
UNIT 1 DEFINITIONS AND SCOPE

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Learning Objectives



Once you have studied this unit, you should be able to:

- define each sub-unit of the subject matter thoroughly;
- understand the importance of each sub-unit in human cultural study;
- indicate the close relationship between archaeology and how this relationship is helpful for the study of human cultures across time and space; and
- recognise the fundamentals of archaeological anthropology.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Anthropology and Archaeology are two interrelated disciplines that deal with the origin and development of human culture and hence occupy an important place in social sciences. Anthropology basically deals with the study of present-day-simple societies and it has two main divisions called physical anthropology and social anthropology. Several branches within it developed in course of time like cultural anthropology, etc. Archaeology endeavours to reconstruct ancient societies and is treated as part of anthropology in American universities. The mutual interdependence of anthropology and archaeology arises from the simple fact that both deal with the study of human cultures—one of the present and the other of the past.

Archaeology is an important discipline with a methodology of its own. It recovers antiquarian remains of various kinds from the field through laborious techniques

including excavation. Although archaeology remained for a long time as a descriptive and classificatory of ancient objects and features, Lewis Binford's New Archaeology Movement of the 1960s emphasised the larger anthropological goals of archaeology. With the help of methods and approaches adopted from both social and natural sciences, modern archaeology seeks to reconstruct past human societies and their cultural processes. As such it supplies the much needed temporal dimension to the anthropologist's endeavour to study cultures of present-day simple societies. This in fact is the principal objective of archaeological anthropology. This is particularly relevant in India, which has both a rich and diverse ethnographic record and an unequally rich archaeological heritage. Let us now consider the main divisions within archaeology and some of its basic concepts.

Archaeological anthropology is one of the sub branches of anthropology deals with the origin and development of human species and its material manifestations in the form of material culture. Archaeology not only helps us to understand diversity in the world around us but also to understand how people relate to the material world.

1.2 PREHISTORY

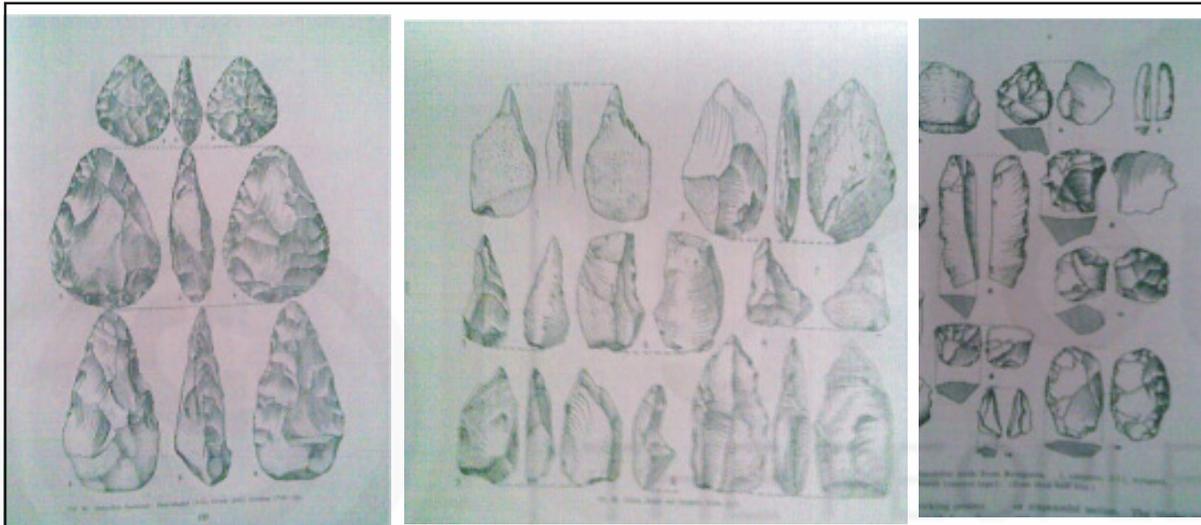
Prehistory is a period used to indicate the time before recorded history. Paul Tournal (1833) coined the term Pre-historique to explain the finds that he had made in the caves of southern France and the word 'Prehistoric' was introduced by Daniel Wilson in 1851. It is the period of human evolution before writing was invented and records kept. The term 'prehistory' refers to all cultural developments of man including his biological evolution till the beginning of historical period. In India the historical period is commonly said to commence from about the middle of the first millennium B.C. when Asoka issued the Brahmi edicts in different parts of India. Prehistorians make their reconstructions of the remote past on the basis of their study of material relics of various kinds.

