

## BOOK REVIEW

## A Review of *Multiple Approaches to the Study of India's Early Past: Essays in Theoretical Archaeology*

By K. Paddayya, Aryan Books International, 230 pages, 2014

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The history of archaeological theories, from its earliest manifestations through to what's going on in the current issues of social science is important in understanding how archaeology has influenced contemporary society. In this context this book is a crucial addition to contemporary debates in theoretical archaeology.

The book is well organized and logically divides the materials into six chapters. The first chapter examines the major theoretical changes experienced in archaeology during last fifty years including New Archaeology and flavours of Post-Processualism. The second chapter reviews the use of theoretical perspectives as has been applied in Indian archaeology. It talks about the use of New Archaeology in Stone Age studies in India and how this approach helped in comprehensive understanding of site formation processes and also prehistoric settlement systems. Use of New Archaeology and its effects in protohistoric studies in India has also been pointed out and how this approach has helped in exposing a full-fledged agropastoral settlements, belief system, and technological development and made it possible to reconstruct people's lifeway. The chapter has also discussed the application of interpretive approaches forming part of post-processual archaeology. However the most important contribution of this chapter was to highlight the fact that the basic tenets of these two streams of thought were already being put to use independently in Indian Archaeology before 1950s. In the third chapter, the author illustrated his observations by way of drawing attention to the writing of some prominent non-specialists to indicate how a non-professional approach or roof-entry approach can give rise to holistic interpretation of the part as this approach affords a bird's eye view of the entire scenario. The fourth chapter deals with the Darwinian Revolution and birth of prehistory. The chapter illustrates the enormous influence of the theory of evolution on subsequent thought in both

natural and social sciences. Following upon the earlier perspectives, the Evolutionary archaeology incorporating Darwinian ideas has emerged as a prominent trend in archaeology since 1980. Chapter five illustrates the Past in Indian mind. The author points out that any interpretation of the past society has to commence with an understanding of the basic nature of Indian mind. This is crucial as India has thousands of years of recorded history which shows that the basic character of Indian ethos has not changed much. Thus young researchers while adopting methodological and theoretical approaches should also consider social psychology for understanding people's perception of the past. The last chapter focuses on the developmental stages in social science that have changed from time to time over last two hundred years. All these developments transformed Archaeology into an active academic discipline based on epistemological aspects. However the author points out that while much of the academic debates in archaeology has been concerned with making improvements in the epistemological or knowledge seeking realm, it is equally important to draw attention to the larger issue of close relevance of the past to society at large and in this respect, studies in ancient regions like India cannot just be a matter of intellectual or romantic adventure but should have the greatest social relevance. And this can only be achieved by strengthening the common man's sense of past by educating them about the past.

The author's writing style is lucid and clear even when discussing topics that are complex like Roof- Approach, Process philosophy or manifestations of the sense of past. In each chapter the author has not only explained the topic and its application in Indian archaeology but has explained why they work, where applicable and how they emerge from earlier method and gradually changes its course in the light of modernization. This book would be a great addition to any library and to students in understanding importance and application of archaeological theory as well as theory building.

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### Competing Interests

The author declares that they have no competing interests.

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