

EMERGING FRONTIER OF PREHISTORY AND BURNING ISSUES OF ITS STUDY IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

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Abstract

Many more prehistoric locations and material remains of man's past are identified from different part of the world from the scholars of developed countries. In the one hand great amount of facilities and resources provided by their governments and related institutions, scholars of developed countries are working continuously in the field of archaeology and prehistory. Besides this the developing countries are struggling for physical development of the country with low amount of resources and they are incapable to allocate national budget for such studies and the scholars and researchers are badly suffered with low income level and high price for livelihood resulting low level of research capabilities. In this context research work on archaeology and prehistory is far away for them and many more prehistoric sites are still hidden under the geological strata of developing countries. There is a great danger of manipulation in data, possibility of forgery like Piltdown forgery and possible damage of megalithic graves for finding antiquities by tomb hunters. Damage of prehistoric sites, tombs and shelters is a great loss for human being not only for related countries, but for the people of the whole world. Therefore, need of collaborative research among the scholars of developed and underdeveloped countries is must for the development of anthropology in global context.

Key Words: Prehistory, strata, artifacts, tools, Mesolithic, block on block method, anvil, chisel.

1. Background

The time before the recorded history is prehistory, which is related with the study of ancient man and his culture. It covers the long period of time from the origin of men, while history is limited with certain incidences from the beginning of writings. Written documents as the sources of studying history are found from the time after the invention of writings. So, the period of history goes up to 3000 BC. This means that the time of history can not go more than 5000 years. Proto-history another branch of studying human past behavior is also limited with the time period for near about 3000 years. It cannot reach up to the prehistoric period. But the study time of prehistory covers millions of years. It begins from the origin of man and ends after the invention of writings, which covers the period from Ramapithecus and ends after the development of civilization by homo-sapiens.

Prehistory is the subject which deals with the story of man and every thing that concerns him from that dim remote movement when he first emerged from his animal ancestry until the time when the existence of written records leads the investigation in to the realm of history proper (Burkitt, 1985: 1). As prehistory covers the long period of time for study, the sources of its study are very simple. Fossils, simple stone tools made by man, prehistoric residence centers, other material remains of the caves and cave arts are the main sources of studying prehistory and human culture. Man is very greedy by nature from the beginning of his civilization period. He uses his equipments and carries them with him when he migrates. He throws them in the land, when they are totally useless. Such equipments also have become more useful for an anthropologist for the study of ancient man and his culture (Dahal and Khatiwada, 2065: 45).

There are different methods of studying prehistory developed by archaeologists. Stratigraphy, tools typology and technology, associate findings and states of preservation of artifacts are some popular methods of studying prehistory. Process of erection and degradation goes on regular process in the land according to the geological rule. Deposition of soil occurs in flat land which helps to form geological strata. Prehistoric artifacts and the material remains of man are deposited in such strata

which are the main source of studying prehistory by archaeologists. According to the geological rule the strata of the bottom is the oldest and the top remains the most recent, where the prehistoric artifacts are also concerned with the same category.

Excavation of prehistoric sites is done for the study of prehistoric man and his culture. In the case of disturbance for the formation of geological strata, material remains of man in such strata do not present the proper date of prehistoric artifact. But in the case of regular formation of strata they become more important for the study of prehistoric man and his culture.

Special types of tools were made by prehistoric man in different centers of the world. In the beginning the stone tools made by prehistoric man were very simple. Art of making tools, choice of the stone quality and the efficiency of the weapon was very simple in the beginning. Latter on Stone Age man developed his tools making technology and he became success to make more effective, light and fine tools. Therefore, we can say that the tools which are simple were made earlier. Hand axe was the first tool, which was made roughly by a Stone Age man in the beginning. Latter on scrappers and other fine tools were made. Cores were the earlier tools where as flakes were used as tools in latter period. Method of making earlier tools was block on block method. Latter on pressure method was also used to make refined tools. Therefore, the stone tools made in latter period were attractive and effective. That is why the stone tools of Neolithic period are very much attractive and artistic, which are made by cutting with bamboo slabs. They were rubbed with sand for its smoothness and brightness.

