
BOOK REVIEW**Book Review**

Prehistoric and Protohistoric Settlement Pattern of Bengal Delta, M. M. Hoque, Dhaka: Ankur Prakashani, pages 108, Index 105–108, Figures 13, Tables 28, Price: Hard cover Tk. 320, Paperback Tk. 300, 2002, ISBN: 9843203690

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The book is an outcome of Professor M. M. Hoque's two research work. Firstly, a substantial data used from his doctoral thesis submitted to Poona University in 1993 on the topic 'Pre and Protohistoric Settlement Patterns of the Middle and Lower Ganga Valley' under the guidance of Prof. V. N. Misra, Former Director of Deccan College; and secondly the area of study is broadened with the research project on documentation of archaeological researches in Bangladesh till 2002, which Prof. Hoque carried out with a generous financial support from Ford Foundation, Bangladesh.

Prof. Hoque provides a synthesis of archaeological data available for Prehistoric and Protohistoric culture of Bengal delta. The delta covers an area of 2,07,000 sq. km. comprising of low-lying vast flood plains constituted in the Holocene period. There are a few pre-Pleistocene and Pleistocene uplands in the western and eastern margins of the region. The archaeological data documented is analysed in relation to environmental parameters, cultural material of the sites, relationship between the material culture of the sites and chronology.

The book is divided into seven chapters. Chapter 1 (Introduction) is introductory character, and presents detailed information of previous researches in pre and Protohistoric period of Bengal, beginning with discovery of handaxe made on green quartzite by V. Ball in 1865 in Kunkune village, Bankura district. It examines 479 sites reported in Bengal delta in last decade. A list of excavated pre and Protohistoric sites excavated in Bengal delta is given in a table. It discusses the prehistoric implements made of fossil wood. Followed by discussion on the controversies surrounding 234 fossil wood artefacts recovered from 11 prehistoric sites of Lalmai hills of Comilla district, Bangladesh. Prof. Hoque has re-studied these artefacts and has presented his views especially on the identification of the tool types. This chapter also documents a brief history of settlement pattern studies. A map giving sub regions of Bengal delta is provided.

Chapter 2 (Ecological Setting) furnishes information on the geographical background of Bengal delta, which has

been described as new mud, old mud and marshes. On the basis of physical variations within the general pattern of alluvium, the region is divided into five geographical sub-regions. The chapter gives detail of drainage system, flora and fauna with local and scientific names. A table gives a list of fishes found in the rivers and *jhils* of Bengal delta with local, English and scientific names. At the end a map of rivers of the region is also provided.

Chapter 3 (Palaeolithic Background) throws light on Palaeolithic human colonisation in Bengal delta. The chapter gives information of 100 reported Palaeolithic sites (Lower- 49, Middle- 41, Upper- 10) located mainly on hill slope, foothill, elevated tract and on river bank. Nine tables in this chapter give information on Palaeolithic stratigraphy, frequency of lower and middle Palaeolithic artefacts, list of lower, middle and upper Palaeolithic sites and distribution of raw materials. There is a useful summary on Upper Palaeolithic site of Kattara. The three clearly drawn maps give distribution of lower, middle and upper Palaeolithic sites in Bengal delta.

Chapter 4 (Mesolithic Culture) deals with 208 Mesolithic sites mainly concentrated on the undulating land surface of Western margins of Bengal delta. Summary on some excavated sites like- Birbhanpur, Paruldanga and Chamargora is provided. Prof. Hoque discusses the types of artefacts and raw material used for making the tools. Seven tables give list of the Mesolithic sites, raw material and artefact type from the excavated sites. The Mesolithic culture on the basis of stratigraphy and typo-technology is dated to circa 4000 B. C. A map giving distribution of Mesolithic site in Bengal delta is also provided.

Chapter 5 (Neolithic) throws light on 99 Neolithic sites distributed in wider landscape, the factor responsible for such occurrence are floods. Around 97 sites are located above the flood-prone zone. And only two sites Banagarh and Tamluk are excavated. Useful summary on stone and fossil wood implements from Lalmai hills, Chaklapunji and Amjadahata is furnished (with photographs). The sites are listed in a table, and two maps give distribution of sites in Midnapur district and Bengal delta. On the basis of C-14 dates of Bihar Neolithic phase and comparative study in Bengal and North-Eastern Indian Neolithic sites, Neolithic phase of Bengal delta sites can be placed between circa 3rd millennium B. C. and 3rd/2nd century B. C.

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Chapter 6 (Chalcolithic) gives information about 72 Chalcolithic sites reported from Lower Ganga Plain. The site selections largely depended upon topographic situation, roughly below 50-m contour line and along the riverbanks, suggesting consideration of adequate availability of water, land for cultivation and grazing, and effective exploitation of aquatic resources. Prof. Hoque provides useful brief accounts of 12 excavated sites- Mahisdal, ahiri, Haraipur, Hatikara, Nanur, Bharatpur, Barabelun, Pandu-Rajar-Dhibi, Mangalkot, Dihar, Tulsipur, and Tamluk. The chapter discusses the ceramic industry, structures, hearths, technology (copper, stone and bone tools), terracotta objects, ornaments, burials, plant and faunal remains of these sites. Seven tables and three maps provide further information of the sites. Based on C-14 dates the Chalcolithic occupancy in the region is dated between c. mid 2nd millennium B. C.- later half of 1st millennium B. C.

Chapter 7 (Summary) is devoted to discussion of all the evidence presented in previous chapters. Here the author discusses the salient features which could be drawn from

the study of Pre and Protohistoric settlement pattern of Bengal delta.

The book is a synthesis of available data for Pre and Protohistoric culture of Bengal Delta. The language of the book is simple and style lucid. The value of the book is further enhanced by references, which will be useful to prehistoric researchers and students of South Asian Archaeology.

The best part of this book is that it has shown that the man in Bengal Delta became adaptive in this landscape from prehistoric period and upheld his culture by equipping himself with the changing phenomenon of land pattern. Due to lack of technology, Palaeolithic and Mesolithic men occupied only the undulating landscape of the *rarh* plain, but Neolithic and Chalcolithic population could colonise most of its deltaic parts through their better understanding of landscape.

The book is attractively produced. The author deserves our congratulations for accomplishing a fine piece of research. And the publisher deserves credit for good quality production.

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