

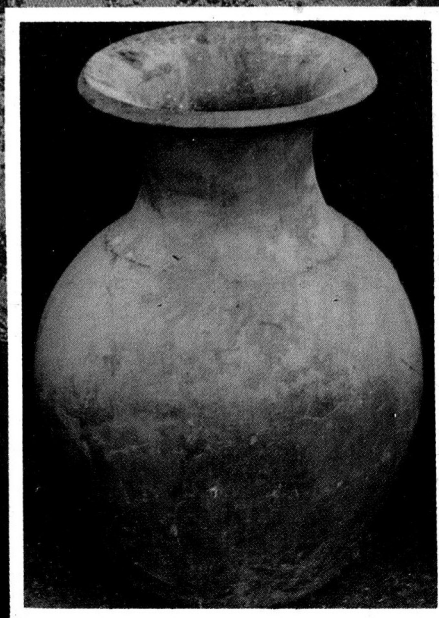
EARLY MAN IN

# EASTERN HIMALAYAS

(North-East India and Nepal)

A.K. SHARMA

Introduction By JAGAT PATI JOSHI



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The book gives a vivid picture of the prehistoric past of North-East India and Nepal. Till recent years the activities of Early Man in Eastern Himalayas were shrouded in mystery due to lack of archaeological investigations but recent discoveries have clearly proved that this difficult cold area was also inhabited by Early Man right from the Early Stone Age onwards. Evidences show that the prehistoric cultures of Himalayas and Siwaliks were deeply influenced and related with their counterparts in Indo-Gangetic plains and Vindhya though contact influences of Eastern neighbours are also visible. The author has put all the scattered evidences at one place along with his own discoveries in Sikkim and North-Eastern states.

The work done by different agencies point towards the vast potentialities of the region regarding the activities of Early Man, which needs to be systematically investigated in order to solve many riddles. Nepal and Bhutan appear to be very rich areas. Meticulously researched, the book is based on the critical use of vast scientific data unearthed by various scholars during last one hundred years.

Profusely illustrated with maps, line drawings and photographs and covering the available research material upto 1995 this volume would go a long way in fulfilling the needs of scholars, students and common man. It also removes the so far held wrong views about the area which was thousands of years back as inhabitable as other areas of the sub-continent. The book would be welcomed by scholars and students of archaeology of North-East India and Nepal.

1996 pp. 204  
Size 11"x8½"  
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Halftone Illus. 32  
Figs. & Maps 35  
ISBN-81-7305-065-1  
Rs. 990

**EARLY MAN IN EASTERN HIMALAYAS**  
**(North-East India and Nepal)**

# **EARLY MAN IN EASTERN HIMALAYAS**

**(North-East India and Nepal)**

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**A.K. SHARMA**

**Introduction by Shri Jagat Pati Joshi**



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To the feet of  
GODDESS KAMAKHYA DEVI

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## PREFACE

When I was exploring in Sikkim in 1979 and then in Manipur, Nagaland and Meghalaya in 1991-92, I felt that though many explorers and archaeologists have done pioneering works in this difficult area of North-East India right from 1867 when Capt. Steel, a British army officer recovered three brightly coloured stone implements from Joypore in Upper Assam, from a Naga in exchange of a few grains of opium, till this date, the vast literature about these prehistoric discoveries, still lies scattered in form of books and articles. I thought it worthwhile to collect all those material, as far as possible, and put them at one place along with my own discoveries of Neolithic tools from Sikkim in 1989, details of which remained unpublished.

Generally for earlier explorers, the main sources of Stone Age antiquities (particularly Neoliths) were the tribal people in different areas, who kept them in their houses as valuable possessions. They still consider them as symbol of prosperity and in Sikkim they still use these polished stone tools for various medicinal purposes. Almost all over North-East India and even in Bhutan and Nepal, the people believe them to have fallen from the sky during thunderstorm and they are called 'Thunderbolts' or '*Vajra-dunga*'.

