

अधिगम

अंक 25 : दिसम्बर 2022

ISSN : 2394-773X

New Archaeology : An Analytical Study

Dr. Jitendra Singh Naulakha*

ABSTRACT

The 1960s mark a turning point in the development of archaeology. By this time various dissatisfactions were being expressed with the way researches in the archaeology were being conducted. These dissatisfactions were not so much with excavation techniques, or with the newly developed scientific aids, but with the way conclusions were drawn from them. The procedures used in archaeological interpretation were questioned. To answer this deficiency, a new approach called new Archaeology was developed. The two principle proponents of this theory were Lewis Roberts Binford from the USA and David Clarke from the UK.

New Archaeology is a movement in archaeology with application of scientific methods drawn from various disciplines to investigate and explain past human behavioural patterns and cultural processes. It advocates the deductive model of scientific reasoning based on well formulated hypotheses prior to archaeological explorations and excavations.

KEYWORDS : New Archaeology, historical approach, processual archaeology, Anthropology, Culture.

INTRODUCTION

The term 'New Archaeology' is applied to a school of thought that swept through Anglo- American archaeology in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The dissatisfaction with the traditional culture- historical approach was crystallized into new Archaeology. Much emphasis is given to science-based approach in new

* Associate Professor-Ancient History, Culture & Archaeology Prof. Rajendra Singh (Rajju Bhayia) University, Prayagraj

Archaeology. The use of scientific techniques is the central part of in New Archaeology. The new Archaeology wanted to look at the internal dynamics of a society. It also emphasised the various forces that was driving the general direction of social development (the phrase often used was 'cultural trajectory'). David Clarke, one of the principal proponents of the new Archaeology, expressed his view in the book *Analytical Archaeology and Analytical Archaeologist*. In this work, he emphasises that a set of questions is more important rather than a set of answers. He emphasised that culture is a system consists of several mutually dependent inter-linked sub systems that are conditioned by surrounding ecosystem. In new Archaeology, the investigation of culture took a centre stage than the study of culture. As new Archaeology got older and developed as a body of thought, it became known as Processualism. Processualism is so called, because of its stress on cultural process.

Objective of the Study :

The objective of this paper is to reconstruct or piece together the past life ways of the ancient but preliterate communities with the help of their material remains (found in the form of artifacts and eco-facts.) It takes interest in having a clear picture of how people lived and how they exploited their environment. It also seeks to understand why they lived in that way, why they had that pattern of behavior and how their life ways and material culture came to take the form they did.

It calls for an understanding of the complex relation between human societies and physical environments. It is strongly associated with the elements of aesthetic appreciation as its primary dependence is on the artifacts and eco-facts and their interpretation in terms of cultural development.

Review of Literature : The maturing of processual archaeology within the last decade is mainly due to four significant publications

appearing between 1960-1970. Albert C Spaulding in 1960 published a paper titled “Statistical description and comparison of artifact assemblage” which opened the way of quantification in archaeology. Binford attempted his systemic model in 1965. Carl Hempel in 1966 published his book titled “Philosophy of Natural Sciences” which deals with the epistemological issues. The nature of general law and its relations with statements of explorations etc. seem to have profoundly helped in developing scientific level of explanation in archaeology. Finally James Deetz in 1967 published his work on human behavior and archaeological remains. This work was to lay down the basic rules for deciding various attributes or attribute clusters in order to identify cultural behaviors. These works brought about a revolution in archaeology. In 1968 the Binfords published *New Perspectives in Archaeology* and demonstrated how greater rigour in data analysis in the new system brings forth much more relevant information than the earlier works.

