

Evolution of Culture in the Maski Environment: A Historical and Archaeological Study

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Abstract: The maski region in Karnataka, India, is a significant cultural and historical hub in south India. This study investigates the cultural evolution of the region using an integrated historical and archaeological approach. It uses fieldwork, excavation reports, and epigraphically evidence to trace the region's cultural trajectory from the neolithic-chalcolithic period to the early historic era. The study also examines the impact of geographical features like the Krishna River and surrounding granite hills on settlement patterns, subsistence strategies, and socio-political organization. The findings highlight Maski's role in broader cultural networks and the impact of local environmental factors and long-distance exchanges.

Keywords: Cultural Revolution, historical archaeology, ashokan edict, cultural landscape, early historic period, neolithic-chalcolithic period.

Date of Submission: 03-08-2025

Date of Acceptance: 14-08-2025

I. Introduction

the study of human culture and its evolution is centered on the interaction between people and their environment. Maski, a significant archaeological site in the Raichur district of karnataka, India, is a prime example of this. The site, known for the discovery of an Ashokan edict, is a vital archaeological site that reveals a long history of human occupation. The region's semi-arid climate, granite outcrops, and proximity to the Tungabhadra River provided a dynamic environment for human settlement and adaptation. The environment influenced subsistence strategies, settlement patterns, technological innovations, and social organization. Over time, communities in maski evolved from agrarian societies to more complex socio-political structures. This study aims to explore how cultural practices in maski evolved in response to local environmental factors and regional interactions. By integrating archaeological data with historical sources, the research contributes to discussions on the relationship between environment and culture, regional development in south india, and the significance of archaeological landscapes in understanding the human past.

II. Literature Review

Nagaraja (2024) Raichur district in india is known for its unique features, including the town of maski, which has been attracting historians worldwide. The town was the birthplace of mauryan emperor ashoka and was at its peak during the Stone Age over three thousand years ago. Maski has a rich history, flourishing during the maurya and satavahana periods and being called the land of eda dore-2000 from the 9th century AD to the end of the 12th century AD. Despite being the capital of andini, maski taluk is losing many historical monuments due to environmental changes. Colonel meadows taylor discovered prehistoric traces in the area in 1835.

Peter G. Johansena,,and rew M.Bauer (2015) The Maski site in northern Karnataka has been largely overlooked in archaeological research. Researchers have conducted three seasons of archaeological survey, recording 153 sites and collecting data on settlement, social life, land use, and craft production during the South Indian Iron Age and Early Historical Periods. The results show significant changes in settlement size, location, metal production activities, agro-pastoral land use, and mortuary interments.

Andrew M. Bauer, (2024) the chapter discusses the history of research at maski, a cultural-historical site in the raichur district of karnataka, india. The maski archaeological research project (MARP) conducted a systematic survey, recording 271 archaeological sites and thousands of artifacts over 5,000 years of daily social life. The study also examines long-term settlement practices around maski, dating back to the third millennium bce. Results show significant changes in residential practices, building materials, everyday items, and environmental knowledge, indicating the establishment of diverse social collectives.

III. Objectives

- To examine the cultural development of the maski region.
- To analyze the influence of the natural environment.
- To study the significance of maski in the broader context of south indian history.
- To contribute to theoretical discussions on human-environment interaction.

IV. Methodology

The study examines the cultural evolution of the maski region using a multidisciplinary approach, focusing on descriptive analysis. It begins with a literature review, followed by an archaeological survey and site analysis to identify key features. The study also assesses excavation data, focusing on material culture and epigraphic analysis on key inscriptions. Satellite imagery and topographical maps are used to study the physical and environmental landscape of maski. A chronology of cultural phases is developed using radiocarbon dating and typological comparison methods. The archaeological record of maski is compared with contemporary sites in karnataka and south india, highlighting its historical significance in a wider context.