Earlier explorers like John Lubbock (1867), Lt. Barrow (1872—Naga Hills), J. Cockburn (1879—Khasi Hills), Goldwin Austin (1875—Shillong), John Anderson (1871), J.H. Hutton (1924, 1926, 1928—Assam and Naga Hills), J.P. Mills (1933), J. Coggin Brown (1914—Assam), collected mostly the polished stone implements from various odd sources. Near Biswanath in Darrang district of Assam, while digging in a tea garden, some ground and polished stone axes along with some belted or grooved hammerstones were exposed, in a stratified context, for the first time. The owner of the tea garden, Mr. W. Panny, realising their importance, after properly documenting them, sent these finds to the then Viceroy of India, Lord Curzon, who got them deposited in Indian Museum, Calcutta in 1908. J. Coggin Brown, 1914 and H.C. Dasgupta, 1913 studied them and published short articles. Later on, G.D. Walker, J.P. Mills and C.W. Pawsey collected a large number of smoothed stone tools from Garo Hills in Meghalaya and Sadiya Frontier

area, respectively. Dani in 1960, studied these collections which were housed in the Pitt Rivers Museum of Oxford University, England and wrote on the "Neolithic Cultures of Assam".

After independence of India in 1947, the archaeological investigations in North-East India and Nepal got fillip due to the attempts of various scholars like M.C. Goswami, T.C. Sharma, H.D. Sankalia, O.K. Singh, N.R. Banerjee, H.C. Sharma, S.N. Rao, V. Nienu, B.P. Bopardikar, Geological Survey of India-N.R. Ramesh and S.K. Kar, W. Yunja Singh, R.V. Joshi, S.N. Rajguru, Mutua Bahadur, R. Gudrun Cornivus, Dr. Dieter Schuch, Angela Simons, B. Schmidt and the present author. Institutions like Guwahati University, Tribhuvan University, Nepal; Deptt. of Archaeology, His Majesty's Govt. of Nepal, German Research Council, etc. played important role in exposing the prehistoric past of the area. It was for the first time that the neolithic tools were discovered through scientific excavations by T.C. Sharma at Daojali Hading in North Cachar Hills of Assam in 1961-63 and at Sarutaru by J.N. Rao, in stratified contexts. These excavations and excavations in Khankui caves in Manipur by O.K. Singh, to some extent put the Stone Age in North-East India in chronological order. The geological mapping of an area in west Tripura by Geological Survey of India and discovery of stone tools (mostly neoliths) from this area; on the geomorphological, geological and typo-technological grounds as well as radio-carbon dating of the implementiferous terrace deposits classified the tools into (i) Pre-neolithic assemblage without polished axes, and ii) Neolithic assemblage dominated by polished axes, all belonging to late Pleistocene age. In spite of these discoveries, Stone Age in North-East India is yet to be properly defined and scientifically dated. This is wanting due to paucity of material in stratified context and virtually non-available material for C-14 dating. The terrain and climate of the area are such that hardly anything survives. This process has been further aggravated due to large scale deforestation resulting in widespread land-slides and floods, wiping out whatever evidences lie still to be discovered.

Though in most of the areas particularly in Himalayas right from Himachal Pradesh or even from Jammu and Kashmir to Manipur, in spite of the political boundaries, the same trait-complexes are noticed in a number of cultures, the local variations could be studied and an objective estimate of the degree to which they approach identity could be found out. The occurrence of ring-stones, discs, polished stone celts, chisels coupled with the distribution of handmade, cord and mat impressed pottery types throughout the belt, in successive zones, point out to basic similarity with only local variations according to the needs, and these

must adjust themselves to the topography and other geographical features. There may be diffusions and assimilations of traits from the neighbouring areas and at times deeper influence from the invading outsiders. We see effect of neighbouring areas and invasions in tool types in North-East India, e.g., shouldered celts. Though the influences of invasion do create impacts but the basic traits remain the same as has happened in North-East India. That is why we find that the majority of neolithic implements show similarity with their counterparts from West Bengal, Bihar and even Orissa as due to geographical factors it was the western neighbours instead of eastern neighbours, who were in a better position to influence and diffuse. This does not mean that independent origins do not occur. No one taught the tribals of Bastar in M.P. how to smelt iron from the locally available overground iron-ore. This never required any contact or influence. All the prehistoric cultures knew fire. In every case they knew how to chip stone, the art of making of cord, pottery, etc. In some cases they went no further and thus stagnated while others progressed. Thus there were fundamental similarities between cultures but they evolved and developed according to geographical conditions and needs of the area, depending on the availability of the raw material.

