Title:	Beyond the biface: Investigating variability in the mode to technology of the south asian palaeolithic through the holistic analysis of select lithic Assemblages
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Abstract:	South Asia occupies a unique position as being somewhat centrally located in the Old World (i.e., the continents of Africa, Asia and Europe). The large landmass it encompasses displays a wide range of ecological and environmental settings, and the region is rich with many natural resources necessary for prehistoric subsistence. This natural setting and its central location could have made this region an important area for the expansion and movement of Palaeolithic hominin populations. Evidence for this can be seen through the rich lithic archaeological record of this region, dating back to about two million years, and the noted diversity in the genetic record of the modern-day populations (second only to Africa). However, despite this rich archaeological record and the deep historiography for prehistoric studies in the region, it is seldom, if ever, considered in ongoing and contemporary discussions in global prehistory and palaeoanthropology. This doctoral research project tries to tackle this perceived exclusion of the South Asian (Lower) Palaeolithic record by undertaking primary research along currently accepted trends and paradigms in Palaeolithic archaeological research. Along with generating new datasets from the rich archaeological record, this research project also attempts to reinvestigate archival collections to update our understanding of them, and enable their active inclusion into the ongoing discourse in South Asian and global archaeological studies. The Lower Palaeolithic of India has generally been characterised on the basis of select stone tool elements called 'bifaces' (such as handaxes and cleavers). However, the focus of study on these 'diagnostic' lithic elements has skewed our understanding of the archaeological record, in general, and of the technological variability expressed amongst these assemblages. This doctoral dissertation attempts to expand our understanding of the lithic technological behaviours of the South Asian Lower Palaeolithic through a comprehensive and holistic analysis of nine Palaeolithic assemblages through: 1) fieldwork for the primary collection and analysis of stone tool assemblages; 2) reinvestigations of historically significant lithic assemblages housed in various archives and repositories in India and abroad; 3) actualistic studies to qualify the various trends and patterns resulting from the study of the archaeological assemblages, and 4) developing various theoretical and methodological models for a better understanding and reconstruction of past human lifestyles and behaviours - which is the primary aim of archaeology. The nine sites included in the study are: the Neemtone Palaeolithic Complex, Morpani, Pilikarar, Mahadeo Piparia and Samnapur (all from Madhya Pradesh), Chirki (Maharashtra), Lalitpur (Uttar Pradesh), Toka (Himachal Pradesh) and the Kibbanahalli Palaeolithic Complex (Karnataka). The lithic assemblages originating from these sites were subjected to detailed technological and reduction sequence analyses, qualifying and quantifying various technological and dimensional parameters, such as the type and nature of the raw material used, the technological dimensions of the lithic elements, and the various aspects of the methods and techniques used in their manufacture. This detailed comparative analysis highlighted the various trends of similarities between these lithic assemblages, hinting at the structural uniformity between these sites; as well as highlighting trends of variability at a multi-scalar resolution at the intra-site, inter-site, spatial, temporal, functional, environmental and cultural levels. The research project also outlines novel methods for undertaking holistic and integrated lithic analysis and theoretical models for understanding the archaeological record of slow-accumulating palimpsests, and presents a schema for the technological ascription of Mode 2 lithic assemblages in South Asia.
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