Prehistory in India covers a time range of 0.6 to 0.7 million years. Recent dates for the Palaeolithic sites of Isampur in Karnataka and Attirampakkam in Tamil Nadu take it to 1.2 or 1.5 million years. The dates from Riwat and Uttarbaini in the Siwalik hills of Punjab and Jammu further push the antiquity of human culture to more than 2 million years. Throughout this period man led a nomadic way of life with hunting of wild animals and gathering of wild plant foods as the chief mode of subsistence. Technology was based on the preparation of tools on a variety of rocks like quartzite and even limestone and siliceous stones like chert and jasper. Depending upon improvements in tool making traditions and to some extent, changes in hunting-foraging methods, prehistoric period is divided into three major phases or stages called the Lower, Middle and Upper Palaeolithic. All these three stages are dated to the geological period called Pleistocene. In the early part of the Holocene tiny stone implements called microliths came into vogue. This stage is called the Mesolithic. In addition to stone, wood and bone also began to be used for making tools from the Middle and Upper palaeolithic phases.

Prehistoric stone tools are grouped into two broad categories: tools for heavy work (heavy duty tools) and tools for light work (light duty tools). These were

used for a variety of operations such as hunting, digging of roots and tubers, cutting, scraping, flensing and boring connected with the acquisition, processing and consumption of animal and plant foods.

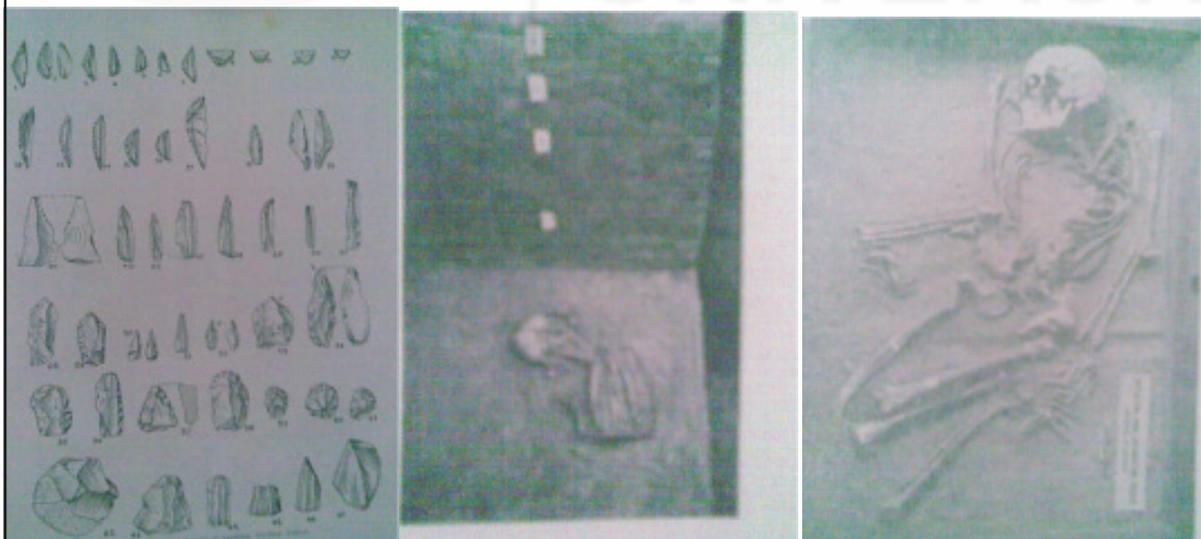
The Lower Palaeolithic stage is characterised by large sized tools such as handaxes, cleavers, chopping tools, polyhedrons, etc. The Middle Palaeolithic tools are smaller in size and consist of flake - tools such as scrapers, points and borers etc. The Upper Palaeolithic culture belongs to Late Pleistocene and is characterised by blade technology leading to the production of long, slender-looking backed blades, points, penknives, saw edged blades, etc. In the succeeding Mesolithic tools become very small or tiny in size, generally measuring a few centimeters in length. The types include backed blades, lunates, triangles, points, etc., all used to prepare composite implements such as arrowheads, spearheads and harpoons. Rock art and intentional burial of the dead also come into vogue in the Mesolithic stage.