In order to compile this volume I have heavily borrowed from various scholars like H.D. Sankalia, M.C. Goswami, T.C. Sharma, O.K. Singh, N.R. Banerjee, S.N. Rao, N.R. Ramesh, R.V. Joshi, S.N. Rajguru, B.P. Bopardikar, Gudrun Corvinus, Dr. Dieter Schuh, Angela Simons, B. Schmidt and others. I am heavily indebted to them. I am also grateful to the Archaeological Survey of India; Geological Survey of India and Department of Social Welfare, Art, Culture, Govt. of Manipur; Department of Art and culture, Govt. of Nagaland; to Shri Mutua Bahadur of People's Museum, Kakching; Department of Arts and Culture, Govt. of Sikkim; Govt. of Bhutan, Department of Archaeology, Govt. of Nepal; University of Guwahati, and others, whose illustrations I have used. I am thankful to my colleagues in the Prehistory Branch of Archaeological Survey of India, Nagpur Sarvashri Nambiraju and J.S. Dube, who accompanied me to the first ever archaeological expedition to Sikkim, worked in extremely difficult circumstances, travelled with me every day up and down the hills and valleys of Sikkim right from Gangtok to Lachen and Lachung and back, and also prepared the illustrations of the finds from Sikkim, used in this book. Though Sikkim material is being published, in detail, nearly after one and half decades, due to circumstances beyond my control, I hope it will still be useful to the scholars of the subject, particularly, when after our fruitful visit in 1979, unfortunately, no one either from the Archaeological Survey of India or from the universities has so far visited the beautiful land and added anything more to what we discovered in 1979 winter.

When in Prehistory Branch of the A.S.I., I had planned to undertake explorations in Bhutan, it is my misfortune that the trip could not materialise and virtually we know nothing about the prehistoric potentialities of this Himalayan kingdom except that few neolithic tools, similar to those discovered by us in Sikkim, are also in the possession of His Highness, the King of Bhutan. I hope soon government of India will take interest and undertake archaeological expedition of Bhutan so that the gap in the prehistoric investigation in the north-east of the subcontinent could be bridged and the continuation of Neolithic culture right from Nepal to Manipur and Tripura in the east could be established. Unfortunately I could not get enough material from Nepal, but whatever came to my notice, I have utilized.

I have endeavoured to undertake this task with the hope that soon some scholars and students will embark on extensive investigations in North-East India and bring to light more evidences on prehistoric life of the region in bygone centuries. It is urgently required that at least a few known sites are excavated and scientifically dated. Though the terrain and conditions are such that, particularly in the hills, hardly any of habitational deposits are left from being washed away but in the valleys, e.g., few km from Kakching, the twin mounds at Elang Khang-pokpi and Wangu in district Thoubal, Manipur are worth excavating as the habitational deposits of neolithic period are still intact. In 1992, Prehistory Branch of Archaeological Survey of India undertook exploration in Khasi Hills around Shillong and discovered a factory site of neolithic age, from where hundreds of neolithic stone tools, in all stages of preparation, were recovered and brought to Nagpur proving that the finds reported by J. Cockburn and Goldwin Austin were not isolated finds. Unfortunately the tools collected by Shri L.S. Rao are still to be studied and published. This is one of the valuable collections from the area waiting to be brought to the notice of the scholars and which is also indicative of the vast prehistoric potentialities of the region. Similarly so far no work has been attempted in Mizoram. It is unfortunate that those organizations which have got funds and resources are reluctant to work in the area, due to their fast developing 'operations nearer the head-quarters' cultures, whereas those institutions and scholars who want to work in these areas are short of funds and resources. Let us hope, the government and University Grants Commission will realise the need to extend archaeological operations in north-east, Sikkim and Bhutan and this is one of the potential ways to bring the area nearer to the mainstream. Let the people of the area, through researches, realise that right from the Stone Age, cultures of their forefathers were an integral part of the culture of this wonderful country India. They were the eastern partners of the nation.

