


HIS6E01-PRINCIPLES AND METHODS OF  
ARCHAEOLOGY  
MODULE-2 TERMS AND CONCEPTS IN ARCHAEOLOGY  
TOPIC-TERMS AND CONCEPTS

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# Archaeological Site/ Tell / Mount, Site Formation Process

- ▶ **Locations that show significant traces of human activity, essentially where artifacts, features and eco-facts are found together, are known as archaeological sites.**
- ▶ **An archaeological site is a place in which evidence of past activity is preserved and which has been, or may be, investigated using the discipline of archaeology and represents a part of the archaeological record**
- ▶ **Sites may range from those with few or no remains visible above ground, to buildings and other structures still in use.**
- ▶ **the smallest unit of space dealt with by the archaeologist**
- ▶ **Site is usually depicted as a basic unit of archaeology.**
- ▶ **A site is any place, large or small, where there are to be found traces of ancient occupation or activity.**

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- ▶ It also known as ‘Tell”, or ‘Mount’, the name given by Flinders Petrie, a British Archaeologist and Egyptologist after a brief interlude a six-week season of excavations at Tell el-Hesi Palestine in 1890.
  - ▶ According to him, a Tell is a manmade mound of successive, superimposed 'cities'.
  - ▶ There are different types of site like habitation sites, burial sites, manufacturing sites etc.

# TELL





# MOUND




# SITE FORMATION PROCESS

- ▶ Site Formation Processes is a core concept in archaeology, developed by Michael Brian Schiffer in the 1970s
- ▶ Site formation processes are “the factors that create the historic and archaeological records”.
- ▶ The archaeological data found in a site are the result of two basic factors namely behavioural process or cultural formation process and transformational process or natural formation process.
- ▶ The behavioural process or cultural formation process involves the deliberate or accidental activities of human beings as they make or use artifacts, build or abandon buildings, plough their fields and so on.

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- ▶ The artifacts and features are passed through three important consecutive stages known as **manufacture, use and deposition**.
  - ▶ **The transformational or the natural formation processes are natural events that govern both the burial and survival of the archaeological record.**
  - ▶ The natural agents of transformation include climatic factors like **wind, humidity, temperature, flooding, earthquakes and volcanic eruptions**.
  - ▶ The sudden fall of volcanic ash that covered Pompeii is an exceptional natural process; a more common process would be the gradual burial of artifacts, feature or ecofacts by rain or windborne sand or soil.
  - ▶ The transporting of artifacts or ecofacts by river action is another example of natural process

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- ▶ **In order to reconstruct past human activity at a site it is crucially important to understand the context of a find, whether artifacts, features or eco facts.**
  - ▶ **Every archaeological material had some settings called Matrix, Provenance and Association**
  - ▶ **Matrix refers to the physical medium like sediments, sands, clay, gravel etc, which surrounds, holds and supports the archaeological material.**
  - ▶ **Its provenance refers to the horizontal and vertical (three-dimensional) position within the matrix.**
  - ▶ **Association refers to the adjacent artifacts found in association with the significant archaeological material in the same matrix.**
  - ▶ **For example, an arrowhead recovered from an alluvial soil at a depth of 7 m in the central part of the site found in association with a human burial represents the matrix (alluvial soil), provenance (central part of the site) and the association (human burial).**

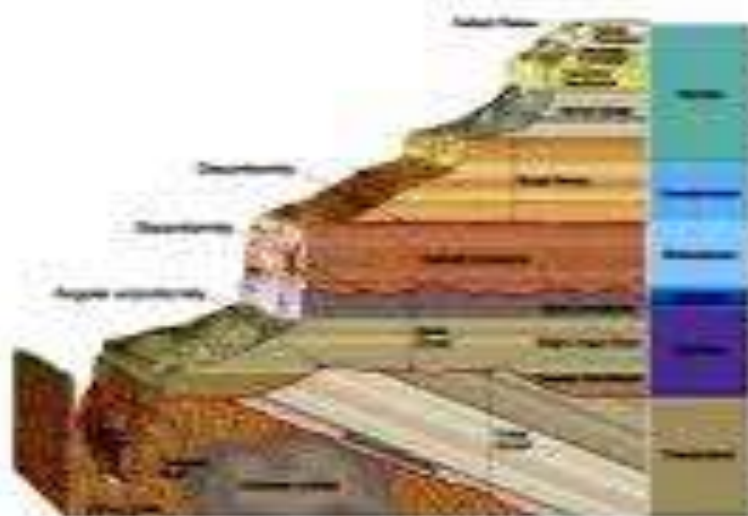


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- ▶ The meticulous observation and documentation of the matrix, provenance and association of archaeological data helps to understand its context.
  - ▶ **Artifacts found where they were originally deposited in the past are said to be in a primary context.**
  - ▶ **In another word, the material is found in undisturbed condition since its deposition, then it is known as primary context.**
  - ▶ **Objects that have been moved since their original deposit through either natural forces or human activity are said to be in a secondary contexts.**

# Layer and Stratigraphy

- ▶ There are **two layers** named **Geological layer** and **archaeological layer**.
- ▶ The **naturally formed sediment layers** are the **geological layer**.
- ▶ The **cultural deposit in the geological layers** is the **archaeological layer**.
- ▶ **Stratigraphy is the study of stratification; that is, the interpretation of horizontal layers that form the deposits of a site over time.**
- ▶ They may compose of **entirely natural deposits** and may consist of a **combination of natural and cultural materials**.
- ▶ Archaeologists may able to understand the **history of the site through the study of stratification**.
- ▶ Of primary importance is the interpretation of the order in which events occurred at a site and the relative ages of artifacts and features found.
- ▶ This is essential for the relative dating of the cultural materials found.
- ▶ The **archeological study of the strata** known as **stratigraphy**.
- ▶ The **Stratigrafical method** is the **removal of the soil in a reverse order, from the surface layer to the natural layer**.