Lower Palaeolithic tools

Middle Palaeolithic tools

Upper Palaeolithic tools



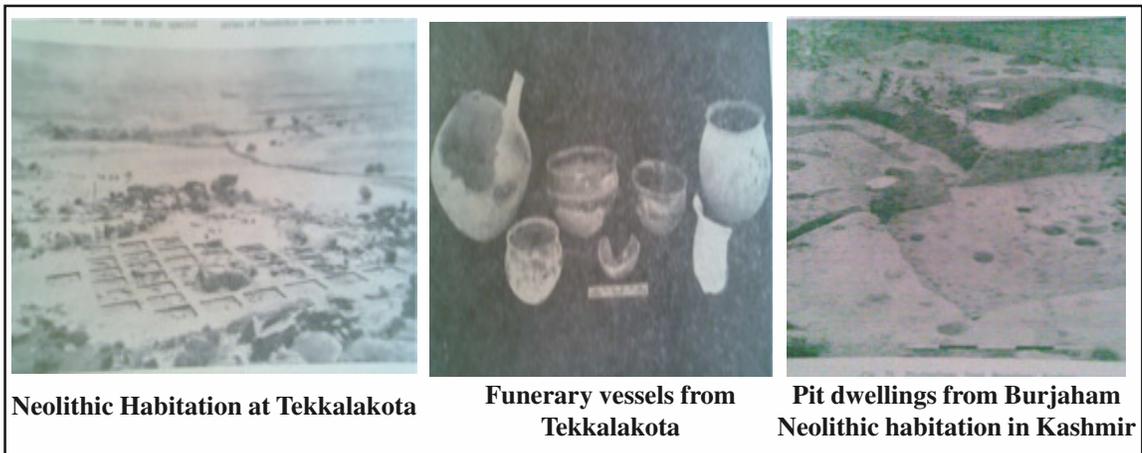
Mesolithic tools

Human skeleton from Langhnaj (a Mesolithic habitation site), North Gujarat

1.3 PROTOHISTORY

The term ‘la Protohistorique,’ was first coined by the French, to refer to a period transposed between prehistory and true historical Period. It suits India very well. First, before historical period there is evidence of writing in the Harappan or Indus valley scripts, though as yet undeciphered. Secondly, though the Vedic literature was in an oral state up to the 4th century AD or so, its antiquity goes back to the second millennium B.C. And it is an important source for reconstructing our early social, political, religious and literary history. This is a unique feature in world’s history. Hence, this period should be legitimately included in as protohistory. Moreover, contemporary with much of the Vedic literature there is evidence from all over India about the early metal-using communities. However, this is certainly prehistory in one sense, because there is no trace of writing in any case but since this period also runs parallel with the Vedic literature, it has been included under protohistory. During the last 60 years or so it has been customary in India to introduce this period as a buffer between the ill-defined prehistoric period and the better defined historical periods covering archaeological record of post-Mesolithic and pre-Mauryan cultures, between 3500 or 3000 B.C and 300 BC (Sankalia, 1973).

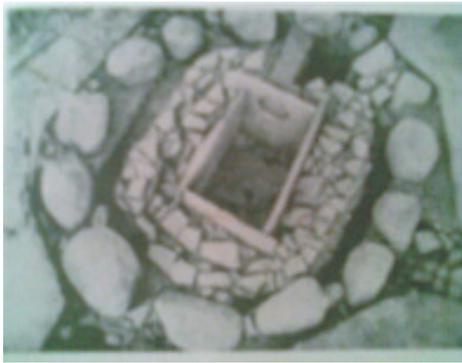
The cultural panorama of Protohistory in India began with the Neolithic phase in seven geographical zones, i.e., North-western India including Kashmir and Swat valleys, the Vindhyan plateau of Belan valley, the Kaimur hills and the Chhotanagpur plateau, northern Bihar, north-eastern region covering all north-eastern states and adjacent sub-Himalayan regions, Central-eastern region of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa complexes and the Southern region covering peninsular India, except Kerala. It is the first settled way of life defined by permanent settlements according to geographical convenience, production of pottery, domestication of plants and animals, pecked and ground stone and blade tool industries, and some degree of reliance on hunting, gathering and fishing. The findings from Mehrgarh in Baluchistan and Lahuradeva in eastern U.P. suggest that the Neolithic phase began around 6000 B.C. Under protohistory are also included not only the Indus civilization but also the various Late Harappan cultures of Gujarat, Punjab and Haryana, Late Harappan, Black-and -Red and Ochre-painted pottery cultures of the Ganga-Yamuna Roap, and the various Chalcolithic cultures of Rajasthan, central India, middle and lower Ganga valley, and the Deccan. The Banas, Kayatha, Malwa, Savalda and Jorwe cultures are major examples of this Chalcolithic stage. To this protohistoric phase also may be assigned the iron-using painted Grey-ware culture of the Ganga Valley and the Megalithic culture of vidarbha and South India.