V. Prehistory

Maski taluk has been a center of population since prehistoric times, with water, food, and shelter being the most important elements for a complete ecosystem. The tungabhadra river flows through the region, and large streams, lakes, benches, and water springs provide abundant water resources. Rice plants and yams are available as food in the foothills and hills, and hunting, animal husbandry, hill farming, and agriculture provide food. By 1700 bce, many types of grain and pulses had been abandoned, and people began to live in caves and hillsides, building circular and rectangular huts.colonel meadows taylor was the first to discover prehistoric traces of the muski area, and later, robert brucefoot discovered traces of prehistoric settlement in muski. The muski environment has consolidated all these archaeological elements, revealing the harappa-mahonjodara culture of the Indus plains. Stones were used as gifts by nature to early nomadic man, helping them dig up tubers, cut plants, hunt, and make weapons. The muski site is the site of many cultures of primitive man, mainly from the neolithic and copper age, with many traces of the megalithic age found.

VI. Early classic period:

The settlements of this period were more extensive than those of the earlier periods. In the villages of maski, talekhana, harwapur and vatagal belonging to the early classic period, decorated pots along with ordinary red and black and red pots have been found. The shapes of these pots do not differ much from those of the previous megalolithic culture. However, large-scale, narrow-bottomed and wide-mouthed pots with rough bodies have been found. Agate and jasper stones of the chert type and burnt stone beads, glass beads, glass and shell bangles have been found in this layer.

It can be said that the carnelian beads of this period were carved with lines on their sides or in the middle according to their shapes and white colored stone beads were painted with white colored lines on them. Iron objects were also found in small quantities. By this time, the use of coins had developed and a lead coin was found in the excavation here. Gray polished pottery was mostly found in the middle layers. Multicolored glass bangles and glass beads have been found. Muski may have had trade relations with distant regions in ancient times. From the shells used for consumption and the blue opal stone beads found here, it seems that it must have come from the persian region. A stone seal found in a previous excavation is of a type common in west asia. However, since the impression of this seal at vadgaon-madhavapura is clearly visible on a pot handle of the prehistoric period, this seal is not as ancient as previously thought. There is a gold mine around this town, which was mined in ancient times. Pits dug for this purpose are still visible here and there. Sculptures related to this period have been found in large quantities at the foot of the mallaiya hill in muski. Among them, the sculptures of horsemen and tigers are particularly noteworthy. Because the tiger images in this place do not belong to a single period, it can be seen that this trend has continued from prehistoric times to recent times.

Overview of history

The maski region has been a significant population center since prehistoric times, serving as a crossroads for various dynasties and rulers who have shaped its cultural and political landscape. Over the centuries, numerous royal families and empires established their dominance here, reflecting the area's strategic and economic importance. Among the most prominent dynasties and powers that ruled or influenced maski were.

Ruled or influenced maski	
Mauryas	Sevunas
Satavahanas	Kakatiyas
Chutas	Vijayanagara empire
Badami chalukyas	Bahmani sultanate
Rashtrakutas	Bijapur adilshahis
Kalyana chalukyas	Nizams of hyderabad
Kalachuris	Sevunas
Cholas	Kakatiyas
Hoysalas	

In addition to these major powers, the region was also shaped by various feudatory families and local rulers, including the sindhas of salagunda, kadambas of karadikallu, haihayas of morata, as well as smaller principalities and local chiefs such as the gudagunti, guntagol, munthi princely families, and the nadagoudas. These local rulers played a critical role in the sociopolitical and cultural life of maski, often acting as intermediaries between the common populace and the ruling empires.

Mauryan period

The earliest historically documented significance of maski emerges during the mauryan empire, especially under the reign of emperor ashoka (3rd century bce). The ashokan edict found in maski is one of the most important inscriptions in indian history, as it explicitly mentions ashoka by name using the title *devanampiyasa asokasa* ("beloved of the gods, ashoka"). This edict affirms maski's place as a politically important center in the mauryan administration. Scholars have identified maski with suvarnagiri, the "golden mountain" referenced in ashokan inscriptions as the center of his southern province. This identification is supported by geological and archaeological evidence: the region around maski, particularly the heeregudda hills, is rich in gold ore deposits. Such natural resources would have contributed to maski's strategic importance and wealth during the mauryan period. Further, the administrative system under ashoka likely appointed mahamatras (royal officials) to govern this region, as suggested by the inscriptions. However, it is noteworthy that no other mauryan inscriptions either before or after ashoka have been discovered here, indicating a possible decline or change in political control after his reign.

