

Alluvial Placer Gold Mining In India through Ages: A Historical Perspective

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India had a rich tradition of gold mining and gold production in ancient times. According to an estimate, India produced approximately 50% of the total gold produced in Asia in pre-historic and ancient times. In ancient times, it was the eluvial and alluvial (stream) placer gold deposits which were first exploited. Subsequently, and still in ancient times, the vein or reef deposit was exploited simultaneously.

The present paper discusses some of the important literary references related to alluvial placer gold mining in India starting from the earliest period till the present time. These references have been drawn from Vedic literature, Classical Sanskrit literature, Puranas, Pali texts, etc. Many of these references were composed much before the beginning of the Christian era. The earliest reference for the alluvial placer gold mining is found in the famous Sanskrit text Rgveda, dating back to approximately 3000 B.C.E. According to this reference, Indus river was an important source of alluvial placer gold. This river continued to remain a source of alluvial placer gold even in medieval and pre-modern times. It is interesting to note that alluvial placer gold, although in small quantity, is mined even in modern times from Indus river. Some other places for alluvial placer gold mining in ancient India were the banks of the river Ganga (Ganges), Saraswati and Jambu. Some important references of alluvial placer gold mining in pre-modern and modern times have also been discussed.

Some of the socio-economic and as well as ethnographic aspects of the gold mining and gold miners have also been presented. It has been shown that there was a specialized class of people who were engaged in alluvial placer gold mining and were called "*Panshudhavaka*". They were different from the class of people engaged in melting and refining of gold. The influence of alluvial placer gold mining on the philological aspect of the formation of some Sanskrit words has also been discussed briefly.