Neolithic Habitation at Tekkalakota

Funerary vessels from Tekkalakota

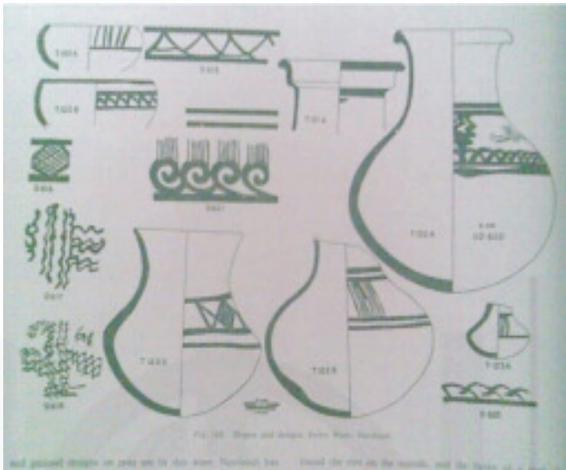
Pit dwellings from Burjaham Neolithic habitation in Kashmir



**Megalithic cist circle with port-holes
Brahmagiri, Karnataka**



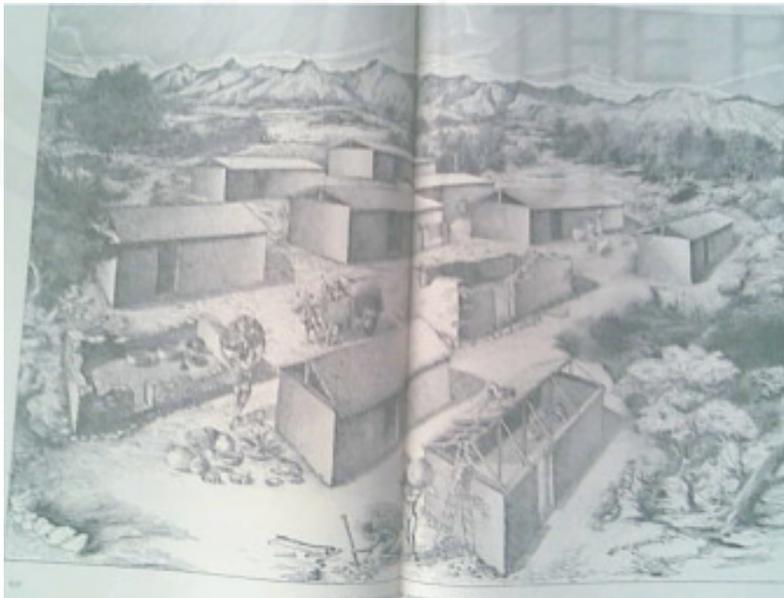
**Copper and Terracotta objects
(Chalcolithic : Jorwe culture)**



Jorwe ware (Navadatoli)



**White painted black and red ware
From a chalcolithic sites: Navadatoli**



Reconstruction of Proto historic Ahar (Chalcolithic site)

1.4 CIVILIZATION

The word 'Civilisation' refers to an advanced state of human society with a high level of culture including city life and state level of government. We may recall here that, Gordon Childe proposed the followings as constituents of civilization: large urban centers; full-time specialist occupations; primary producers of food,

Definition and Scope

paying surplus to deity or rulers; monumental architectures, ruling class that is exempt from manual labor; system for recording information; development of exact, practical sciences; advanced metallurgy; internal and external trade; independence of classes comprising peasants, craftsmen and rulers; state religion/ ideology; and persistent state structures.

