MODERN STEEL FOUND AT ANCIENT TELANGANA SITES

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The contribution of South India in the development of crucible steel technology has been widely recognised, but not much is known/recorded by archaeologists or historians. Travellers' accounts in the 17th century suggest that the then Andhra Pradesh (now Telangana) was an area where pre-industrial iron and steel production flourished, said experts. Using satellite imagery, researchers from Bengaluru have now concluded that while iron production was of great significance in Andhra Pradesh, there is evidence for the production of crucible steel in 183 sites.

"The range of archaeo-metallurgical debris studied includes slag heaps with remnants of tap slag and furnace walls, crucible remnants, furnace wall remains, tuyeres and occasionally potsherds. Both primary iron smelting sites and steel production sites that used crucible refining have been identified, some being independent and some being inter-connected," said the study conducted by the National Institute of Advanced Studies (NIAS), Bengaluru.

Dr Smriti Haricharan, who started working on this project as a post-doctoral fellow at NIAS in 2010 and is currently assistant professor at Shiv Nadar University, Uttar Pradesh, said that while there is evidence for largescale sites of iron production in Telangana, much of this is currently being destroyed, making this work "critical and urgent".

"Some of our challenges included working alongside rampant quarrying," she added. The research involved field work and satellite imaging. "Of the 245 sites located during the field survey, 183 of them were metallurgical sites, while the remaining were either geological, prehistoric, historical or single find spots. The study has shown that these metallurgical sites are found in varying environmental contexts. Haricharan said by using satellite images or scientific dating, and other such tools and techniques, one cannot only understand these sites better, but also make field work and analysis more efficient. "However it is important to remember that archaeology is a discipline in its own right and has its own set of theory and methods," she added.