
RESEARCH PAPER

Early Historic Material Culture in Karnataka with Particular Reference to Banavasi, North Kanara, India

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In this paper I have tried to reconstruct the pattern of development at the early historic settlement of Banavasi, Karnataka. Karnataka has been broadly divided between forested Malnad and Maidan which is relatively more open and flat. The settlement of Banavasi lies in Malnad. Malnad has good drainage and enjoys cool climatic conditions. It is well-known for the cultivation of cash crops such as cashew, pepper, cardamom and cinnamon. Cool climate and heavy rains have resulted in a thick forest cover. Forests have given valuable products such as Teak, Ebony, Bamboo, Sandalwood, etc. Further, Malnad enjoys the benefit of having metals and minerals. The author has tried to explain that favourable climate and natural resources were the major factors responsible for rich habitation and over-all prosperity. This prosperity was manifested by rich archaeological assemblage that included structures, pottery, beads, terracottas, sculptures, coins, inscriptions, etc. The aim of this paper has been to have a comprehensive understanding of the socio-political and economic development and to contextualize it in relation to the local geographical setting. The main engagement has been with the basic issues concerning subsistence of the settlement, the early beginnings of social stratification and ruling authority and the contemporary religious beliefs. The principal concern of the author is to understand the patterns about human lifeways as indicated by the material remains of the period.

Keywords: Archaeology; material remains; natural resources

Introduction

The early historic period is crucial in the area of Decan as well as Karnataka for it served as a crucial link between the proto-historic megalithic and the historic period. The early historic witnessed an all-round development as reflected by several excavated early historic settlements spread across Karnataka including Banavasi (Sreenivasa Murthy, H V and Ramakrishnan, R: 1977). An important zone where early historic culture has been located lies in Malnad. Numerous settlements have been found spread over Belgaum, North and South Kanara and Shimoga. They have yielded rich assemblage comprising of pottery, sculptures, Roman coins and inscriptions. Particularly noteworthy are the structures, both secular and religious. The major early historic settlements in Malnad are Vadgaon-Madhavapur and Banavasi. The settlement at Vadgaon-Madhavapur appears to have been in existence from third century B.C. to the beginning of third century A.D. At Banavasi one of the brick structures has been dated to first-second century A.D. The ceramic evidence shows that Banavasi was a flourishing city in the third century B.C. (I.A.R.: 24). A fragmentary inscription in box

headed characters mentions the name of early Kadamba rulers which suggests that occupation may have lasted till sixth century A.D. (Sharma: 86).

Aim

The aim of this paper is to have a larger understanding of the socio-economic and religious conditions of the settlement of Banavasi. Archaeological remains including Roman antiquities are the principal evidence which has been examined in this paper. Roman trade was at its peak in the early centuries of the Christian era. Rome was particularly interested in buying spices including pepper. Banavasi and the surrounding area falls in the geographic region of Malnad which is known for the cultivation of crops such as cashew, pepper, cardamom and cinnamon, etc. Banavasi also found mention in the works of classical writers such as Ptolmey. Further, coins of the Anandas and Satavahanas may have been useful in local trade. The author has tried to investigate the possible sources which may have provided sustenance to Banavasi and other nearby settlements. What information do the archaeological artifacts provide about the religious beliefs that prevailed during this period, has been looked into. These are some of the broad issues which the author has tried to probe in this paper.

Chronology – Early historic period in Karnataka is normally placed between third century B.C. to third century

A.D. This chronological framework however does not imply that early historic culture showed uniform patterns in terms of space and time. While at Vadgaon-Madhavapur it unfolded itself as early as third century B.C., at T. Narasipur its beginnings can be traced only to first century A.D. The early historic culture in Karnataka can be broadly divided in two phases-early and late. The early phase is from third century B.C. to first century A.D. The second phase is seen from first century A.D. to third century A.D. Early historic culture seems to have flourished during the second phase. Excavations at Chandravalli, Brahmagiri, Maski, Piklihal, Vadgaon-Madhavapur and Sannati have demonstrated that early historic culture with its distinctive traits like permanent structures, Russet coated Kaolin Painted Ware, metal and stone objects, ornaments particularly beads, terracottas and sculptures, coins, inscriptions and script came to the fore in the period from first century A.D. to third century A.D.

Early Historic Culture

1. Structures – A notable feature of the early historic period was the construction of varied type of structures. In fact, it was one of the developments which distinguished this phase from the preceding megalithic period when one finds extensive burial vaults made of stone but practically no other structures. The structures which came up in the early centuries of the Christian era i.e. largely from first to third century A.D. can be broadly classified as secular and religious. The former included rooms, halls, wells, water cistern, storage bin, drain, sewage pit, soakage pit, moat, platforms, storage pits, floors, street, granary, fortification wall, etc. Among the religious structures which were built during this period, notable were the stupas, chaityas and brick temples. An important feature which characterizes both secular and religious buildings of the period is the prolific use of bricks. Furthermore, bricks used show a certain uniformity in texture, quality and size as for instance at Brahmagiri they measure $17 \times 9 \times 3\frac{1}{2}$ inches, at Chandravalli $17 \times 9 \times 3\frac{1}{2}$ inches, $18 \times 9 \times 4$ inches, $18 \times 9 \times 3\frac{1}{2}$ inches, at Banavasi $16 \times 9 \times 3\frac{1}{2}$ inches, at Vadgaon-Madhavapur $18 \times 9 \times 3\frac{1}{2}$ inches and at Pattadakal $16 \times 9 \times 3$ inches (Murthy: 1987–88: 19). The popularity of bricks which were made of laterite could be due to the nature of laterite. Laterite is highly porous, soft and can be cut into blocks and dressed in the form of bricks. The easy availability of laterite almost throughout the state must have facilitated the production of bricks. However, this is not to imply that stone was entirely given up for it continued to be used, though on a small scale for memorial pillars, slabs and sculptures. Stone is extremely difficult to work with and this could be one of the plausible reasons for its markedly reduced use during this period. This is indeed striking considering that in the preceding period stone with all the difficulties inherent in its working was extensively used in the construction of megaliths. The megalithic folk perhaps took all the trouble because of the veneration that they wanted to show towards the dead and on an ideological plane wished to give such an abode to the deceased member which was made of durable material, in their case stone, signifying permanence. Bricks began

to be frequently used for construction as they were economical in terms of production. As already pointed out laterite was commonly found in the state. Furthermore, timber needed as fuel for brick making must have been easily available for Karnataka enjoyed thick forest cover specially in the south and west where incidentally many brick structures have been exposed. A notable advantage which the brick structures might have had over the stone structures was that the labour needed in their construction must have been a lot less than that required for the stone buildings.

