very much later than 200,000 years ago, on this reckoning.

The first scientific prehistoric survey in Nepal was undertaken by the Department of Archaeology, H. M. G. in a joint venture with the I. C. M., under the leadership of Dr. R.V. Joshi, Superintending Archaeologist of the Archaeological Survey of India, in 1962. The brief survey which lasted a couple of weeks traversed the valleys of the Bagmati and Vishnumati in the midland region and came to the conclusion that there was probably no trace of the prehistoric man in the Kathmandu valley. It indicated, therefore, the necessity of exploring the lower reaches of the mature and larger rivers, especially the Mahakali, Bagmati, Narayani, Kosi and Rapti between the Mahabharat Lekh and the Tarai across the Siwaliks.

Meanwhile, Dr. S. B. Deo, then Colombo Plan Professor of Ancient History and Cul-

ture at the Tribhuvan University from the Indian Cooperation Mission, carried out an exploration in the region to the east of Lumbini in the Tarai in 1964 in a joint expedition of the H. M. G., Tribhuvan University and the I.C.M. The outermost point covered by him was Triveni Ghat at the confluence of the Narayani and the Panchanadi in the Lumbini Zone of Nepal, opposite to Bhainsa Lotan, in the Champaran District of Bihar in India. Though he made no survey for prehistoric remains, he recommended the undertaking of an exploration for the purpose in the basin of the Narayani, upstream from Triveni Ghat.

### B. Work in 1968-1969

Shri Ramesh Jang Thapa, Director, Department of Archaeology, H.M.G., who has been throughout keen on the undertaking of an exploration for prehistoric remains in Nepal, had been urging the present author, in his capacity as Archaeological Adviser, to initiate the work in a suitable terrain. It was not however, possible to undertake this work before the middle of January '69. He deputed Shri Janaklal Sharma, Chief Research officer of the Department to work in the project, especially as he has earlier worked with Dr. Joshi and Dr. Deo also.

We chose to work from Triveni Ghat in the Nawal Parasi District upwards along the two banks of the Narayani river, and make a quick survey of the terrain, with a view to exploring the prospects of an intensive work later. The Narayani, also called Gandaki, which carries the combined waters of the Marsyangdi, Trisuli, Budhi Gandaki, Kali Gandaki and other streams, rises in the Himalayan regions beyond the borders of Nepal, i.e. in Tibet, flows into the Tarai and then into the Champaran District of Bihar in India, finally joining up with the Ganga.,

A preliminary examination of the landscape at Triveni Ghat showed a succession of four

terraces, rising up in varying contours, and reaching upto the Siwaliks. At Triveni Ghat itself there is a strand terrace (T 1) on the water front, which is still being formed. The little township of Triveni has come up on the next earlier Terrace (T 2) and has sprawled even upon the next earlier one (T 3), rising at last 40 ft. high above the former. The average height of each receding terrace would be about 25-30 ft. An examination of the section through a deep pit cut for a well into the third Terrace (T 3), showed a deposit of gravel and sand standing to a height of about 100 ft.

Beyond the third terrace is terrace No. 4 (T 4) which rises considerably high. The jungle has started growing thick over this terrace. Not very far from the edge of this terrace, is a spot made sacred to goddess Bhavani, and is known Kulayani Than, though actually marked by a damaged medieval image of Vishnu, mistakenly worshipped as Bhavani.

Owing to the jungles growing thicker beyond this point, it was not possible to penetrate deeper into the forest margining into the foothills of the Siwaliks. There cannot be any doubt that the river once had cut through the hills and the earliest terrace is to be traced at the slope of the Hills.

Nevertheless, we undertook a survey of the T 4, walking over it through the thickness of the jungle, stopping to examine the sections exposed by kholas (nullahs or rivulets) here and there for a length of about 2 miles, and reached a spot above Kherakhola, a tributary of the Narayani, on the fourth terrace. It was marked by three broken stone torsos of sculptured figures laid a round the trunk of a tree and other fragments of habitational remains in the form of brickbats and potsherds.

Without armed help it was considered inexpedient to probe further into the interior of the forest on still higher grounds, as the sands on the lower levels had already revealed

significant pugmarks of the tiger, panther and the bear.

Westward from Triveni Ghat, at a distance of about three miles from the river's edge, exploration revealed the remains of a medieval township on broad ridge, conforming in height to T 4. The finds included potsherds, bead and terracotta animal figurines, and the site is significantly known as Kothla.

It was thereupon decided to examine the terrace sections all along, travelling upstream from Triveni Ghat by boat. As the boat would take long to cover even short distances, against the current, we decided to get off from time to time, and walk up and down along the banks examining the terrace formations and the loosened gravels all along the way as far as the topography permitted such an undertaking.