I would also like to record my profound regards to Shri and Smt. Jagat Pati Joshi whose hospitality I enjoyed during the processing of this book. Shri Joshi's rich library and suggestions were always available to me. I am also grateful to him for readily agreeing to write the introduction to this book. My grateful thanks are due to Shri B.M. Pande who helped me in various ways to bring out this volume. It is due to the result of untiring efforts of Shri Vikas Arya, the publisher of this book that the book could be brought out in shortest possible time. Ever ready, Shri B.R. Rajput and M.S. Mani prepared the illustrations in short time. To them I am thankful. Some of the illustrations have been borrowed from various published and unpublished sources. I am heavily indebted to the authors, institutions and publishers.

**A.K. Sharma**

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## INTRODUCTION

North-East India, according to the traditional views held by an average Indian till the last century represented a land of beauty, greenery, charms, myths, legend and mysticism. It has been considered the land of rising sun and mysticism. If we look back to the tradition and religion we find that the north eastern region was recognized from the time of Mahabharata down to this day as an integral part of the country. The popular memory was further pervaded by the concept, for example, the Goddess Kamakhya, the great wish fulfilling divinity with high Nilachal hill as her abode and the mighty Brahmaputra sanctified by the sun everyday for it marked the holy East or the 'hope' in the Indian context. It has remained a land of pilgrimage for all Indians and its association with mythology has played an important role in the Indian culture as such. Besides, Assam in particular and the entire North-East India in general, abound in local myths and legends associated with different areas and social groups showing at times inter-connections with cultural antecedents of the region.

Similarly Nepal which is held in deep esteem by all Indians and particularly for the great temple of Pasupatinath and Buddha's birthplace at Lumbini has traditional bonds of culture with India. From 1893 when newspapers reported the find on an Asokan pillar at Bairat which later on A. Führer correctly located at Nigalisagar in 1895 dawned the era of archaeological discoveries in Nepal. After that Waddel and Mukherjee did pioneering archaeological work in Nepal followed by the excellent work done by Deptt. of Archaeology, H.M. Govt. of Nepal and several Indian and foreign joint archaeological missions which have now broadly brought out Nepal's archaeology from prehistoric times to the modern period.

The culture of Nepal and North-East India presents an excellent synthesis of ideas, behaviour, ritual and other practices derived from the diverse sources, for example, Gangetic valley on the west, social groups of eastern origin who made North-East India their home like the Koch and Ahom in Assam and other elements. Earlier texts like Mahabharata and Vishnupurana make references to Assam, which undoubtedly show that the cultural communication of the Gangetic plain and Brahmaputra valley had already been established some time before the compilation of the Great Epic.

These differences are, however, to be properly attested by archaeological findings. Though legend and traditions are very important for an archaeologist, yet, it is to be conceded that an archaeologist tries basically to reconstruct the past with the help of study of material remains at his disposal. In this context, it is absolutely necessary that the vertical development of economy of Man in India has to be visualised. The basic concept of vertical growth of economy of Man in India would depend upon two factors : (i) the regional development and (ii) the cohesive emergent picture of development of the entire country. While making such a study, the areas of isolation and the areas of attraction have also to be considered for the growth of human cultures and subsequent culture-interaction. Significant discoveries from Stone Age to 19th century have been made in various parts of the country and in north eastern region generally. Assam's contribution is in no measure small. From 1912 onwards the contribution of Kamrup Anusandhan Parishad has been very substantial and most commendable. The Directorate of Archaeology, and the Directorate of Museums, Government of Assam besides institutions and government departments in its neighbouring states have done excellent work within their capacity and financial constraints in the archaeological investigation of the area. In the recent times, the discoveries made by Shri M.C. Goswami and Dr T.C. Sharma in the field of prehistoric North-East India are unique.