Structures which have been brought to light so far include stupas, chaityas, temples, halls, rooms, wells, water cistern, drains, soakage pits, moat, platforms, streets, granary, fortification wall, etc. These have been placed in the time bracket of first to third century A.D. mostly on the basis of associated datable finds such as coins and pottery. A closer examination of these structures shows that they are well planned and scientific in their execution. People in this age appear to have attained a fairly high degree of skill in building operations as made evident by the fact that along with relatively simple structures like rooms, soakage pits, platforms they were undertaking the construction of complex edifices also such as stupas, chaityas, temples, fortification walls and moat. There is evidence for the use of tiles for roofs and lime plastering for walls. It is noteworthy that in the period from fourth-third century B.C. to first century B.C. there is little evidence for structural activity. In other words, the building of various structures and edifices appears to be a sudden development which perhaps proceeded at a very fast pace. Interestingly sites which have given major evidence for structures such as Sannati, Brahmagiri, Chandravalli, Banavasi and Vadgaon-Madhavapur have also given indications for the presence of Mauryas and even more strongly that of Satavahanas. The nucleus of power of both the Mauryas and the Satavahanas lay outside Karnataka, the foci of Mauryan power being the Gangetic valley and that of the Satavahana power being the Maharashtra-Andhra area. In other words, there is a possibility that outside influence was to an extent responsible for the spurt in structural activity which characterises this period. The hypothesis of outside influence gains strength from the fact that in the adjoining state of Andhra Pradesh which shares border with both Eastern and Northern Karnataka, extensive structural activity was already underway from third century B.C. onwards. In this region one notices structures like mud fort at Kotalingala, palace complex, residential quarters, granaries, wells, multi storied buildings with sewage, stupa at Dhulikatta, wells, houses, cisterns at Peddabankur, vihara and stupa at Kondapur (Parasher: 1991: 30–35). The ideas and concepts behind the construction of various buildings might have had their origins outside Karnataka but resource base which sustained this extensive building activity was in all likelihood local.

2. Pottery – A distinguishing feature of the early historic period in Karnataka is the profuse occurrence of a wide range of pottery. The main fabrics found included the Russet coated Kaolin Painted Ware, black-and-red ware, red ware, red polished ware, red slipped ware, buff

ware, black ware, black polished ware, black-slipped ware, brown ware, polished brown ware, grey ware, slipped and polished grey ware and Rouletted Ware. Among these wares perhaps the most noteworthy was the Russet coated Kaolin Painted Ware. It was represented in black-and-red ware, red-slipped ware, red ware was invariably potted on a fast wheel. The main shapes found in this ware included partially straight sided bowl, globular bowl, shallow bowl, pot, bluntly carinated shallow dish, bluntly beaked dish, vessel, globular vessel, etc. Perhaps the most outstanding feature of the Russet coated Kaolin Painted Ware was its rich repertoire of designs which were generally executed on the outer surface. The designs found included groups of vertical lines, groups of oblique lines, criss-cross or trellis, radiating lines terminating in pellets, dotted lines, lines with frond like branches, hatched triangles, dentilled lines drawn vertically, horizontally or obliquely sometimes with big dots in between them, comb pattern, etc. Among the designs the most common motif was that of vertical or criss-cross lines. The designs on this ware were first executed with a thin sloppy paste of kaolin or lime and thereafter coated with a russet-coloured wash prepared out of red ochre which preserved the designs. The technique of painting was therefore essentially underslip (Thapar: 1957: 73). Once the painting was over the ware was salt glazed. When the fuel had burnt out and the pots became red hot, common salt was sprinkled into the kiln. In the heat of high intensity sodium chloride would volatilize thereby giving a fine glaze to the body of the pottery (Murthy: 1987–88: 19).

Though Russet coated Kaolin Painted Ware is one of the main wares of the period both in terms of quantity and its characteristic features, other wares have also come to light, notable among them being the black-and-red ware and red ware. The black-and-red ware had medium fabric showing sand and grit particles in the paste, was of thick section and almost always salt glazed. The black-and-red ware with its typical forms such as bowl, dish, lid with a flanged waist and basin with a nail-head or a variant rim seems to have continued from the preceding megalithic period but it lacked the distinctive polish and shine of the megalithic black-and-red ware (Thapar: 1957: 76). The main shapes in black-and-red ware were dish, carinated dish, dish with bluntly beaked rim, bowl, globular vessel, squat pot or basin. The red ware of the period was made of both fine levigated clay and medium to thick grained clay with its section being either thin or thick. The fabric of the ware was medium to coarse (Rao and Nagaraju: 1974: 25–27). Some of the notable shapes in red ware were dish, bluntly carinated dish, dish with bluntly beaked rim, bowl, vessel, carinated vessel, lid, carinated lid, spout, pot, globular pot, vase, miniature vase, lamp, sprinkler, carinated basin, jar, etc. The plain wares of the period were marked by incised decoration which included lines of notched or herring bone pattern, applied bands of finger tip pattern, chevrons, thumb and nail impressions. Sometimes two or three designs were seen combined. Incised decoration was executed before the application of slip and was generally found on the exterior and shoulders of large pots.