Satavahanas: there is a reference to the city of maski being a cultural center during the satavahana period, but although there is no inscriptional information about the satavahanas, the satavahana empire extended to the vicinity of maski. The unique colored from the satavahana period, 200 bce to 50 ce, 59 have been found in maski and piklihalas, which are of the satavahana period, which dates back to the period 200 bce to 50 ce, 59 of the satavahana period, including brick stones for rubbing the face, conch shell bangles, and frog-shaped beads. Similarly, a seal with the inscription 'samaharathiputasa' of the 2nd century ad, a seal with a scene of a man carrying an elephant, etc. Have been found.⁸⁰ neither the inscriptions nor any other traces of the banavasi kadamba kings who ruled Karnataka after this dynasty have been found in this region. Badami chalukyas: it was thought that there were no inscriptions available about the badami chalukyas in the vicinity of maski taluk till now, but recently, an undated unpublished inscription mentioning 'sri reverayaru' was found on a rock in kanakappa hill. The 6th-7th century. And recently, a team of local scholars, amaresh yatagal, has discovered six inscriptions of the badami chalukya period in kotekal village. The first inscription is sri bade erayangan, the second inscription is sri veeralathan and the third inscription is asivritamagan.

VII. Geographical environment:

Muski, located between sindhanur and lingasugur on the bidar and bangalore national highway nh 150(a), is a semi-arid region with 142 revenue villages and over 220 inhabited areas. The taluk is divided into four hoblis, maski, guddur, pamanakellur, and halapura, for administrative convenience. The climate is semi-arid, with less rainfall than usual, with an average rainfall of 484.6 mm. The taluk experiences cold temperatures from december to february, while summers last from january to may, with temperatures ranging from 35°C to 46°C. The main crops in the taluk are rice, sorghum, sunflower, sajje, jola, cotton, and maize. the taluk is covered with hills and rounded rocks of stone, with valleys and pebbles scattered in rows. The town of muski is known for its mallikarjuna temple and the hill durgadabetta, which has an inscription mentioning the name of the mauryan emperor ashoka chakravartthy and an ancient fort. Other nearby hills include giddadammana kereabetta, majjigegundu, rama-lakshmanara gudda, sanagudda, medakinala hampanala, and nanjaladinni villages. muslim taluk is famous for its gold mining history, with many ancient mines believed to have supplied gold ore to the indus valley civilization. The southern capital of the mauryas, suvarnagiri, which ruled the

region, cannot be ruled out. The British took a more active interest in the gold mines in the 18th-19th centuries, with geologist Captain Leonardman conducting a survey in the Hatti areas in 1915 AD. Recent studies have also proven gold deposits in Mudbal, Sanbal, and Buddini areas of Maski Taluk. This gold ore plays a role in the historical background of the environment of Maski Taluk and is also the root cause of its economic growth. The Masi Nala reservoir is a significant water source in the area.

VIII. Art and architecture

The development of architecture is closely tied to the shift of human societies from nomadic life to settled habitation. In this context, *vastu* referring to a dwelling or sacred space—marks the beginning of architectural consciousness in ancient India. As humans began constructing homes, temples, and forts, architecture evolved as a reflection of their intellectual and spiritual progress. This chapter explores the architectural and sculptural heritage of **Maski Taluk**, emphasizing the religious and secular structures that have shaped its cultural landscape.

IX. Temples and religious architecture

In the Indian tradition, temples are the most prominent and enduring forms of architecture. Built with locally available materials initially mud, wood, and later stone—temples not only served religious functions but also embodied the artistic and spiritual ideals of the time. The use of stone in temple construction, inspired by deep religious devotion, led to structures that have withstood the test of time and stand as significant cultural markers. The temples in the Maski region, primarily of the Dravidian *Shadvarga* style, demonstrate architectural evolution from modest structures with a single *mantapa* (hall) to complex edifices influenced by dynasties like the Kalyana Chalukyas. Elements such as *navaranga* (pillared hall), *mukhamantapa* (entrance porch), *terada mantapa* (chariot hall), and *prakara* (enclosure wall) reflect this stylistic progression. These temples were not just places of worship but centers of socio-religious life, housing intricately carved idols that mirrored changing theological and sectarian influences. The science of idol-making grew alongside temple architecture, influenced by ancient texts like the *Manasara*, *Mayamata*, *Samarangana Sutradhara*, *Kashyapana Shilpashastra*, and *Vishwakarma Shilpa*. These texts guided the design of sacred spaces and images, revealing the integrated development of architecture and iconography from as early as the 3rd century BCE.

