

## **The Ecological Background and Earliest Human Activities in the Pratapgarh District, Uttar Pradesh**

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The ecology is the study of all the factors surrounding the man which directly or indirectly influence the human behaviors and culture. When the man was in its primitive stage and his technology was not advanced and naturally was more dependent on ecology which played an important role in the rise of human culture. It provides the opportunities limitations and also upon the level of cultural development. The man is surrounded by many ecological factors such as soil type, climate, rainfall, drainage etc. In this way it covers the concepts of population, environment, technology and sociological and economic organization. Thus ecology establishes the relation between man and environment. For a number of factors environment was used by archaeology which is interrelated. There is a combination of observations on climate, soil, fauna and flora, topography etc. and the study of these factors influencing the cultural growth. The rise of cultures is largely response to an environment and for an intelligent understanding of its pattern of development one should begin with geographical factors. The importance of geography for the study of human culture, therefore, cannot be overemphasized.

The role of ecology in the rise of cultures has been highlighted by eminent scholars for a very long time. B.Subbarao was perhaps the first Indian writer to put forward forcefully the importance of

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geographical setting in the development of cultures through his concept of nuclear zones of attraction, relative isolation and isolation. It has thus been accepted that the study of ecology is essential for thorough understanding of culture. B.Subbarao has rightly stated that history without geography is like picture without frame. Later on D.P.Agrawal also laid much emphasis on the background of ecological factors in his book *The Copper Bronze Age in India*. According to him, when the Harappans were pushed into the peculiar ecology of doab, they withered. He further writes that as the copper technology, the urbanization of Ganga Plain therefore had to wait till the advent of iron. Thus some times environment places limitations upon the level of cultural development also. Every region has its own character to which man, plant soil climate contribute a lot, so is with the Pratapgarh. In archaeological reports our approach to the ecological background and climatic condition is very narrow and it is confined to a mere listing of fauna and flora and raw materials discovered during the explorations and excavations. But some pioneer work has been done by much quoted Gurdeep Singh (1971), D.P. Agrawal (1992), Enzel (1999), V.Shinde (2001), Yasuda (2001), G.L. Posshel (2002), Rakesh Tewari(2004) to rule out the ecological context. Rakesh Tewari's work is based on the literary and archaeological evidences but rest of the work mentioned above mainly deals with the western India. So it is very necessary to work out the ecological context in the Gangetic Plain as the work has been done on the lakes of Rajasthan.

### **A Review of the Archaeology of Pratapgarh district**

The district lies between the parallels of  $25^{\circ} 34'$  and  $26^{\circ} 11'$  north latitudes and between the meridians of  $81^{\circ} 19'$  and  $82^{\circ} 27'$  east longitude extending for some 110 km. from west to east. It is bounded on the north by district Sultanpur, on the south by district Allahabad, on the east by Jaunpur and on the west by Fatehpur and north-west by district Rae Bareli. In the south-west the Ganga River forms the



boundary of the district for about 50 km. separating it from Fatehpur and Allahabad and in the extreme north east. The Gomti River forms the boundary for about 6 km. (Varun 1980:1).

The Epi-Palaeolithic or late Upper Palaeolithic demarcates an important phase in the pre-history of the Pratapgarh. The antiquity of Pratapgarh goes to this culture. Evidence of Epi-Palaeolithic culture has been identified on Suleman Parvatpur, Mandah, Salhipur (Pal 1984; Misra and Gupta 1995). These sites are located near the tributaries river Sai.

The next phase is Mesolithic. The Mesolithic sites are Sarai Nahar Rai (Sharma 1973), Mahadaha (Sharma et al. 1980; Pal 1985) and Damdama (Varma et al. 1985). They have provided remarkably rich evidence of Mesolithic occupation along the horse-shoe lakes in the Pratapgarh. Microliths, bone tools, food-processing equipments, living floors, hearths, animal remains and human burials and skeletons constitutes the salient features of Pratapgarh Mesolithic culture.

The morphological feature of the area is the living and partially living horseshoe or ox-bow lakes. A few of them contain Mesolithic occupational floors on their banks. The occupational deposit at the site has been washed away leaving only the basal 6 cm thick deposit. It is an open air site with burial in shallow, oblong pits with tapering sides and structural remains in the form of floor and hearths, microliths, animal bone fragments and sandstone fragments were obtained from the site. Mahadaha is situated on the western bank of an ancient oxbow lake, cut through by irrigation canals, was brought to light in 1978. Three separate areas have been demarcated at the site: a burial cum settlement area occupying the central position within the settlement, a butchering area between the settlement and the western margins of at the southwestern corner of which Mahadaha was located, where excavations have revealed a substantive quantity of occupational debris which was once the bottom of the lake. 28 burials containing 30 human



skeletons were excavated, while two graves contained skeletal remains of the two individual each, the remaining 26 were associated with the remains of single individual. Some of these burials are seen wearing ear rings and necklaces of disc cut from another. 35 circular and oval pit hearths and several floors were excavated. At the site a good number wild animal charred and uncharred bones, arrow heads, pieces of haematite, necklaces, ear ornaments of bone rings, microliths, querns, mullers and hammer stones have been unearthed.