The bulk of the pottery can be assigned to the period from first century A.D. to third century A.D. as indicated by excavations at Brahmagiri and Chandravalli. Dishes of an individual type with concentric rings of rouletted pattern round the interior of the base, the Rouletted Ware, occurred at both Brahmagiri and Chandravalli. This Rouletted Ware was dated in 1945 at Arikamedu (Pondicherry) by its association with imported Arretine ware of the second quarter of the first century A.D. The distinctive rouletted pattern which is alien to Indian ceramic is characteristic of Arretine ware and was derived in India from it. The Indian Rouletted Ware can therefore be placed in the first or second quarter of the first century A.D. At Chandravalli the Rouletted Ware occurred almost throughout along with the Russet coated Kaolin Painted Ware. Here the upper layers produced Satavahana coins to which a date in the latter part of the second century A.D. is ascribed. Thus in the opinion of R.E.M. Wheeler, the pottery, particularly the Russet coated Kaolin Painted Ware can be given the time bracket of first to the end of the second or beginning of the third century A.D. (Wheeler: 1948: 200, 277–278) (Figures 6 and 7).

3. Tool assemblage – Explorations and excavations have brought to light the tool assemblage of the period which comprised of both stone and iron tools. The use of stone continued for tool making but it was iron which was given a marked preference as indicated by its frequent occurrence. Stone tools such as double edged blades without retouch, parallel-sided blades, straight backed blades, side scrapers, rubbers, pestle, quern, axes, pounders and mortar were used for agricultural operations and domestic chores. Stone blades and rubbers were perhaps meant for clearing hide of the animals while balls might have been used in hunting operations. Iron sickles may have been an essential part of the equipment of the farmer. Iron nails, hooks, and boring tool must have been indispensable for the permanent structures which had started coming up in this period. Arrowheads, spearheads and daggers might have served as weapons. A very small number of bone objects such as points have been found thereby implying use of bone, though on a very limited scale.

4. Ornaments – People of this age had an aesthetic sense and were fond of dressing up well and this is reflected by their ornaments such as bangles, finger rings, ear ornaments, nose ornaments, kohl sticks, needle shaped rod, pendants and beads. These have been recovered in large number and in varied raw materials. The intricate designing of the ornaments, particularly bangles and beads, shows the skill of people in jewellery making. Bangles were made of shell, bone, glass, clay, gold, bronze and copper while finger rings were made of shell, bronze, copper and ear and nose ornaments were of terracotta and copper. Beads of the period showed considerable variety both in raw material and the shapes given to them. They were made of glass, shell, terracotta, crystal, carnelian, steatite, lapis lazuli, chalcedony, garnet, agate, amethyst, white paste, coral, jasper, quartz, blood stone, magnesite, faience, etc. Among the raw materials used for ornaments, it is shell which seems to predominate thereby suggesting the popularity of shell industry during

this period. Furthermore, the wide range of raw materials used for jewellery is also indicative of social stratification which might have characterised the society of the period. Ornaments made of shell, bone, clay and terracotta being cheaper must have been more popular with the lower sections of the society. This is also suggested by the fact that of the ornaments recovered, those of shell and terracotta tend to predominate. On the other hand pieces of jewellery which entailed more of labour input and were made of expensive raw material such as gold and semi-precious stones must have been exclusive and meant for the selected sections only. These ornaments can be largely assigned to the period from first to third century A.D.

5. Terracottas – It appears that artistic impulses of the people found expression not only in the medium of jewellery but also by way of terracottas which showed a marked improvement vis-a-vis the preceding period. Terracottas found included discs, marble, truncated cone, flesh rubber, spool, animal and human urines. Animal and human figurines are particularly noteworthy for their fine clay and are well modelled. They are no longer crude but show a certain degree of sophistication. The features are well delineated and details of drapery and ornaments are finely depicted. The anatomical details demonstrate a sense of realism. Some of the interesting figurines recovered were those of *nagas*, *Vamanaka*, mother-goddess, standing nude male from Chandravalli, a figure of standing man with right hand probably in *abhaya-mudra* and upper garment running over the left shoulder, comparable to standing Buddha from Vadgaon – Madhavapur and torso of a standing female figure from Maski. The left hand of this female figure is placed akimbo while the right hand is almost pendant and assumably holds some object. The upper part of the body is bare and shows a necklace. The folds of the drapery are visible. On the back is seen a single plait of hair coming upto the waist. Terracotta discs, both pierced and unpierced have been found. The pierced discs were probably spindle whorls while unpierced discs were perhaps toys. The art of terracotta making seems to have undergone major development especially from first to third century A.D.

Other noteworthy finds include bells of copper and bronze, rattle of bronze, etc. The game of dice seems to have been popular during the period as suggested by the discovery of terracotta and ivory dice.

Banavasi

Archaeo-material assemblage

Banavasi (district North Kanara) (**Figure 1**) is an extremely important site for the reconstruction of early historic period in Karnataka. Banavasi was known by various names such as *Vanavasa*, *Vanavasaka*, *Vanavasi* in inscriptions, accounts of foreign travelers and literary sources. Perhaps the most popular version was *Vaijayanti* or *Vaijayantipura*, as mentioned in the inscriptions of Gautamiputra Satakarni and Kadambas, respectively. The archaeological site of Banavasi is located close to river Varada (Murthy: 1997: 1–2). An important find was the fort which was built in three stages at different points of time. The fort was first constructed during the Satavahana period. It is a possibility that the fort was contemporary to

