

HIS6E01-PRINCIPLES AND METHODS OF ARCHAEOLOGY – ELECTIVE
COURSE

MODULE-1
TOPIC- POST-PROCESSUAL ARCHAEOLOGY

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- Post-processualism, as a movement in archaeology
- Post-Processual Archaeology is, more than anything else, a critique of processual archaeology
- Post-processual archeology is also known as *interpretive archeology*.
- During the course of the 1980s, several archaeologists (most notably Ian Hodder; e.g. Hodder 1986) started to doubt the solidness of the scientific fundamentals of the New Archaeology
- The theory puts more emphasis on the archeology interpretation.
- The post- processual archeology criticized processual in several ways.
- It just concentrated on the weaknesses of the processual archeology.
- Generally associated with Ian Hodder & his students as a reaction against processual archaeology of Binford
- Reaction against scientific approach in archaeology

- Reaction against attempts to generalize about culture & archaeological method
- Both processual and post-processual archaeologies have a common aim; to explain the man culture.
- However, the two forms differ in some ways- Their differences are clearly seen in the way of gathering information, and also in the evidence explanation.
- For example, processual archeology puts more emphasis on the methodology. That is, the practical part of the data.
- On the other hand, post processual archeology relies on the information from the previous. This is evident from its name, 'Interpretive archeology'. In this theory, the argument is based on the present, rather than the past
- Drew inspiration from structuralism, post modernism, critical theory etc

- **Postprocessual Archaeology** is based on the ideological framework of postmodernism.
- While Processual archaeologists had, if not a "codified" theory to unify them, then at least a common overall goal and spirit that drove them ie scientific archaeology.
- Conversely, Post-processual contains ideologies as diverse as Neo-Marxism, feminist archaeology, cognitive archaeology and contextual archaeology- These viewpoints are all very different.
- As a group, they are only unified by their critique of Processualism, which they consider a positivist outlook on culture.
- Post-processual archaeology began as a critical response to a set of perceived failings of processual archaeology

- The critique primarily focused on the processual concern with adaptive technologies, its embrace of a cross-cultural anthropology at the expense of historical context, and its restrictive definition of archaeological science as ‘positivist’ (positivism, as used in archaeology, is the belief that arguments are built by testing theories against independent and objective data).
- Initially a wide range of authors, including those influenced by feminism, *entered into* such critiques, and it was difficult to identify common themes of an alternative agenda.
- The strongest impact of the post-processual critique was at first in Britain and Scandinavia, although important contributions were made from historical archaeology in the United States.
- The main struts of the post-processual critique dealt with meaning or symbolism, history, agency *and critical approaches*.
- *Within processual archaeology of the 1960s and 1970s* it was suggested that material culture should be studied in terms of long-term adaptive processes.

- For its early proponents, notably Ian Hodder in Britain and Mark Leone in the United States, postprocessual archaeology represented so radical a critique of the New Archaeology (i.e. processual archaeology), as to establish a fresh beginning in archaeological theory, which avoids the positivist philosophy and the "scientific" outlook of Lewis Binford, David Clarke, and their colleagues.
- For its more severe critics, the initiative, while making a number of valid criticisms, simply developed some of the ideas and theoretical problems introduced by the New Archaeology.
- To these critics it brought in a variety of approaches from other disciplines, so that the term "post-processual," while rather neatly echoing the epithet "postmodern" in literary studies, was a shade arrogant in presuming to supersede what it might quite properly claim to complement. Michael Shanks and Ian Hodder suggested that "interpretive archaeologies" (plural) may be a more positive label than "postprocessual."

- Just as New Archaeology and Annales History, post-processual archaeology (or interpretive archaeologies, as it is often called) is a counter-movement in essence.
- As the name clearly implies, it is a reaction to the principles of processualism. Post-processual archaeology, however, is not a unified movement, nor a singular theoretical paradigm.
- It is a label used to group a wide array of perspectives often sharing not much more than a certain critique of processual theory.
- Their greatest objection was to the positivist argumentation, used to make broad generalizations on the basis of archaeological data.

- According to the critics, archaeological research could not be satisfactorily valid statistically to verify or falsify hypotheses.
- A second, fundamental critique was based on the importance of hermeneutics in archaeological research.
- It was argued that archaeological interpretation was never neutral, but loaded with meanings.
- Archaeological research is done by scholars, working in their present-day historical context, studying ancient peoples who lived in their own specific historical contexts, thus resulting in a so-called hermeneutic circle.

- It has also been stated that archaeological research always has a meaning within the (political) present.
- Following this thought, archaeological research from a post-processualist perspective was often focused on themes, such as gender and power, which were strongly related to contemporary social currents, such as for example the feminist movement.
- Another post-processualist approach uses the anthropological concept of agency to ascribe an active role to the individual.
- This means that anomalies and patterns in the archaeological record might be explained by individual activities, rather than by governing social structures.
- This is strongly related to the post-processualist rejection of ecological determinism, i.e. the idea that human activity is controlled by its environment

- Currently, there is a widespread awareness of the various post-processual critiques without rejecting all processual thought and methods.
- Within the discipline of landscape archaeology it has caused a growing interest in assessing possible subjective methodological biases, as well as the acceptance of various co-existing interpretations of a single research question, resulting in different conceptualisations of the same archaeological landscape.
- The main influence of post-processual theory on landscape archaeology, however, can be seen on an interpretative level.
- Whereas New Archaeology and Annales History approaches tended to explain the archaeological landscape from a deterministic point of view (whether ecological or social), as a process of human adaptation to its environment, post-processual archaeologists have focused on cultural, ritual, or cognitive aspects of the landscape.