The first object that looked very much like an artefact was picked up from the loosened gravels on the left bank of the river a little to the north-east of Bhimban. It raised our hopes of finding many such specimens higher up. We were convinced that we were now indeed on the trail of the prehistoric man. It was not, however, till we could get on to the upper terraces in the valley that there was any prospect of obtaining Stone Age remains.

Walking on foot from Ratanpur to Pithaunji Ghat on the border of Chitawan we observed a succession of five terraces. At Danda, about 6 miles from Ratanpur, an exposed cliff section of the fifth terrace, cut and exposed by a rivulet, appeared in the loosened gravels below the 30 ft. high cliff section of the terrace in the course of a brief search. The section itself showed two deposits, consisting of a lower series and an upper one with an intermediate sand and silt deposit separating the two. ~~The larger gravels and pebbles, as usual, in both the bottom.~~

The tools, which were not in situ, having been detached from the pebble bed, were all on quart<sup>ite</sup>~~ite~~. Most of them had a thin calcereous outer skin, whitish in appearance. These were from pebbles or on the pebbles themselves. They comprise hand-axes, cleavers choppers and scrapers. The scrapers are apparently later than the other tools, and would belong to a later phase of evolution. Not being in situ the tools have been much rolled about in the flowing waters but do not carry any patina.

Thus a landmark had been created, and it was legitimate to expect more such finds on and along the terraces on the same contour further upwards. We thereupon addressed ourselves to the search in the upper region of the valley.

The gravels of the rivulet to the west of Tribhuwani Tar, a village about 2 miles away from Danda, revealed a scraper in the course of a brief search.

Further north-westwards, the ground was seen to rise still further till it reached the edge of the forest, and at its base a few tools were found again at Tarwa.

Thus the vicinity of the habitat of the prehistoric man was clearly isolated, and we were convinced that a more patient and painstaking and securely organized search would reveal tools in situ on many other sites and bring out the environments of the stone age man fully to view. Further upwards as we crossed into the Chitawan valley, at Pithaunji Ghat, three terraces in succession were clearly revealed. The second terrace away from the river bears the Rampur Agriculture-Animal Husbandry Farm. It is composed of a gradation of pebbles and gravels, the larger and heavier of which were at the bottom and the topmost soil cover of sand and silt was scarcely more than 1 ft. thick. The third terrace bears now the township of Bharatpur in the

Chitawan district. The work had lasted for almost a month.

The lay-out of the terrains and possible habitats of the prehistoric man would thus be comparable throughout the southern parts of Nepal, particularly in the upper terraces of the major and mature rivers.

At the dim past when man used stone tools for his living, human life was indeed free from the complexities that weigh upon it in modern times. His ingenuity was taxed primarily for the gathering of food to keep hunger away and for the protection of one's kith and kin against the vagaries of climate and the ravages of predatory animals. The only relics that the man of the far-away past have left behind in the form of their stone tools are mute. The purposes for which they may have been used in the past have largely been surmised, in the context of the past, often experimentally and empirically. The names devised suggest the various works for which they may have been employed, and help to conjure up the way of life of the Stone Age Man, in Nepal as anywhere else. Thus, at a bound the antiquity of man in Nepal takes a long leap backwards by about a couple of <sup>hundred</sup>-thousand years. There can be no doubt that the future will bring forth many more discoveries of this kind.

### C. PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

The courses of the numerous rivers that

traverse the space between the Mahabharat Lekh and the Siwalik hills are therefore likely to be the most fruitful grounds for systematic prehistoric explorations in Nepal. The basins of the Mahakali, Karnali, Rapti, Narayani (Gandaki), Bagmati and Kosi would lend themselves to systematic exploration for the remains of prehistoric man in Nepal. One of the immediate tasks, however, is to probe the already visited Gandaki basin more closely in a systematic manner over a period of time, the idea being to proceed from the known to the unknown. The exploration may be followed by scientific excavation of the tool-bearing deposits of gravel. These would reveal the habitat and environs of the prehistoric man in proper perspective, and the results would point the way for expansion of further activity in this direction. The task envisaged is important enough, as it is also technical and would call for disciplined work by adequately equipped teams of field workers over a considerable period of time. The evidence that will thus be gathered will have to be interpreted in an integrated manner, and who knows, what the future will reveal. The task lying ahead is enormous in its scope and no less trying in its challenge.

A fresh milestone in archaeological research in the country has thus been covered, but the major part of the journey is yet to be undertaken. The significance and importance of the recent discoveries will be more clearly understood and appreciated by all and sundry as time advances.