the two brick structures. The fort was repaired or rebuilt around fifth century AD by the early Kadambas. The fort was built at a sharp curve of river Varada. The total length of the fort at the periphery is 2140 mts. There was a moat along the exterior slope. The width of the fort wall at the base is 30 mts while at the top it is 10 mts. The width of the moat is 25 mts (Murthy: 1997: 68–69). The fortified wall was repaired in two phases (Sharma: 1987: 86). Huge brick apsidal structures of the Satavahana period were discovered. Excavation of a large mound known as *Donigudda* brought to light apsidal brick structures. It has three concentric walls of brick and there is a platform 1.5 mt. thick at the frontal entrance. The whole structure measured 26 × 13.5 mt. The bricks used in the construction were uniform and of good quality. They are burnt bricks measuring 45 × 26 × 7.5 cms. The space between the two walls was used as circumambulatory passages. On the basis of the antiquities found close to the structure, it has been dated to second century AD (Murthy: 1997: 71, 73–74). A big structure measuring 22.5 × 12.5 mt. has been recorded. It also has a rectangular frontal platform and an apsidal back. It has two concentric walls running parallel. The thickness of the outer wall was about 1.5 mt. while the inner wall was slightly thinner. It had foundations of about 2 mt. The bricks of both the structures were similar in fabric and measurement (**Figure 4**). Antiquities such as Russet coated Kaolin Painted Ware, imitation Rouletted Ware, Samian ware, gold glazed bead and coins of the Satavahanas were found in association with the structure. Below these levels was found a punch-marked coin. Hence, the structure can be associated with the Mauryas. It is noteworthy that the structures found at Banavasi more or less resemble the one which was excavated at Brahmagiri. On the basis of the pottery and coins that were found the structure has been assigned to the Satavahana period (Murthy: 1997: 74, 76–77).

The pottery recovered included the red ware, black-and-red ware, black ware, chocolate brown ware, dull brown grey ware, Russet coated Kaolin Painted Ware and the imitated Rouletted Ware. Red ware is of two types, bright red ware and dull red ware. Bright red ware pots are well finished, slipped with thin russet coat and burnished with a smooth material. Bright red ware includes pots, cups, bowls, wide mouthed jars and spouted jugs. Most of them are table ware. Bright red ware seems to have been a deluxe and expensive ware. Dull red ware seems to be more in number and variety. The most commonly met shapes in this ware are wide mouthed flaring type cups, pots, storage jars, bowls, spouted jugs, small plates, sprinklers, etc. The rough finish, dull colour and simple look indicates that they may have been for the daily use of the poorer people. The black-and-red ware was also a table ware. The main shapes in this ware were plates, small cups, etc. The surface is well slipped and polished, which occasionally gives a metal like surface and finish. Only a limited quantity of black ware was found. The main shapes in this ware are small pots, vessels, cups, bowls, plates, lids, etc. A solitary sherd of NBPW was recovered. In brown ware the shapes found are large sized vessels, jars, small plates, dishes, lids, bowls, cups and pots. Few sherds of Rouletted Ware were collected. The production



Figure 1: Map, Courtesy – Author.

of imitation Rouletted Ware is suggested by the presence of Samian ware. A large number of sherds of russet coated kaolin painted ware were discovered in the course of excavation. Sherds of red ware, black and red ware, dull red ware and brown ware have been collected having kaolin paintings. Pots of various shapes and sizes, plates, lids, bowls, cups are the types on which kaolin painting is seen. The designs executed are various kinds of lines such as straight, curved, short and long, criss-cross, single strokes, etc (Murthy: 1997: 112–116, 120).

The layers which gave pottery also yielded a punch-marked coin. It is made of silver. It is rectangular, measures 1.8×1.5 cm and is almost 0.1 cm in thickness. Coins of the Satavahanas and of Chutu kings Chutukulananda, Mudananda and Sivalananda were reported. Three Satavahana coins made of lead were discovered. They have been attributed to Satavahana kings Yajna Sri Satakarni and Gautamiputra Yajna Sri Satakarni. Chutu coins were made of lead. One Maharathi coin also came to light (Murthy: 1997: 79–80, 82–84, 87). An important find was a coin-mould of the Roman type. It is made of fine grained greyish stone. It is rectangular in shape and measures $4.6 \times 3.5 \times 2.1$ cms. It has a groove at the top. The mould is exactly similar to the reverse of the Roman coin belonging to Tiberius in which is seen a female figure sitting on a chair holding a long scepter in the right hand and a branch of a tree in the left hand. There is also the legend *MAXIM* on either side of the figure. It is possible that the mould was used for making a pendant. The pendant testifies to the popularity of Roman coins in this region (Figure 2). A circular terracotta mould of similar design was recovered from excavations at Talkad, the capital of the Western Gangas (Murthy: 1997: 91). A large number of beads of

terracotta and other material such as carnelian, agate, jasper, rock crystal, lapis lazuli have been recorded. A soapstone bead mould has been found. It is rectangular and measures $5.6 \times 4.2 \times 1.4$ cm. At the top are two notches with a horizontal line so that the bead could be used as a pendant also by passing a thread through it horizontally. This mould has another surface which has designs for making tubular long beads. So the same mould was used for making two types of beads (Figure 5). Perhaps the long tubular bead of 5 cms was first prepared and later cut into beads of smaller size. On the bead mould were two letters *Ra ha* in typical Asokan Bрами. It could be a legend referring to the artisan. A clay bangle piece was found.

Excavation brought to light seven terracotta figures. One of them is a female figure made from a double mould. It has a dark red slip. It is 11.5 cm tall and 5.5 cm broad. The figure is standing but the legs below the knees are broken. The large rings she has in her ears are noteworthy. She is shown wearing a broad necklace. The plain bangles are seen in her hands. Her dress is depicted in incised lines. Another terracotta is a torso of a human figure made from a double mould. It has a fine head dress which is decorative. The dress of the figure is shown by criss-cross lines in the front. Yet another terracotta consisted of two pieces of lower limbs in which the leg ornament is shown clearly modelled. An interesting piece is a portion of a hand with fingers and bangles well depicted. These terracottas are typical of the Satavahana workmanship. They are made of fine clay and treated with dark red slip. Stylistically, they show similarity with the terracottas discovered at other sites in Karnataka in early historic context. Accordingly, they can be dated to first or