Extensive investigations were conducted by Shri O.K. Singh in Manipur and Shri A.K. Sharma in Sikkim, as a result of which a large number of Neolithic sites were brought to light in these two states. For geological investigations in Manipur and Meghalaya credit goes to Dr. R.V. Joshi and Shri S.N. Rajguru. In 1969 Dr. N.R. Banerjee and Shri J.L. Sharma reported about the discovery of neolithic implements from Nepal. It was the German Research Council in collaboration with Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu and Department of Archaeology, Govt. of Nepal, from 1985 to 1994 under the leadership of Gudrun Cornivus that conducted geo-archaeological researches in Nepal and discovered a large number of prehistoric sites right from Early Stone Age to Neolithic Age. In fact, it is this project which had firmly put Nepal on the prehistoric map of the Indian subcontinent. The prehistoric investigations were part of a survey of the Siwalik foothills in Nepal, including the geology and biostratigraphy of the Tertiary to Quaternary Siwalik sediments as well as the post-Siwalik sedimentary history of the intermontane Siwalik Dun valleys together with an investigation into possible prehistoric occupations in the Himalayan foothills, though Shri R.V. Joshi had made first prehistoric investigations in the Kathmandu Valley in 1964, investigations by Cornivus and others resulted in the discovery of numerous occupation sites, factory sites, small localities and activity spots of Early

Man. Investigations were also conducted under joint Nepal-German archaeological research project for prehistoric remains in the caves in Muktinath and Mustang valleys. Detailed articles on these investigations have been published by Dr. Dieter Schuh, Angela Simons and B. Schmidt, in *Ancient Nepal No. 130-133*, Journal of the Department of Archaeology, Govt. of Nepal.

The prehistoric material about North-East India is generally scattered in the form of articles in various publications. A.K. Sharma has tried to bring at one place, as far as possible, the available material about North-East India and Nepal in the form of the present book. His attempt is of immense help to the students and scholars of prehistory. Apart from discussing prehistoric findings from these regions, he has also covered about geology, environment and people of the area. So far the results of prehistoric investigations conducted in Sikkim in 1980 were available, only in brief, in the form of an article by Sharma in *Purtattava No. 10* and short report in *Indian Archaeology—1980-81—A Review*. In this book he has discussed about the findings in detail, which put Sikkim in the prehistoric map of India for the first time.

On the basis of evidences which have come to light during the last 10-15 years, the prehistoric picture of North-East India and Nepal is becoming clear. Instead of earlier held view that the area was very much influenced by South-East Asia and China, it is now clear that the prehistoric developments in North-East India and Nepal too were closely linked with the prehistoric cultures of Gangetic plain and Vindhya, though there were some contact influences from South-East Asia. Evidences point out that the entire region in prehistoric times was a closely knit entity, as dictated by geographic and environmental factors. The entire area including Nepal and Bhutan needs extensive archaeological investigations to bring out the prehistoric wealth of the region which will help in understanding the prehistoric culture of Early Man in this part of the subcontinent.

Despite all these discoveries are we in a position to answer the question—“Have we been able to give a continuous picture of development of human cultures in North-East India and for that matter have we been able to unravel an authentic account of the vertical development of the economy of Man in India as such?” I concede, that there are still many yawning gaps in this study in many parts of India and it should be our endeavour to fill up these gaps to give a coherent picture. If one sees the published accounts, it is clear that some discoveries from North-East India, are also reported which pertain to the Stone Age, Neolithic times, historical period followed by medieval and late medieval periods. Finds from Ambari, Garo Hills, Imphal valley, Sikkim and Nepal and other areas are

suggestive of a fruitful line of further studies through well planned future excavations of potential sites in North-East India to give a comprehensive picture.

Archaeologically, we have yet to know as to when the copper technology was introduced in the Brahmaputra valley and its sources of induction; or there was no Copper Age in Assam at all? More significant in this context are the factors and period which marked introduction of iron technology in this part of the country. The study of growth of iron technology may have to follow the development of communication, trade links and urban movement. Since no large scale archaeological investigations have been taken up in this direction in Assam we are not in a position to answer aptly these questions.

During the Gupta period, apart from references to Kamrup and Davaka (Dabok of district Nowgong) in the Allahabad inscription of Samudragupta as border kingdom, the beautiful temples at Dah Parbatiya are evidence of extension of classical art tradition into Assam during 5th and 6th century A.D. Reference to Pragjyotish in Kalidasa's *Raghuvansa* and in later records show the significance of the region in the country's cultural base. However, the appreciation of the picture of cultures of Brahmaputra system continues to be hazy despite the prehistoric discoveries referred to by me earlier. We find that from the 7th century onwards we have relatively clear sequence of history and growth of culture in Assam although strenuous researches are called for in the Ahom history and medieval archaeology of Assam and their contribution to the Indian culture including the growth of Kamkhaya temple complex.