Associate findings also help to confirm the date of artifacts. For example if some prehistoric tools are found in strata with the bone object, we can test carbon of the bone to confirm the date. It helps to fix the date of stone tools. Stone tools are dated only by typology, but in the case of carbonic object found in the same strata, which helps to fix the date for these tools.

Fossilization and the mineralization are the two process of decaying organic objects. It depends on the mineral and chemical elements found in the soil of organic collection. Fossilization preserves the actual shape of organic object and helps to study the prehistoric man and his culture. But the process of mineralization totally destroys the organic materials.

Study of glaciations and river terraces helps to find out the prehistoric remains, which is another method of studying prehistoric culture. As the prehistoric man was nomadic in character, it is very hard to find its permanent residents. Except some caves he used to stay at the bank of rivers under the tree. Therefore, we can find stone tools of prehistoric period in the caves and river terraces. But the geological system of formulating strata in river terraces is quite opposite than the geological strata.

Prehistoric research is a hard work where a researcher seeks the material remains of man's past to find the facts of his society and culture. A low quality of artifacts or material remains of the past also bears great value in such a research. Therefore, archaeological excavation of prehistoric sites becomes the main deed of a researcher to find such artifacts. Geological study and proper exploration becomes the main deed before excavation, which is a main technique of finding facts for prehistoric studies. Secondary data were used as the most important source to complete this paper. Reports of excavation from prehistoric sites were also considered as primary sources but priority was given to the secondary sources than the primary ones.

2. Emerging frontier

When we talk about the origin of man we reach up to the long period of geological calendar, when squirrel, shrewmouse and other small mammals originated in the earth. They are the farthest relatives of human being and or common ancestor of different mammals. From Eocene to Oligocene era only mammals like monkeys were originated. In the same way orangutan, gorilla and chimpanzee originated near about two Crore years ago. They are kept in anthropoid group by the scholars as the ancestor of man. But we are even facing the problem of knowing the first man seen in the earth and the process of human development from apes to the humanoid is still missing in link. In this context propliopithecus (Kenya), Egyptopithecus, pliopithecus and driopithecus are known as the earliest ancestors of man developed in the earth. But their character was closer with pongidae than humanoid. Therefore, that was known as pre-human period for human development. Lemur, tarsier and semedae

were developed in Eocene period which are divided into different categories like gibbon, chimpanzee, gorilla and orangutan. They were both apes and tailed monkeys which were the nearest ancestor of man than other animals.

As many more researches on the development of mankind were done earlier, different kinds of concepts were developed. At first GE Lewis got some jaws of ancient man in 1930 AD from the Siwalik range of India. With some features similar with human being Lewis named it Ramapithecus. It was dated 80 lakhs years back from the present man. In the same way LH Leakey found the fossils of Kenyapithecus dated back 1 crore and 40 lakhs years. The same kind of Ramapithecus jaw was found in Siwalik Nepal in 1981 by JH Hutchison, which dates back 1 crore and 10 lakhs year old (Dahal and Khatiwada, 2065:79).

Finding fossils of Australopithecus was the greatest invention for the study of human development in the sense that it was the first man who used to make weapons. At first Remond A Dart found a skull of a baby creature of this category in 1924 which was similar with modern man. It was found in Tang valley of Transval district, South Africa and named Australopithecus. Later on the remains of such creatures were found from other parts of Africa also. Then they were called plesianthropus, paranthropus, zinjanthropus, homohabilis and megarthropus Africanus from the name of places where they were found. LGS Leakey was the first person who found material remains of this ancient creature with its handmade stone tools. In 1930 he got some stone tools made from pebbles in Olduvai George of Kenya also. They were found under the volcanic lava. The tools from Kenya and Olduvai George were proved 27 and 18 hundred thousand years old from the help of potassium argon testing techniques. Therefore, as the first man Australopithecus was existed between 27 to 18 hundred thousand years ago in the earth. It was the first man, who used to make stone tools for its survival.