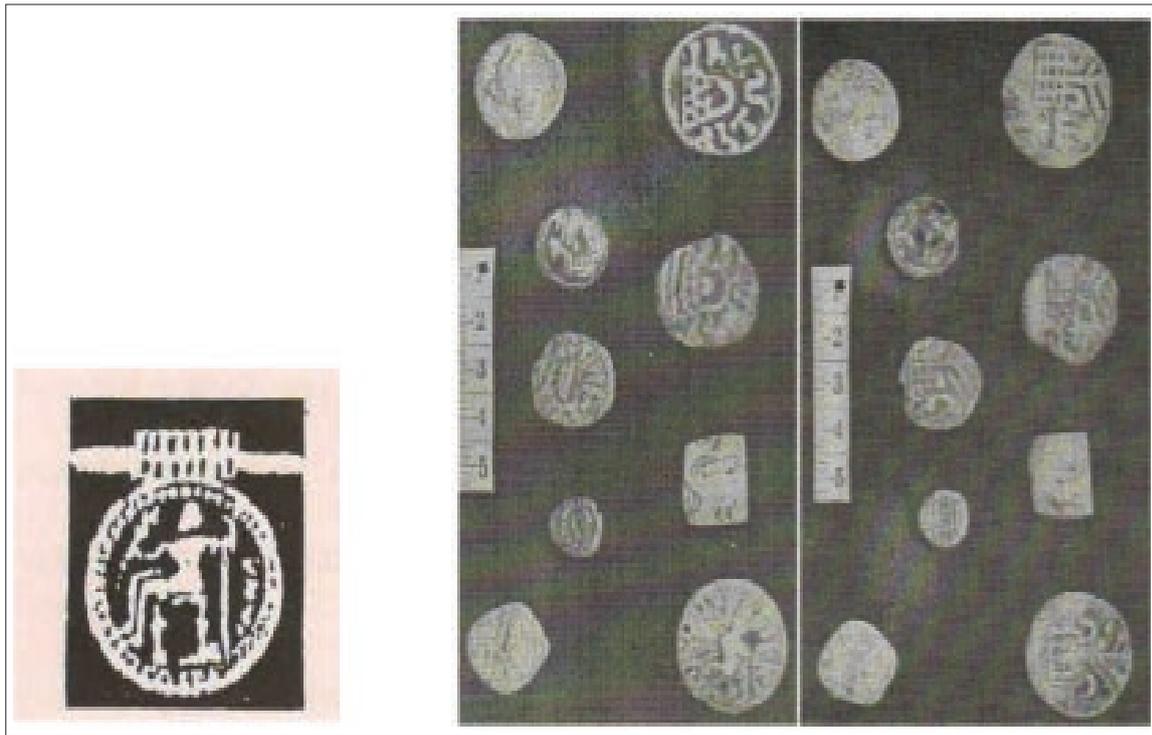


Figure 2: Roman Coin; Coins (obverse); Coins (reverse).



Figure 3: Terracotta Female Figure; Terracotta Horse.

second century AD. It is difficult to decide on the purpose of these terracotta images. They could be *Yakshas* and *Yakshis* having religious significance (Murthy: 1997: 94, 96, 98, 100, 102, 105–106) (**Figure 3**).

Gudnapur (district North Kanara) was excavated by K.P. Poonacha in the late eighties (I.A.R.: 1988–89). Excavation brought to light a large number of flat and multi-cusped roof tiles of the early historic period

(I.A.R.: 1988–89: 39). In districts North and South Kanara important early historic sites were located at Udyavara, Hattiangadi, near Coondapur, Haigunda, Kadgod and Agasur. Remains of brick structures were found at Hattiangadi, near Coondapur and Haigunda. A citadel and remains of a Siva temple were noted at

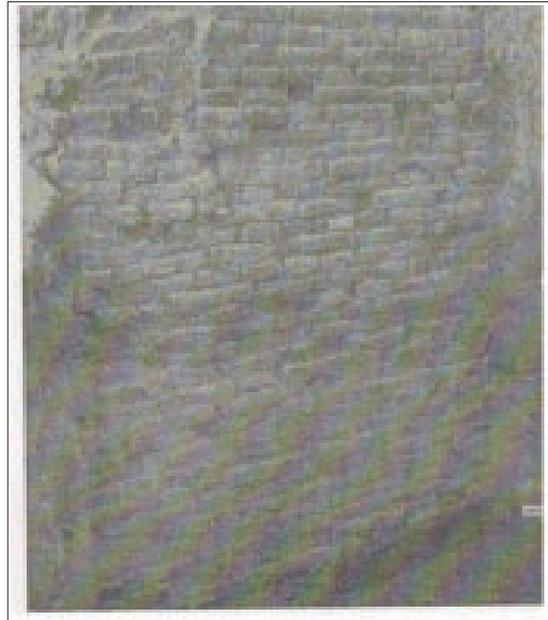


Figure 4: Part of a brick structure.