Damdama lies at the confluence of two branches of a water course called Tambura Nala, a tributary of the Pili River, a tributary of the Sai River. The location is 5 km from Mahadaha towards north in Warikal village, Patti tehsil. Near the site, there are still different types of harshy vegetation and trees. Besides the burials and plain plastered pit hearths, microliths, bone artifacts, querns, mullers, hammer stones and wild animal bones were other noteworthy finds from the site.

Exploration for Neolithic sites is still to be worked out.

More than 30 Chalcolithic sites in Pratapgarh has been explored. The sites are Gangheti and Sarai Jamuwari on the way to Madafarpur and Narainpur road, still there are evidence of lakes and oxbow lakes, Bhanti, Darchut, Bhewani on Narainpur-Chilbila road, Pure Deojani, Kanjakhas near Kanja Bazar, Patti Chauraha. The sites are located near oxbow-lakes. Excavation of the Chalcolithic sites is still to be worked out.

From the above evidences we see that pattern of life in the Pratapgarh changes due to change in ecology. Such as tool technology and subsistence pattern. As we know that the inhabitants of the Vindhyan region were depended on hunting and gathering. But when they colonize with the Pratapgarh they started gathering and hunting becomes secondary. Hunting implements are less as compared to implements for processing vegetal food. Hunting tends to be a high-risk, low return subsistence activity. So inhabitants of the Vindhyan region move towards



the Pratapgarh and here the environment for them was entirely different. The environment of the Pratapgarh was more suitable for the subsistence pattern although it did not provide the Mesolithic man with natural shelters. Food and shelters were the basic necessities. Hence they made small huts, circular or oval, supported by bamboo poles. Tools show exploitation of wild plants. The burials present the picture of their funerary customs and eschatological beliefs of the Mesolithic people. The meticulous way in which graves were prepared and the way the skeletons lie, represents the performance of a ritual at the group level. The graves were oblong and shallow. The width was increased in case the grave was meant to receive more than one body. The excavation of burials at Damdama suggests that some sort of a fire ritual was performed in the grave itself just before burying the dead (Varma et al. 1985). Generally the bodies were placed west-east with the head towards the west. But some graves with east-west orientation were also found. There is an exception in which a couple has been buried in north-south and south-north orientation. The bodies have generally been buried in an extended position on their back. In one case the body has been buried in supine position. Couple burials indicate some sort of male-female relationship. It is interesting to note that in each case the man was first placed in the grave and the female followed. In each case, either the female has been placed to the left of the male or above the male in two tiers. The set patterns in which these burials have been made indicate that it had become a common practice. Funerary offering in the form of microliths, bones, fresh water molluscs and antler ornaments confirms that the people believed in life beyond death but had also developed elaborate ritual practices (Varma 1999).

The inhabitants of Damdama, Mahadaha and Sarai Nahar Rai lived in huts with separate circular or oval hearths in which meat was roasted by controlling the fire. In huts, men, women and children lived together. Some sort of stratification in the society during the Mesolithic period can be suspected on the basis of grave-goods from Mahadaha. Some of



them were skilled for making implements which has kept in graves. One of them would have been performing funerary customs.

### Concluding Remarks

The Mesolithic sites Sarai Nahar Rai, Mahadaha and Damdama are distributed over a large area of Pratapgarh district which represents extensive and deep rooted Mesolithic occupation. Thus the archaeological investigations in Pratapgarh indicate the favorite climatic condition which paved the way for the rise of cultures in the area. Thus we have to work out the ecological conditions as has been done in the western India. Besides, its impact for the rise of cultures and also for the idea of seasonal migration of the Mesolithic people of Vindhyas to Pratapgarh area. The available evidences now clearly indicates a gradual evolution from Upper Palaeolithic to Mesolithic. It is also suggested that Neolithic culture evolved out of the Mesolithic. Thus the first settlements in the Pratapgarh started with the onset of the Neolithic phase. The pattern of life-style and the subsistence pattern of these people have not been possible largely because of lack of data and expertise. Osteological remains of animals have not been collected and studies. On the basis of animals bone exposed at the sites of Pratapgarh district we can only form an idea about the climatic condition and ecological background but this remains to be firmly established by further research. However, a palynological assessment is under observation from Lahuradewa Lake in Sant Kabir Nagar district.

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