The Indus civilization fulfils all these criteria and ranks with the Egyptian and Mesopotamian civilizations. It covered an area equivalent to that both these civilizations and flourished from the beginning of third millennium to the middle of the second millennium B.C. Harappa, Mohenjodaro, Dholavira, Surkotada, Lothal, Kalibangan are some of the major sites of this civilization. The evidence from sites like Mehrgarh suggest that this civilization developed out of the local agropastoral way of life. Inspiration from the Mesopotamian civilization also played a role in its origin.



Surkotada, Harappan habitation, Kutch



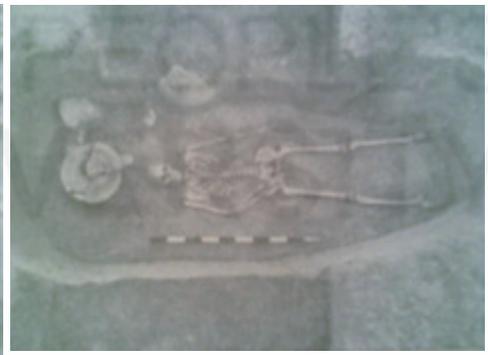
Cultural sequence of Surkotada



Arterial thorough fare Harappa, Kalibangan



The Citadel, Period IC, Surkotada (Harappan)



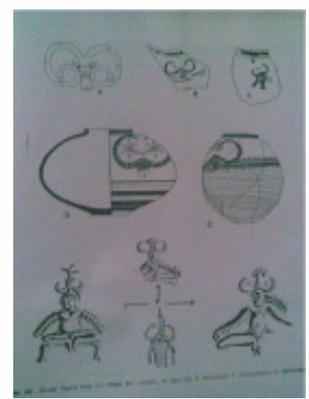
Extended human skeleton in a grave pit, Kalibangan



Grave pit burial with pottery



Fire places in a row, Citadel, Kalibangan(Harappan)



Horned figures from Hissar Kalibangan (Harappan) and Burzahom.(Neolithic)

The Indus civilization declined by about 1500 B.C. probably due to loss of external trade. Traditional interpretations attribute this decline to the invasion of Indo-Aryan speaking groups from central Asia. The Aryan culture, initially centered in the area of the Indo-Gangetic divide, was a rural way of life based essentially on cattle pastoralism and rudimentary agriculture. It soon began to spread towards east to the Ganga valley, leading to important developments in religion, economy and social organisation. By about the middle of the first millennium B.C. heterodox religions like Buddhism and Jainism came up and also a new phase of urbanisation (called second urbanisation) followed, leading to the growth of cities like Pataliputra, Kavsambi and Ujjain. These eventually paved the way for the rise of the Mauryan empire.

1.5 ARCHAEOLOGY: CONCEPTUAL DEVELOPMENTS

Archaeology deals with the study of antiquarian remains, which are brought together under the phrase archaeological record. It has three or four major components. First, there are individual objects ranging from stone tools to pots and pans to metal objects to beads, pendants and other ornaments to seals and coins. The second category consists of a variety of features, structures and monuments such as hearths, house floors, religions, military and commercial structures, and burials and burial monuments. Then there are some art creations such as painted or incised designs on pottery, terracotta or metal figurines and rock part. But the archaeological record also includes materials and remains which, although not made by man, are closely associated with archaeological sites, such as soils and sediments, plant and animal remains, ore and slag pieces, and rocks and siliceous stone pieces.

On the landscape we notice these various categories of antiquarian remains are generally found together as clusters. These clusters are called sites which may be small or large like the Mohenjodaro and Harappa mounds. Depending upon the type of human activity that took place on these spots, archaeological sites are again distinguished into various classes such as habitation sites, animal penning stations, factory sites, religious sites, commercial sites and military sites.

Over the last four to five centuries important changes took place from time to time in the aims and methods adopted for dealing with the archaeological record. The late David Clarke, in his famous article entitled 'Archaeology: The loss of Innocence' published in the journal *Antiquity* (1973), characterised these changes as successive stages of consciousness, self consciousness, critical self-consciousness, and self critical self-consciousness.