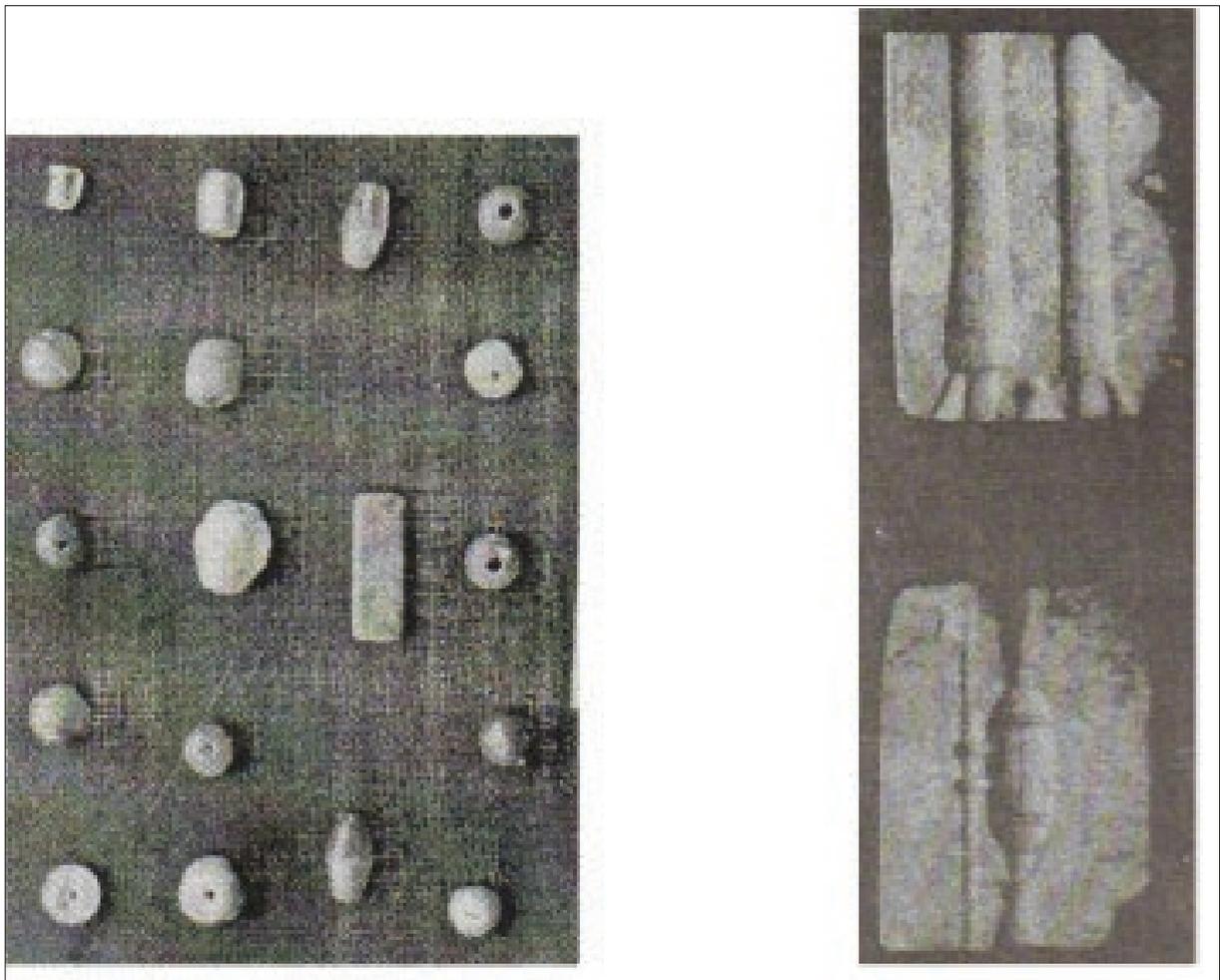


Figure 5: Beads; Bead-making mould-sides A and B.

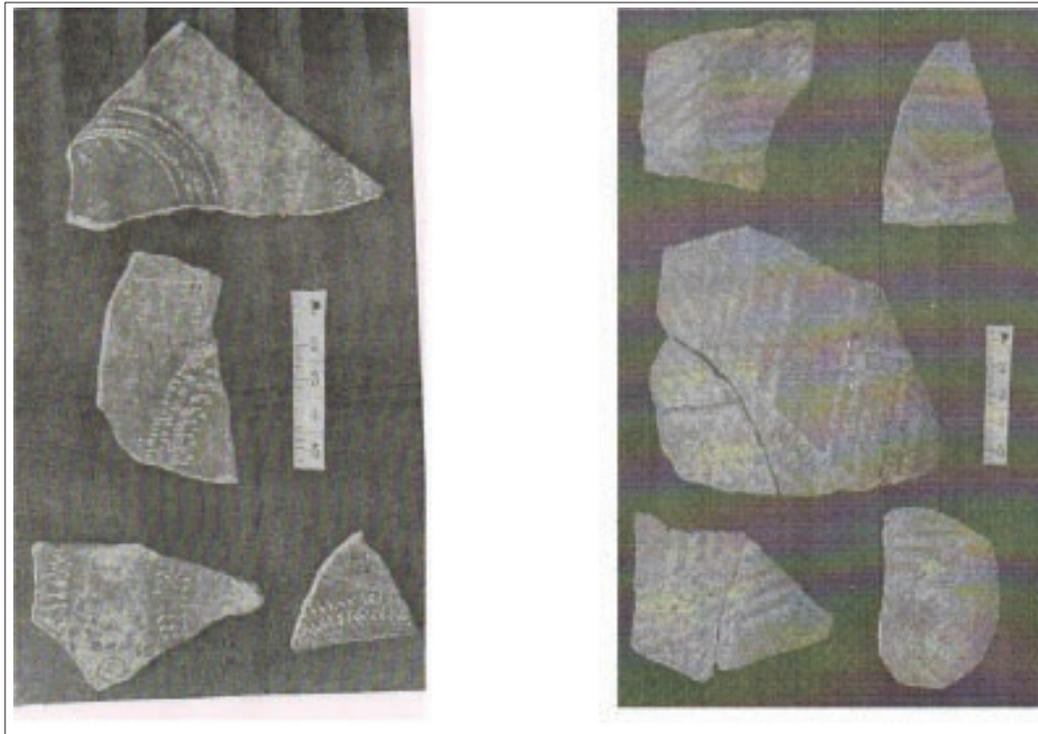


Figure 6: Rouletted Ware; Russet coated kaolin painted Ware.