Discussion :

Binford outlined the programme of the new Archaeology in his two papers titled ‘Archaeology as Anthropology’ (1962) and ‘Archaeological systematic and the study of culture process’ (1965). His two books *New Perspectives in Archaeology* (1968) and *An Archaeological Perspective* (1972) are the result of his thinking in this direction. Binford introduced the philosophical debate that archaeology could be a science. He stressed the need for archaeologists to become more scientific in deriving inferences about the past. White is the first one who emphasised the scientific approach to archaeology in his book ‘The Science of Culture : A Study of Man and Civilization’ (1949) and ‘The Evolution of Culture: The Development of Civilization to the Fall of Rome’ (1959). Binford’s thrust on cultural process brought the various

sciences into archaeology and in turn, archaeology attained the status of science.

New Archaeologists sought to explain the culture as a system, which could be classified into various subsystems like social subsystem, ideological subsystem, trade subsystems and alike. According to Binford, culture was not just a mixed bag of different randomly acquired norms, rather it was a system. Therefore, he emphasised on systematic thinking. He looks into the culture as 'man's extrasomatic means of adaptation.' This extrasomatic means of adaptation can be explained by an example. For instance, polar bears have lots of fur to deal with Arctic winter but man wears furs and lives in igloos to deal with the same winter. This cultural adaptation is outside (extra) the body, hence 'extrasomatic'. Like Grahame Clark, Binford viewed cultures as humanity's extrasomatic means of adaptation. Changes in all aspects of cultural systems were therefore interpreted as adaptive responses to alterations in the natural environment or in adjacent and competing cultural systems. He described evolution as 'a process operative at the interface of a living system and its field'. Binford championed the positivist view. According to him, the explanations and predictions are equivalent and that both rest upon the demonstration of a constant articulation of variables. Binford's work also influenced the British archaeologist Colin Renfrew. Renfrew explained the difference between the traditional archaeology and new Archaeology.

New Archaeologists stress the dynamic relationship between social and economic aspects of culture and the environment as the basis for understanding the processes of culture change. They think that culture was adaptive to external environment, so they try to reconstruct the whole ecological system which led to the cultural materialism, cultural ecology and

modeling of the subsistence economy. New archaeologists see the culture as a system. They feel artefacts are part of a system. Some process of thinking is involved in making and using these artefacts in the given system. This is what they call it systematic thinking. New archaeologists look for various systems and sub-systems. In a system, for instance, the trade, religion and so on are sub-systems. They see the material involved in the trade or religion had some functional value. Therefore, one of the main thrusts I new Archaeology is this interpretative thinking.

They also give much emphasis to variability. The traditional archaeologists had given much emphasis on the biggest sites or more beautiful artefacts. The big sites or urban centres or trade centres or ports could not be understood respectively without looking at the rural infrastructure, resource area, coastal geomorphology and other allied areas. Therefore, understanding the settlement pattern is more important than the finds. To understand this variability, they introduced the sampling theory and techniques.

Processual archaeologists emphasis the need to understand the interaction between human culture and environment. Conceiving this interaction is essential for understanding cultural change. Processual archaeologists are positivists, believing that hypothesis about the past can be tested. Initially, Processual archaeologists also largely ignored the ideological and symbolic nature of some of the data they recovered.

General system theory is another borrowed and modified concept that became popular with the new Archaeology. In this, a culture was viewed as an open system conditioned by outside stimuli. Binford defined three subsystems of a culture (technology, social organization and ideology) and the material correlates each (which he termed *techno facts*, *socio facts* and *ideofacts*). He tried

to show the function of each artifact that is found in archaeological context in the background of above concept.

Irrespective of the advancement made in archaeological theories, the gap between the material record and high level theories was soon realized in the era of new Archaeology. To fill the gap a middle-range theory was developed by scholars like Michael Schiffer in which the attention is paid on how archaeological record is formed (Schiffer 1976). Schiffer has tried to bridge the gap between the data-oriented archaeologists and theory –oriented archaeologists, which he termed it as ‘behavioural archaeology’.

Critics of New Archaeology :

The critics felt that New Archaeologist simply coined new vocabularies and created jargons. They termed their scientific aspirations as “scientistic” or “functionalist”. They felt that it is nothing, but a refined form of processual archaeology in which much emphasis is given to functional and ecological explanation. In the early phase, it reflected the functional- processual phase and later it turned into a cognitive- processual phase where in the cognitive aspects of the early societies are given much importance.