In the antiquarian stage which lasted till the early decades of the 19th century, in Europe and elsewhere in the world, amateurs from different walks of life took interest in the cultural heritage of their respective countries and went to the landscape and sought to obtain first hand information about palaces, forts, paintings, sculptures and other striking antiquarian remains dotting the landscape. They prepared short descriptions of the remains along with sketches and drawings. These studies were of a random type, motivated by general human urges like curiosity about surroundings, spirit of romanticism and adventure, instinct of pleasure, respect to ancestors, etc. The notion knowledge, if it existed all, was of

a simple nature. There was nothing like any commonly accepted methodology. Rather the amateurs felt free to adopt their own methods of commonsense for describing illustrating the ancient remains. It was only in the second quarter that the element of acquiring knowledge about the past societies through their discarded items not only emerges into the picture but witnessed three or four swift shifts in the perspectives. These knowledge seeking perspectives are called culture history, reconstruction of life ways, New or Processual archaeology and Ideational or Interpretive trends. We will briefly discuss these below.

1.5.1 Culture History

The credit for introducing the knowledge perspective by dividing the pre-literate (pre-Christian) past of Europe goes to C.J.Thomsen, the curator of the Royal Danish National Museum of Antiquities in Copenhagen. Thomsen was confronted with the task of cataloguing a huge collection of stone and metal objects, ceramics and other antiquities that had accumulated in the museum. Partly by way of using his common sense and also based upon ethnographic parallels, Thomsen finally arrived at a three-fold classification of the objects in the collection. This is the famous three-Age system which appeared in print in 1836. According to this scheme, three major periods or ages existed in the pre-Christian past of northern Europe, viz. Stone, Bronze and Iron Ages.

The second major contribution made by Thomsen lies in the fact that he was probably the first antiquarian worker to highlight the fact that antiquarian remains provide knowledge or information about the ancient human societies. He specifically pointed out that these remains could inform us about ancient cultures and burial practices, ancient environments and even about past human migrations.

This topic of partitioning prehistoric past into phases and seeking information about the respective phases emerged as a strong trend in the second half of the 19th century. Sir John Lubbock divided the Stone Age into Palaeolithic and Neolithic periods in 1865. Soon, thanks to discoveries in the French Caves, several stages (Lower, Middle and Upper) were recognised within the Palaeolithic. Likewise, several stages were noted within the Bronze and Iron Ages. The culture history perspective thus enabled archaeologists to recognise several stages in the development of human culture and also obtain some basic information about each cultural stage.

1.5.2 Reconstruction of Life Ways

Even a brief glance at the archaeological discoveries of the last quarter of the 19th and the first quarter of the 20th century makes it clear to us that this period witnessed many large-scale excavations in various parts of the Old World. These led to the recognition of all important Bronze Age civilizations that we know today. Heinrich Schliemann's excavations at Troy (Hiissarlik in Turkey) exposed the Mycenaen civilization. Arthur Evans's work at Knossos gave us the Cratan or Minoan civilization. Leonard Woolley exposed the remains of Mesopotamian civilization. Flinders Petrie and others gave us the Egyptian civilization. John Marshal and his colleagues exposed the remains of the Indus civilization.

One thing you will not fail to notice is that these civilizations could be identified because the excavations were conducted on a large scale and almost entire towns were exposed to view. Town lay-outs with imposing structures like palaces,

temples and elaborate burial tombs containing treasure were laid bare. It was thus possible to reconstruct the life ways of these city-dwellers.

1.5.3 New or Processual Archaeology

The first explicit efforts at developing the theoretical structure of archaeology were made by publications like Gordon Childe's *Piecing Together the Past*, Grahame Clark's *Archaeology and Society* and Stuart Piggott's *Approach to Archaeology*, all published in the second quarter of the last century. Against this background came up two major developments which dominate contemporary theoretical archaeology—New or Processual Archaeology and Post-Processual Archaeology and Post Processual or Interpretative archaeology. We will now note the main tenets of these two trends.

Lewis R. Binford from the U.S. and David Clarke from England were mainly responsible for the emergence of New Archaeology in the 1960s. Both emphasised the systemic nature of culture and held that archaeologists should identify not only its components but their interconnections as well, as these alone give clues about past culture processes. Processual archaeology also emphasised the role of environment in the functioning of human cultures. In fact, Binford adopted the definition of human cultures as extra somatic means of adaptation to respective environmental settings. Going beyond the traditional tasks of description and classification of antiquarian remains, he emphasised the anthropological goal of explaining culture change with reference to law-like formulations or generalisations cutting across time and space. Binford held the adoption of a regional approach to archaeological sites as a prerequisite for realising the anthropological goals of archaeology aimed at the identification of past human behavioural patterns.