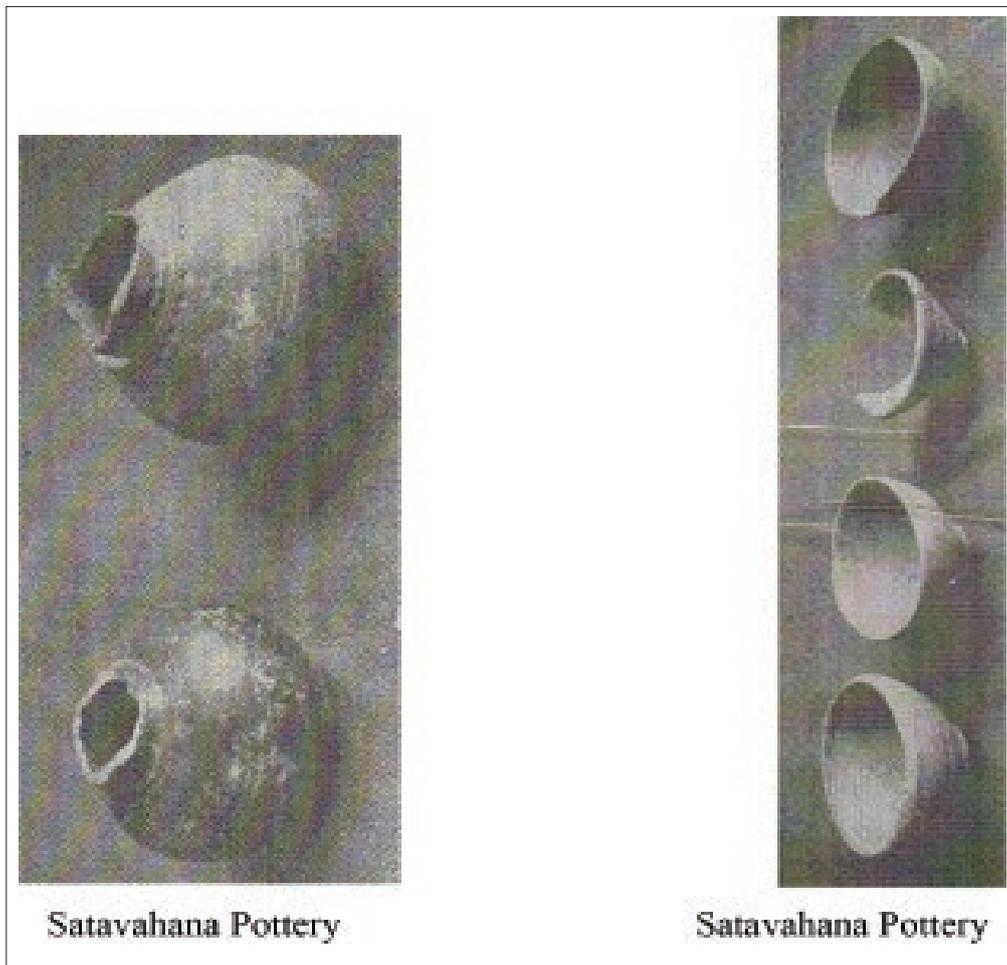


Figure 7: AV Narasimha Murthy – Excavations at Banavasi, Mysore, 1997.

Udyavara. A colossal standing *Yaksha* about 1.80 mt. in height of first–second century A.D. and two images of standing Buddha in round relief of second-third century A.D. were collected at Haigunda. A Brahmi inscription of second century A.D. was recorded at Kadgod. One thousand six hundred and twenty five potin coins of the Satavahana rulers were collected at Agasur (I.A.R.:1968, 1973, 1974, 1983, 1992). In district Shimoga early historic vestiges came to light at Malavalli, Talagunda, Niralagi, Togarsi, Balligave, Govinkovi, Konaikanahalli, Narasagondanahalli, Mallena-halli, etc. Remains of brick structures were noted at Malavalli, Talagunda, Isur and Mallenahalli. A ruined Siva temple of early Kadamba period with original Siva-linga was reported from Niralagi. Early historic pottery was found at Karige and Togarsi. Exploration brought to light some interesting sculptures such as a seated female figure, perhaps a *Yakshi* of second–third century A.D. at Talagunda and lamp pillar with *Kubja Yaksha*, carrying lamp on the head, at the top and a panel of standing Buddha and his disciples in the middle of the pillar, probably of second-third century A.D. at Togarsi. Inscriptions of Satavahanas and Kadambas were located at Malavalli (I.A.R.: 1973, 1974, 1985, 1987).

Geographical Setting

An important zone where early historic culture has been located lies in Malnad. Numerous settlements have been found spread over Belgaum, North and South Kanara and Shimoga. They have yielded rich assemblage comprising of pottery, sculptures, Roman coins and inscriptions. Particularly noteworthy are the structures, both secular and religious. Banavasi, Vadgaon-Madhavapur and the surrounding early historic sites are in the Malnad area. Malnad in Kannada means “hilly country” as *Male* stands for “hill” and *Nadu* for country. The Malnad (Belgaum, Sirsi, Shimoga, Sringeri, Chikmagalur, Coorg, Gundlupet), stretches in a continuous belt trending NNW-SSE. Due to the deeply dissected Ghats edge in the west and various curves in the east, the width of this region varies from 40 km. to 85 km. but its width narrows down near Sakleshpur where the headwaters of two rivers, the Netravati and the Hemavati have cut the Ghats. The topographical features of the Malnad also vary greatly from North to South. In the North, it attains a height of 450 mt. to 600 mt. and south of this it descends and is just an upraised part above the general level of the plateau. The South touches a height of 900 mt.–1200 mt. in a large tract, especially along the western rim just above the coastal plain. Some of the parts of this area attain considerable height as the Bababudan hills (1,913 mts.). This part serves as watershed for the two different drainage systems and the rivers have, finely dissected the area giving a picturesque hill-and-valley terrain (Yazdani: 1982: 121).

In this region climatic conditions are cool and rains are heavy. Rain is received both during south–west monsoon and north-east monsoon. The area is drained by a large number of rivers such as Netravati, Gurpur, Gongolli, Sitanadi, Swarnanadi, Tunga, Bhadra, Tungabhadra, Sharavati, Kumudvati and Varada. The stretch of Malnad is

famous for the cultivation of cash crops like cashew, pepper, cardamom and cinnamon. Cool climate and heavy rains are to an extent responsible for thick forest cover. Forests are source of commercially viable products such as Teak, Ebony, Bamboo, Sandalwood, etc. Resource base of the area is further enriched by the availability of minerals which include quartzites, laterite, granite, shale, limestone, soapstone, gold, garnet and iron, among others. Favourable climate and availability of resources were major factors behind a reasonably big population and over all prosperity which reflected itself not only in major settlements such as Vadgaon-Madhavapur and Banavasi but also in a large number of other sites of the region. Incidentally these sites have yielded not only typical pottery but also permanent brick structures, thereby indicating that these structures were not exclusive to a few settlements.