Although the new Archaeology advocated in studying all aspects of cultural systems. New Archaeologists merely concentrated on subsistence patterns, trade and to a limited degree on social organization. They pointed out that Binford’s own research has been largely concerned with technology and subsistence patterns as they all related to ecological adaptations. Major aspects of human behaviour, such as religious beliefs, aesthetics and scientific knowledge, received little attention. Their scope could not extend beyond ecological concerns and settlement patterns. The new Archaeologists appear to have erred in assuming that ecological constraints would exert same degree of influence on all aspects of culture, but failed to recognize other cultural factors.

The growing awareness of these weaknesses between 1970s and 1980s necessitated the archaeologists to rethink over the application of this theory, which led to the formulation of *contextual archaeology or postprocessual archaeology or interpretative archaeology*.

Ian Hodder thought that new Archaeology could not answer all the questions raised. His line of thinking was well reflected in his work “Post-processual Archaeology” published in *Advances in Archaeological Method and Theory* (1985). He became one of the principal proponents of the ***Post-processual archaeology or Interpretive Archaeology***. According to him, the archaeological record should not be utilized to reconstruct the past human behaviour alone rather one should be able to trace the human mind and its various manifestations like sentiments, feelings and emotions.

Conclusion

Archaeologists need to examine all possible aspects of an archaeological material in order to understand the significance of the each part of it. Each theory and method has its own merits and demerits; advantages and disadvantages, Therefore, it is the duty of the archaeologists to collect, document and interpret the date faithfully to the best of their knowledge without any prejudice in the given context.

Thus, the underlying fact remains in all these theoretical approaches is to bring out the maximum possible amount of information from an archaeological record. Archaeological records are considered as a text and it is up to the individual archaeologist, how he/she reads this text and interprets the inherent specifics. The outcome depends upon reading and interpretation of the archaeological record. Therefore, the archaeologists must pay

greater attention to collect, document and interpret the data to the best of their knowledge without any prejudice.

References

- Binford, Lewis R., 1962 'Archaeology as Anthropology', *American Antiquity*, vol. 28,
- Binford, Lewis R., 1965 'Archaeological Systematic and the Study of Culture Process', *American Antiquity*, vol. 31,
- Binford, S.R., and L.R. Binford, (eds.), 1968 'New Perspectives in Archaeology', Aldine, Chicago.
- Caldwell, J.R., 1959 'The new American archaeology'. *Science*, vol. 129,
- Childe, V. Gordon, 1960 'A short Introduction to Archaeology', Collier, New York.
- Childe, V. Gordon, 1960 'What happened in History', *Penguin Books*, London.
- Clarke, D.L., 1979 'Analytical Archaeologist', Academic Press, New York.
- Daniel, Glyn E., 1975 'A Hundred and Fifty Years of Archaeology', Duckworth, London.
- Harris, Edward, C., 1968 'The Rise of Anthropological Theory', Crowell, New York.
- Hodder, I., 1985 'Postprocessual archaeology', in *Advances in Archaeological Method and Theory*, (ed.) M.B. Schiffer, Academic Press, New York, vol.8,
- Paddyayya, K., 1995 'Theoretical Perspectives in Indian Archaeology- An Historical view', In *Theory in Archaeology – A World Perspective*,
- Renfrew, Colin and Paul Bahn 2000 'Archaeology : Theories, Methods and Practice', Thames and Hudson, London.
- Said, Edward, 1978 'Orientalism', Pantheon Books, New York, USA.
- Sankalia, H.D. 1977. New Archaeology : Its scope and application to India, (D.N. Mazumdar memorial lecture 1964 : (Ethnographic Folk Culture Society) Lucknow.
- Schiffer, M.B., 1976 'Behavioral Archaeology', Academic Press, New York.
- Wheeler, R.E.M., 1954 *Archaeology from the Earth*, Clarendon Press, Oxford.