1.5.4 Interpretative Archaeology

Since the 1980s some reactions started coming up, raising doubts and objections about functionalist and behaviour oriented approaches of New Archaeology. Ian Hodder of Cambridge University took the lead in staging this reaction, which over the last quarter-century developed as interpretative archaeology.

A Major proposition of this trend holds that it is the internal, innovative elements within human culture, rather than external environmental factors, which are agents of culture change. The second major aspect of this new trend highlights the importance of relating behaviour to human minds. So interpretative archaeology has also come to be known as archaeology of mind. It brought to fore human cognitive abilities, sentiments, feelings and emotions. This led to the growth of definite trends such as cognitive archaeology, symbolic archaeology, structuralist archaeology, hermeneutical archaeology, etc. As against the use of scientific method emphasised by New Archaeology, post processual archaeology treats archaeological record as a text and that its meanings in terms of human minds need to be retrieved by methods of interpretation.

We may now conclude our foregoing observations about conceptual developments in archaeology by emphasising that (1) these developments constitute yet another instance of the progress of all social sciences from description and classification to explanation to interpretation; and (2) these various trends are in the final analysis mutually complementary and not contradictory.

1.6 ARCHAEOLOGY: METHODOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENTS

In the preceding section we have sketched how the aims and goals have become progressively more and more elaborate and how the character of archaeology changed from the practical task, collecting and classifying antiquarian remains to a full-fledged discipline which seeks to retrieve information from these about the past human behaviour and its roots in the human minds.

We will now note how, commensurate with these developments in theory, important changes also came about in the realm of methodology. In field investigations random and selective recording and study of sites of the antiquarian stage are now replaced by systematic and intensive survey of all categories and sizes of sites in a given region. This work may involve the use of maps, aerial photos, satellite images, etc. This is followed by vertical or horizontal excavations, which involve detailed recording of evidence in the form of site and trench maps, three dimensional recording of finds in the trenches, and photography. While it is true that all excavation is destruction of original evidence, the site record is preserved in maps, plans, stratigraphical sections and photographs.

Over and above these field methods which are peculiar to archaeology, the discipline also employs certain broad methodological strategies for studying and interpreting archaeological evidence. These are environmental archaeology, settlement archaeology, ethnoarchaeology, experimental archaeology and ethology.

1.6.1 Environmental Archaeology

Environmental archaeology is the study of past human interactions with the nature. It finds its focus in the impact of the environment on past cultures and its influence on the social and economic aspects of past societies. The importance of these studies is such that Karl Butzer termed archaeology as past human ecology. Geo- and bioarchaeology are the two main branches of environmental archaeology. The common types of evidence used in environmental archeology are (a) animal remains, such as bones, eggshell pieces, insects, ostracods, foraminifera, molluscs, parasite eggs and cysts, (b) plant remains such as wood, charcoal, pollen and spores, phytoliths and diatoms; and (c) archaeological and geological stratigraphy, chemical and physical analyses of sediments and soils, soil micromorphology and mineralogy. The two main issues in environmental archeology are how the human societies in the past were shaping themselves in tune with their respective landscape settings and how in turn the human groups directly or indirectly were changing the physical and biological components of their landscapes. Environmental archaeology involves very detailed field studies as well as laboratory analyses.

1.6.2 Settlement Archaeology

Settlement Archaeology is the study of societal relationships of ancient societies as can be inferred from the study of spatial distribution of archaeological sites on the landscape. In the 1940s Gordon Willey of Harvard University initiated settlement pattern studies in the Viru valley of Peru in South America. In his own words Willey (1953) "Settlement pattern is the way in which man disposed

himself over the landscape on which he lived which reference to dwellings, to their arrangement, and to the nature and disposition of other buildings pertaining to community life. These settlements reflect the natural environment, the level of technology on which the builders operated, and various institutions of social interaction and control which the culture maintained”.

Settlement archaeology seeks to understand the geographical, political and military, economic and religious/symbolic factors governing settlement locations. Likewise, it provides important clues for reconstructing socio-economic, demographic and other aspects of ancient life ways. Settlement pattern studies have been carried out with reference to prehistoric and protohistoric sites in different parts of India.

1.6.3 Ethnoarchaeology

Ethnoarchaeology deals with the use of analogies or parallels drawn from the study of contemporary simple hunter-gatherer and farmers/pastoral societies for reconstructing and interpreting the archaeological cultures. As such ethnography serves as an important tool for archaeological reconstruction.