Discussion

Banavasi was a major early historic centre and is particularly noteworthy for the Roman antiquities. Banavasi was a famous trading station of the period and found mention in the works of classical writers. Ptolemy (150 A.D.) referred to it as Banaouasei. He also refers to Malippala which is identified with the coastal town of Malpe in South Kanara (Desai: 1970: 42). Of the many commodities Rome showed interest in buying mention can be made of pepper. Malnad and South Kanara are known to grow pepper in large quantities (Murthy: 1991, 1996: 200). It is interesting that though no Roman coin has been found a Roman coin mould was discovered. On the inner flat surface of the mould is carved the design and hence it can be called as one half of the mould and the other half is yet to be discovered. It is made of fine agate of black colour and has a groove at the top. It is circular and shows a lady seated on a decorated stool. She holds a sceptre in her right hand and a branch of olive in her left hand. The legend reads MAXIM. This is exactly similar to the reverse of the silver coin of Tiberius and Augustus. As the mould has a hook or loop above, it was perhaps meant to be a pendant (Murthy: 1996: 25, 27). It is a possibility that it was prepared to manufacture a coin for making a necklace as the top portion indicates. It could be a counterfeit prepared locally or a genuine mould brought from Rome (Murthy: 1996: 61). Roman antiquities including Rouletted Ware indicate that Banavasi had direct or indirect commercial relations with the Roman world. It is worth noting that a hoard of Roman and Byzantine coins has been discovered at Akki Alur in district Dharwar. The coins belonged to Roman kings Septimus Severus (193–211 A.D.) and his son Caracalla (211–217 A.D.). Forty three coins belong to early Byzantine kings Theodosius (402–450), Marcian (450–457), Leo 1 (457–474), Zeno (474–491), Anastasius (491–518) and Justin I (518–527).

All the Byzantine coins of this hoard were minted at Constantinople. The coins are said to be fresh and no traces of any wear by circulation is seen on them. This leads to a possibility that they were replicas meant for jewellery as many of them have two holes at the top (Murthy: 1996: 23, 28). Coins of the Satavahanas and Anandas are a further

indication of trading activity. In this context it is noteworthy that at Udayavara, in the same region as Banavasi was discovered a Siva temple and a citadel of the early historic period which indicates that the scene of action mentioned in the Greek farce with Kannada passages known as *Oxyrhynchus Papyri* was the ancient port of Udayavara (I.A.R: 1968–69: 24). Thus, Banavasi emerges as an important exchange centre of the period with traders as one of the dominant classes. Perhaps the brick structures which have come to light belonged to them. The settlement of Banavasi seems to have been prosperous and perhaps this could be the reason for the fortified wall which apparently enclosed Banavasi, giving it the necessary protection. Among the various interesting antiquities found is a soapstone bead mould. It suggests that beads were manufactured for local consumption and were perhaps also sent to other areas where they were in demand. A large number of terracotta beads have been recovered along with beads of other material. Particularly noteworthy are the broken glass beads with gold plating (Murthy: 1996: 17). It appears that people of Banavasi were extremely fashionable and had a special fondness for ornaments. Though not many pieces of jewellery have been found but the terracottas which are ornamented give indirect hints. The jewellers seem to have attained high standard for along with simple bangles they were now making elaborate necklaces, large ear rings, leg ornaments, etc. Terracottas recorded at Banavasi are indicative of high quality workmanship. These are mostly human figurines. Particularly noteworthy is a female figure made from a double mould. It has a dark red slip. The figure is standing but the legs below the knees are broken. She is shown wearing a necklace, ear rings and plain bangles. The dress is depicted in incised lines. Yet another terracotta has a fine head dress which is decorative. The art of sculpture making was well developed as indicated by the images of *Yakshas*, *Yakshis* and Buddha.

According to the Asokan edicts Satiyaputa, Keralaputa, Chola, Pandya and Tambraparni were the neighbouring tracts of his empire. Of these, Satiyaputa roughly stands for the South Kanara district (Desai: 1970: 45). Two stupas have been discovered at Banavasi, not far from the river. The largest of the stupas had been built in two stages. The Mahavamsa records that Asoka sent a missionary to Banavasi and in the first century B.C. a contingent of monks from there came to the dedication of a stupa at Anuradhapura (Maloney: 1976: 25). The fact that Asoka sent a Buddhist monk to Banavasi for the spread of Buddhism is confirmed from the foot-print slab inscription found at Nagarjunakonda (Desai: 1970: 46). That people were familiar with Buddhism is indicated by terracottas and sculptures. Remains of Siva temples have been located at Niralagi and Udayavara.

Conclusion

It is quite evident that there was marked development during the early historic period. An important factor which contributed towards this development and brought

about prosperity was Roman trade. Roman trade was at its peak in the early centuries of the Christian era and was responsible to an extent for the wealth and flourishing status of settlements, notably in coastal areas such as Banavasi in North Kanara. Early Byzantine gold coins were found at Akki Alur in district Dharwar. Along with these coins three coins of the early Roman kings came to light. The coins of the early Byzantine kings belong to the fifth and sixth century A.D. and thus this hoard extends the chronological horizon of Roman activity in Karnataka upto sixth century A.D. (Murthy: 1996: 23). Banavasi is located in Malnad which has favourable climate and is drained by various rivers. Rivers helped in transport and communication and also served agriculture. The region of Malnad is well-known for the cultivation of cash crops like cashew, pepper, cardamom and cinnamon. Further, suitable climate and heavy showers have resulted in thick forest cover which is a source of valuable products. The area is well-endowed with minerals. The advantage of having resources and supportive climate led to an over-all prosperity which is clearly reflected by permanent brick structures, beautiful sculptures, script, coins, inscriptions, etc. It would be appropriate to conclude that there was concentration of people and resources in certain regions, for instance Banavasi which due to geo-cultural and techno-economic variables developed an individual character.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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