## *Principles of Stratigraphy*



- Superposition
- Original Horizontality
- Lateral Continuity
- Crosscutting Relationships
- Inclusions
- Faunal (biological) Succession
- Incomplete record
- Base-level
- Accommodation
- Preservation Potential
- Cyclicity
- Walther's Law
- Correlation

# Artifacts, Features and Eco facts

- ▶ The material remains collect from an archaeological context can be broadly classified into; Artifacts, Features and Eco facts.
- ▶ Any kind of portable object made, fashioned, modified or used by human beings are the artifacts. For example pottery, beads, plough share, ornaments, etc. It includes unbroken objects, broken objects, manufacturing wastes, rubbing objects, etc.
- ▶ All types of non- portable artifacts such as hearths, structures of floors, walls, postholes etc are called features. Both artifacts and features are the product of human workmanship.
- ▶ Eco-facts are the non- artifactual evidences which includes both
  - ▶ □ Inorganic eco-facts like geological samples such as minerals, sediments, stones, volcanic ash. etc
  - ▶ □ Organic eco-facts like bone, fossils, skulls, teeth, shells etc botanical samples like, plants or wood remains, pollen, nuts, grains, husks, etc.

## Ecofact vs. Artifact



# Assemblage, Industry

- ▶ Assemblage means a **group of artifacts, features and eco facts recurring together at a particular space belong to a particular period.**
- ▶ It represents the **sum of human activities.**
- ▶ For example; the **megalithic assemblage** which is the grouping of **various artifacts like Black and Red Ware pottery, iron Objects, etched carnelian beads, bone fragments etc of a period between 1st century AD and 4th century AD, from the excavation at Porkalam.**
- ▶ **The assemblage of artifacts, features and eco facts termed as Industry.**
- ▶ For example, **Pattanam Industry, which means the grouping of all artifacts and eco-facts discovered from Pattanam archaeological site.**

# Culture


- ▶ As part of the anthropological studies, **19th century witnessed the development of concept of archaeological culture.**
- ▶ Archaeologist often found **material remains such as artifacts, features and eco-facts in the course of their exploration or excavation in a particular site.**
- ▶ **They labeled the assemblage of such material remains as culture.**
- ▶ For example, the term '**Megalithic culture of Kerala**' stood for the **assemblage of artifacts collected so far from Kerala in association with the Megalithic monuments and it represented the cultural milieu of the people lived in the Megalithic period.**
- ▶ **E B Taylor**, in his work "**Primitive Culture**", defined **culture as " the complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of a society"**.

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- ▶ However, in archaeology culture means the grouping of archaeological remains from a particular site and then labeled the site as a distinct culture like Harappan culture, Mohanjodaro Culture, Lothal Culture, Dholavira Culture, Kalibangan Culture, Ropar Culture like that.
  - ▶ The **assemblage of these cultures stands for 'Civilization'**.
  - ▶ For instance, the grouping of the above said archaeological cultures labeled as Indus Valley Civilization.
  - ▶ The **transfer of material culture from one culture to another is labeled as diffusion**.
  - ▶ The **diffusion of iron technology is often quoted as a good example**.



# Cultural Evolution

- ▶ Archaeologists and anthropologists commonly use term '**cultural evolution**' to **conceive the long-term trends in human history**.
- ▶ It represented the **evolution of human culture from hunting food gathering to farming; from farming to the origins of civilization and the state; from agrarian civilizations to industrial and now post-industrial society**.
- ▶ Consequently, such **development has resulted to the increase of population, greater social complexity and inequality, and technologies that are more complex**.
- ▶ Archaeologist felt that the **culture is always moved from simple to complex or from one condition to another condition**.
- ▶ For example, **state is evolved from tribal society to chiefdoms and chiefdoms to kingdoms**.
- ▶ The cultural evolution concepts have originated during the **18th century Enlightenment period and it is largely influenced by the nineteenth century ideology of Karl Marx and Frederic Engels and heavily influenced by L.H. Morgan's sequence from savagery to barbarism to civilization**.

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- ▶ **Gordon Childe** in his *“Man Makes Himself”*, *“What Happened in History”* and *“Social Evolution”* clearly demonstrate the changes occurred in the human culture due to the changes occurred in the subsistence strategies.
  - ▶ Childe conceived the **origins of agriculture (the Neolithic revolution) and the emergence of urban societies (the urban revolution) as major steps in the progress of human societies, because they represented improved adaptations of humans to their environments**