In the initial stages archaeologists were content with the study of published reports and books of anthropologists on contemporary societies and use of objects shown in museums and archival records. In more recent years archaeologists have felt the need to undertake fieldwork themselves among present-day simple societies and study them from archaeological points of view. Lewis Binford’s study of the Nunamiut Eskimos of Alaska and John Yellen’s work on the Bushmen of Africa are excellent examples of ethnoarchaeology.

Ethnographic analogies are of two types. General comparative analogies deal with comparative studies of cultures irrespective of geographical limits. Direct historical analogies involve unbroken links between past and present in specific regions. India has tremendous potentialities for ethnoarchaeology. Many studies have already been undertaken with reference to hunter-gatherer groups like the Chenchues, Yanadis, Vanvaghtris, etc. and agropastoral communities like the Dhangars, Bhils, etc.

1.6.4 Experimental Archaeology

Archaeologists also frequently make use of analogies drawn from experimental studies for reconstructing ancient societies. Experimental studies have a long history of more than 150 years and have been very helpful to archaeologists when other methodological strategies failed to give clues. Like ethnographic analogies, analogies from experimental studies give no final answers but only tentative or hypothetical solutions which need to be checked in the context of actual archaeological evidence.

While undertaking experimental studies, archaeologists observe certain precautions. First, materials similar to those used in the past should be employed in the experiments. Secondly, modern technology and gadgets of various kinds associated with it should not be allowed to influence the experiments. Experimental stone tool making has been in practice from the early part of the 19th century. Louis Leakey, Donald Crabtree and Francois Bordes have made experimental specimens of all important stone tool types of the Old and New

world prehistory, including leaf-shaped bifacial points such as Solutrean points of Europe and Clovis and Folsom points of North America. Experimental studies covered many other aspects of the archaeological record such as building of dwelling structures, construction of megalithic tombs, preparation and consumption of foodstuffs, animal butchering, and agricultural practices.

1.6.5 Ethological Studies

Ethological studies deal with the understanding of behavioural patterns of various animal species. Prehistorians have in particular found analogies drawn from primatological research very helpful in reconstructing the behaviour patterns of ancient hunter-gatherer societies. In earlier stages investigations of behaviour of monkey species and higher apes (chimpanzee, baboon, orangutan and gorilla) were restricted to animals kept in Zoos. Such studies gave only limited observations about primate behaviour.

In the last half a century full fledged field studies of these primate groups in their natural habitats were carried out; these in some cases extended for several years. In particular, the studies on chimpanzees, baboons and other higher primate groups have supplied many useful analogies for reconstructing the behavioural patterns of prehistoric hunter-gatherer communities.

One of these aspects concerns group living among higher apes, which facilitates learning of life skills by the young and affords security against other groups. Occupation of a certain favorable areas called core areas with a home base is common among higher apes; this analogy is helpful for reconstructing Stone Age hunter-gatherer land-use patterns. In certain situations chimpanzees make artificial objects like flakes by breaking stone blocks. This may give clues for understanding the origins of stone tool making and use.

1.7 SUMMARY

In this unit we have made efforts to understand how archaeology emerged as a distinct academic discipline from a prolonged stage of antiquarian studies done by amateurs for satisfying innate human urges like curiosity about surroundings, adventure and respect to ancestors.

Regular, knowledge seeking interest developed with the formulation of three-Age system by C.J.Thomsen. This knowledge-interest became more and more elaborate and comprehensive, encompassing both material and non-material aspects of human culture. Archaeology is now able to answer questions not only of what, when and about past cultures but also of why and how. The proposition made by the famous British archaeologist C.Hawkes that archaeology can help us reconstruct only economic and technological aspects of ancient societies is no longer valid. Archaeology also enables us to reconstruct sociological, religious and ideological components of past life ways.

It is in this respect archaeology serves as the bedrock for anthropological studies of present-day simple societies spread across the world. Apart from supplying the time dimension to human culture, archaeological studies also highlight that regional diversity in adaptations is an inherent attribute of human culture.

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Sample Questions

- 1) Discuss the scope of archaeology and its main divisions.
- 2) Show how the aims of archaeology changed from time to time.
- 3) What are the main methodological strategies employed in archaeological reconstruction.

Write short notes on the following

- i) Protohistory
- ii) Early farming communities in India