Ancient gold-mining activity

The communication by Nagabhushanam et al.\textsuperscript{1} has not revealed any new dates regarding the ancient gold-mining activity in the Hatti Goldfield, except by extending it up to the 7th century AD.

India is one of the world’s earliest sources of mineral treasure. On the basis of archaeological and other evidences, the first discovery of gold-bearing reefs in the Deccan region was during the Neolithic period, i.e. between the end of the 3rd millennium BC and the first half of the first millennium BC – broadly coinciding with the Vedic period, i.e. 5000–2500 BC. I have been studying India’s ancient mining heritage since the past several decades\textsuperscript{2-5}. I do not agree with the statement of the authors about the absence of historical records pertaining to the episodes of ancient mining activity in Karnataka.

The pre- and the post-Mauryan period (500 BC to AD 1200) was the ‘golden period’ of mining in ancient India. The most important evidence is the occurrence of rock edicts\textsuperscript{6} in different parts of the country (a total 23 with five in Karnataka), which were installed by Emperor Asoka (268–233 BC) close to the mines of gold, lead, zinc, silver, copper and diamond worked during that period. The edict at Muski is located right in the Hatti Goldfield, where several ancient mines are sited and gold is being mined at present. Some historians believe the name ‘Swarna Nagari’ (gold town) or ‘Suvamagiri’ (gold hill), mentioned in the Brahmagiri edicts (Chitrardaga District) is ascribed to Muski – the site of a forgotten ancient Neolithic town, which could have been Asoka’s capital in the Deccan\textsuperscript{7}. However, one exception noticed is the conspicuous absence of Asokan edict in the region of the Kolar Goldfields. Certainly, gold was mined in the pre-Christian era. A reference to the Indian gold is also made in the Bible, which records that around 970 BC, King Solomon obtained large quantities of gold from ‘Ophir’, which was in fact India\textsuperscript{8}.

It is admitted that the present dating techniques prove or disprove the historic time-scale and, are hence relevant in basing our observations/conclusions on the ancient mining heritage in our country.

\textsuperscript{2}Raghu Nandan, K. R., Ancient Mining in Khetri Copper Belt, Rajasthan, India, The Mythic Society, 1988, pp. 177–182.
\textsuperscript{4}Raghu Nandan, K. R., India’s Ancient Mining Heritage (it is one of the world’s earliest mineral sources), Rock and Gem, 2003, pp. 44–45.

Response:

Raghu Nandan has mentioned that we have not revealed any new dates regarding the ancient gold-mining activity in the Hatti Goldfield, except by extending it up to the 7th century AD. We wish to clarify that though some \textsuperscript{14}C dates have been available from Kolar and Hatti mines, it does not mean further studies need not be carried out at other mines. With the scientific objective of exploring the time period of mining activity at Uti, radiocarbon dating was carried out on the wood log found by one of the authors\textsuperscript{4}. Only after \textsuperscript{14}C dating of the wood log of the Uti mine, the contemporaneity of
ancient mining activity both at Kolar and Uti mines could be established. In fact, the last statement by Raghu Nandan about proving/disproving the chronology itself supports our effort. Though Raghu Nandan notes ‘I do not agree with the statement of the authors about the absence of historical records pertaining to the episodes of ancient mining activity in Karnataka’, this general statement needs to be supported by dates in the context of historical episodes of a particular mine. We have already cited in the text about the antiquity of gold mines in Karnataka; identification of 300 ancient workings in Hutti-Muski schist belt; epoch of copper ore mining belonging to the Satavahana period, etc. However, we also acknowledge the work carried out by Raghu Nandan and Mishra for establishing historical periods of various mining activities in India.