In view of the foregoing what is needed now is to have an extensive archaeological investigations of north eastern region through explorations of the Brahmaputra river system to locate more prehistoric, protohistoric, historic and other sites followed by systematic excavations on the foregoing theme of thinking so that we are able to get continuous record of the cultural development supported by stratification and scientific analysis of data and establishment of chronology through scientific aids. This can be achieved by a coordinated effort by the Archaeological Survey of India and state governments and universities and other research institutions of the region. Sharma's work in Sikkim and parts of North-East India is a pioneering effort and needs follow-up by other agencies. The book is well written and would be welcomed by scholars and students of archaeology of North-East India and Nepal.

**Jagat Pati Joshi**

Former Director-General,  
Archaeological Survey of India.

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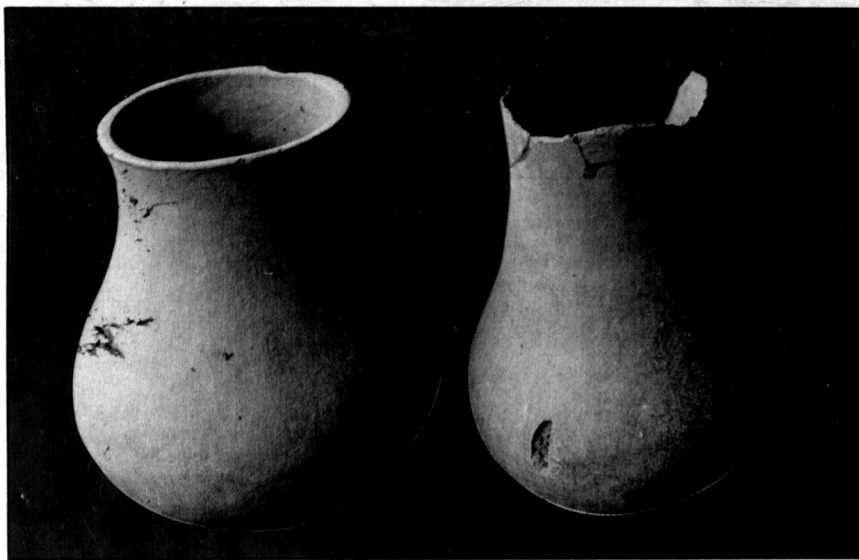
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**Shri A.K. Sharma** is an archaeologist of repute. He is internationally known for his original contributions in the field of archaeology and anthropology. During thirty three years of his hectic career, in different capacities in the Archaeological Survey of India he explored and excavated a number of sites throughout the length and breadth of the country, particularly in remote and inaccessible areas of North-East India, Jammu-Kashmir and Lakshadweep. For the first time, through his field works he brought Sikkim and Lakshadweep islands in the archaeological map of the country. To his credit goes the discovery and excavation of the biggest Stone Age site Anangpur, near Delhi, the biggest pre-historic cave of Kachagad in Maharashtra, the sprawling nucleus megalithic site in Chhattisgarh, unique Neolithic site of Gufkral in Kashmir Valley, early historic sites of Sekta in Manipur and Vadagokugiri in Garo Hills of Meghalaya. He is also known for the discovery of horse bones of domesticated horse in Harappan context which have been internationally acknowledged and has changed the whole theory about Aryan migrations.

He has to his credit more than 50 published research papers on anthropology, archaeo-zoology, pre-history and other aspects of archaeology. His recent books, (i) *Emergence of Early Culture in North-East India* (ii) *Prehistoric Delhi and its Neighbourhood* (iii) *Manipur, the Glorious past*, (iv) *Megaliths in India in Asian context* and his popular writings in *the India Magazine* have been widely acclaimed. From 1993 to 1994 Shri Sharma was the leader of Indian team in Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, New Delhi where under Indo-French Rock Art project, he conducted detailed excavations in the rock-shelters at Jhiri, near Bhopal. Presently he is working as Senior Fellow of Indian Council of Historical Research on his project "Megaliths of Chhattisgarh including Bastar".



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