
Post-Pleistocene Adaptations in North-Central India as a Case Study to Evaluate Binford's Predictive Model based on Ethnographic Analogy

Indrani Chattopadhyaya*¹

¹Department of Anthropology, University of Delhi – Inde

Résumé

Mobility, a near-universal phenomenon from prehistoric times, was affected by palaeoclimatic changes since the Pleistocene-Holocene interface. Based on contemporary cross-cultural data compiled in Murdock's Ethnographic Atlas, Lewis Binford proposed a predictive model on prehistoric hunter-gatherer adaptation explaining settlement pattern as a latitude-dependent phenomenon. Accordingly, there is greater likelihood that foragers of temperate and still colder conditions (effective temperature, $ET < 15^{\circ}\text{C}$) would follow a 'logistic' mobility pattern as annual resource distribution is clumped one. In contrast, those in warmer regions of Asia and Africa, for example, where resource distribution is year round in different pockets shall follow residential mobility pattern, which is consistent with the consensus agreed upon in Man the Hunter symposium (1968).

By way of testing the above hypothesis, the problem of prehistoric adaptations in sub-tropical north-central India ($ET > 15^{\circ}\text{C}$) was re-evaluated as a case study. The area of study consists of topographically heterogeneous regions of the central Ganga plains and its southern region of the Vindhyan plateau and hills. On the basis of excavations at early Holocene Mesolithic site of Sarai-Nahar Rai in the Ganga valley, characterized by regular onsite, human burial practices, a region devoid of natural rocks, G. R. Sharma had proposed a 'seasonal migration' hypothesis of people between stone-rich Vindhya and the Ganga valley, especially during summer months when resources were scarce in the former region to support rising populations. This was consistent with Binford's above prediction. However, later excavations at sites like Mahadaha and Damdama with thicker occupational deposits somehow opened way for a different explanation. The common features of the three excavated sites include onsite burial practice, the existence of bone/antler tools and objects, and near-exhausted lithic cores of Vindhyan origin. The study of faunal remains from these sites – ageing of teeth of two species of deer (*Axis porcinus* and *Cervus duvauceli duvauceli*) suggests a near-year round occupation at Mahadaha and Damdama, which is further corroborated by the regular occurrence of remains of bandicoot rat. Finally, the grave orientation pattern confirms the year-round occupation pattern. The study also suggests the existence of inter-group complementarity reflected by the flow of stone raw materials from the Vindhya in exchange for Gangetic local products (bone tools, for example).

This study, thus, highlights the weaknesses of New Archaeological approaches on the use of ethnographical analogy in the reconstruction of the past.

Mots-Clés: 'logistic' mobility, early Holocene Mesolithic, central Ganga plains, India

*Intervenant