Homo-erectus and homo-sapiens were other categories of man as they were developed from Australopithecus. At first the remains or skeletons of homo-erectus were found from Java Indonesia. Eugin Dubois a Dutch medical doctor collected the skeletons of this creature from Java in 1880 and 1890. As a proof of homo-erectus the remains of thigh was found in Java, which could easily prove its movement standing straight with two legs like a man. Therefore, it is said homo-erectus from its character of walking with two legs. The theory of Eugin Dubois was accepted by the scholars from 1920, after finding the same kind of skeletons from other parts of the world. In the same way the remains of Peking man were found from Chau-Kau-Tsian cave of China in 1927. Peking man was able to settle in the cave and it protected the fire found from the firing of the forest. Therefore it was more developed than other earlier men.

In the process of development, homo-sapiens made different kind of artifacts. This man used to live in the caves. Cave art was also developed by this man. It was settled in different parts of the world. Asia, Europe and Africa were the main region of its settlements. Therefore, their settlement caves and equipments were found from different parts of these continents.

Prehistoric exploration, excavation, study of river terraces, study of geological formation of the earth and climatic condition is necessary for the study of prehistoric man and his culture. Most of the prehistoric sites of developed countries are minutely studied and exposed out. For example France, Germany, UK and other European countries have done such studies. India is also able to identify the prehistoric sites and the scholars of that country have studied most of such centers and artifacts. .

After the finding of a stone tool a cleaver from Pallavarum Madras India in 1863 by Robert Bruce Foote, need of studying prehistory in India was expected by the scholars. He explored different prehistoric sites in India regularly for 40 years. Later on Yale Cambridge Expedition Team was the first team which studied geological formation of different places of India in 1935. That team studied the river terraces of Sohan River, where strata formation of different glacial and pluvial period were traced out. Helmut De Terra and T Peterson were the leaders of that team. Their work brought forward the need of studying prehistoric sites in India. Now such kind of study in India is far ahead than other neighboring countries. Most of the Paleolithic, Mesolithic and Neolithic sites of India are studied and prehistory of India is as clear as other developed countries.

3. Burning Issues of its study in Developing Countries

Study of prehistory for the scholars in developing countries is not so easy. At first geological study of the country is essential to locate the prehistoric human settlement, which is impossible while lacking knowledge and equipments. Government as well as the scholars of developing countries is suffered with different kinds of scarcities and problems that led them to work hard for the fulfillment of their necessities. The government can not allocate the budget for prehistoric exploration and excavation and the scholars also can not conduct the research work with limited knowledge and sources. Low level of salary and high price level for necessary goods force the scholars of developing countries to work for the long time in a day to fulfill their daily necessities. Therefore, they prefer side job to survive than the research work. That is why prehistoric studies of developing countries are lacking. With together this problem the main burning issues of prehistoric studies in developing countries are as follows:

a. Lack of government interest: The governments of developing countries always prefer for physical development of the country with limited resources. Therefore, they can not allocate national budget for prehistoric studies, which results the backwardness in this field. Most of the developing countries have not developed the certain category of qualification to be elected in the parliament. Criteria of education are not fixed to be appointed in ministers also. Therefore, the education minister of some countries are having with lower than secondary level education. They cannot realize the need of studying prehistory and does not show interest to allocate budget for such studies.

b. Lack of proper law: Proper law of a country plays the vital role for the study of prehistory. But such laws are lacking in many developing countries. When we talk about Nepalese context antiquities preservation act was brought by the government of Nepal in 1957. All though it was renovated for 3 times up to 1987, there are many more gaps in this act even today. The rule is silent about the exploration and excavation of prehistoric sites. Department of archaeology is also inactive by the lack of proper fund and experts.

c. Lack of proper training: System of proper training on prehistoric studies is lacking in developing countries. Proper encouragement for the study of such subject is also lacking. Only limited universities of developing countries have introduced the course of prehistoric studies. But, it is considered as a dead subject with limited numbers of students enrolled in the universities. Possibility of job is always lacking for the students of such subject. National universities are also monotonous to provide trainings on prehistory and archaeology. That is why the foreign scholars of developed countries tend to study prehistory in developing countries.