X. Sculptures and secular monuments

Alongside temples, sculptures and secular monuments in Maski illustrate the region's cultural and artistic growth. The iconography of deities reflects theological developments and the influence of various sects, making sculptures vital sources for understanding local history. The temples and sculptures together represent a vibrant religious life and a sophisticated tradition of craftsmanship.

Buddhist stupas and monuments

Buddhist architecture, though not dominant in the current landscape, once held significant presence in Maski. The region was likely a Buddhist and trade center during the 3rd century BCE. A notable architectural remnant is a large stupa-like mound located behind the Government First Grade College in Maski, measuring approximately 40–50 feet in diameter and 5–6 feet in height. This structure suggests the former existence of Buddhist religious monuments, further highlighting Maski's multi-religious and multicultural heritage.

XI. Religious system in the inscriptions

1. Mauryan influence and Ashokan edicts

The discovery and analysis of the Ashokan edicts at Maski have been foundational in situating the region within the broader Mauryan empire's cultural and political sphere. Scholars such as epigraphist D.C. Sircar (1965) and archaeologist B.S. Sali (1970) have documented the unique nature of the Maski edict, noting its explicit mention of Ashoka's name a rare instance in Indian epigraphy that sheds light on imperial policy and Buddhist propagation. These findings emphasize the region's early integration into pan-Indian religious and administrative networks.

2. Buddhist and Jain heritage in South India

Studies by Richard Cohen (1988) and Romila Thapar (1990) highlight the spread of Buddhism and Jainism in Karnataka and adjacent areas, discussing Maski as a significant center in the southern Dakshinapatha route. Excavations revealing Buddhist stupas, sculptures, and Jain basadis in and around Maski reflect these traditions' coexistence and competition. Such research complements the epigraphic evidence by providing material culture context.

3. Kalyana chalukya architectural influence

Research into the architectural styles of the kalyana chalukyas by scholars like m.a. Dhaky (1983) outlines the stylistic evolution visible in maski's temples. The adaptation of chalukyan architectural features such as navaranga halls and prakara enclosures situates maski's temple architecture within a larger south indian tradition. This body of work aids in dating the cultural phases and understanding the religious and political shifts affecting local art and architecture.

4. Environmental and settlement studies

Environmental historians and archaeologists such as d. R. Gadgil and k. Paddayya have emphasized the role of geography and resource distribution in shaping settlement patterns in the deccan plateau. Their frameworks help interpret how maski's physical landscape influenced human habitation, trade routes, and cultural exchanges.

5. Comparative regional archaeology

Comparative studies of contemporary sites in karnataka, like hire benakal, sannati, and naganahalli, reveal shared cultural traits such as megalithic burial customs, pottery styles, and religious iconography. These parallels support the theory of maski as part of a broader cultural continuum that extended throughout south india during the neolithic to early historic periods.

XII. Conclusion:

The maski region's cultural evolution is a complex interplay of geography, religion, politics, and material culture. It has evolved from its earliest habitation in the neolithic-chalcolithic period to its role in major empires like the mauryas, chalukyas, and the nizams. The ashokan edict at maski is a landmark in indian epigraphy and a reference for understanding the early spread of buddhism in southern india. The region's religious diversity and openness to multiple philosophical traditions are further reflected in jainism, shaivism, and vaishnavism. The study of temple architecture, sculpture, and secular monuments in the taluk reveals the influence of regional dynasties and the significance of local craftsmanship. Maski's geographical setting, rich mineral resources, and strategic location significantly influenced its historical development.

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