If we talk about the study of prehistory in Nepal, foreign scholars have done some of the works in this field. In this context foreign scholar Tony Hagen was the first person who visited Nepal in 1959 for the geological study of mountain region. Indian scholar A Ghosh also visited Nepal in 1960 to explore the prehistoric tools. But he was not succeeded in his work like Hegan. After that Indian scholar RV Joshi tried to study the terraces of Bagmati and Bishnumati rivers in Kathmandu Valley. He also was not succeeded in his work. While giving the chronological table of prehistory in Indian subcontinent HD Shankaliya has put Nepal in three phases likely early and middle late paleolithic period dated about 150000 and 25000 BC for the first and last respectively. He has characterized the early palaeolithic culture in Nepal as Sohanian and hand axe tools. He has characterized the middle paleolithic culture with late Sohan and Nevasian (Shankaliya, 1963: xxi-xxii).

NR Benarjee another Indian scholar attempted to collect the prehistoric tools from Nepal and studied the terraces of Narayani River. Benarjee was also not successful to find such equipments. But he studied the specimens of neolithic tools collected at Department of archaeology in 1966-67, which were collected from Mahabharata and Siwalika range (Benarjee, 1969: 53-58). Latter on RN Pandey, a Nepali scholar was able to find prehistoric tools at first in Nepal. He found a cleaver, a chopper and a hand axe from western Nepal in 1966. After that Indian scholar SB Deo studied the terraces of Narayani River and got three tools likely hand axe, cleaver and scraper. In the same way Schetenko of Russia became success to find a Neolithic tool from Kathmandu valley of Nepal.

Goodrun Kornivus is another foreign scholar who studied the geological formation of western Nepal in 1983-85 and found different kinds of prehistoric tools. She claims that she had found a tools factory

from an excavation of prehistoric sites in western Nepal. But it is not proved even today. In this context Nepalese scholars must work in the field of prehistoric studies. Indian scholars also can work jointly, because the prehistory of these two countries is the same.

d. Possibility of destruction: There is a great danger of destroying prehistoric strata and tools with low level of knowledge of prehistory in developing countries. Traditional belief also plays the great role for its destruction. For example rural people of Nepal collect Neolithic tools in the belief that it comes from the heaven. It is collected in the fire place and used as medicine of stomach pain. So these people collect such tools and destroy its original shape and features, which is one of the great harm for prehistoric studies.

e. Tomb hunting activities: Tomb hunting is another problem of prehistoric studies in developing countries. Tomb hunters cover out the megalithic tombs to find gold and other kind of properties. Most of the megalithic tombs of developing countries are covered out to collect properties. It is a great loss in the field of prehistoric studies.

f. Possibilities of forgery: Pilt Dawn forgery is famous in the history of prehistoric studies. Some people of developing countries may attempt to do the same kind of forgery to become famous in a short period. Therefore, it is another kind of problem for the study of prehistory in developing countries. If some body tries to do forgery on prehistoric tools, we do not have proper environment to examine it, which results the fake truth for the period of time. It will take a long time to erase the errors in such a study.

g. Lack of motivation: Government policies of developing countries do not cover the value of prehistoric studies in the country. Proper motivations for the scholar to conduct prehistoric studies is also lacking in such countries. Such studies are considered as the useless work by general people. Most of the scholars also do not show their interest for such studies in developing countries. Such attitudes disturb for the study of prehistory in global context.

h. Problem of preservation: Excavation of prehistoric sites is the destruction of geological strata, which are built in order chronologically within the certain period of time. Therefore, proper recording, preservation and conservation of artifacts are expected after the excavation. But such work may not be prioritized by concerned authorities of developing countries. It is a great burning problem in such countries. The government also cannot allocate proper budget to preserve them, which results a great danger of destroying prehistoric tools and equipments.

4. Conclusion

System of studying prehistory is emerging and rising in the modern world. Evolution of man is studied from the help of prehistoric artifacts and other material remains. But developing countries are not capable to conduct such researches even today. Therefore, prehistoric studies of such countries are done in limited area by some foreign scholars. There are many more burning issues for the study of prehistoric man and his culture in developing countries. Lack of proper knowledge, capability of funding and preservation, danger of forgery and destruction of antiquities and lack of interest for such studies are some burning issues in these countries. Therefore, collaborative or joint research by scholars of such countries is expected for proper study of mankind and his culture.

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