CHAPTER TWO
THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

It may be taken as a fact that no culture comes from void, it has its antecedent. So the existing cultures have their roots in past. Each economy has a style, is a part of cultural and symbolic scheme (Tilley 1991:188). Symbols are nothing but concrete expression of concept and each concept includes a set of experiences and thoughts. So each symbol has its base in thoughts and experience. Symbols work at two levels - one at mental level and another at concrete level. So when the same symbol takes a material form or concrete form it becomes inanimate. In fact it is a continuum of symbol in inanimate and animate forms. When a symbol takes concrete form, it becomes frozen, wherein the variable responsible for its creation got fossilized (Roy, 2000). All cannot be seen but they work in tacit. It is an unseen aspect of material culture. Object does not speak for itself. This needs to be deciphered against the ecology (through the term ecology, the economy, technology, socio-cultural variables are meant). There are attempts to understand the past by extrapolating the ethnographic present. Attempts have been made to decipher the voice of the past and to see whether it has any bearing on the present indigenous culture distributed around archaeological site.

Leshnik (1967:8) expresses the opinion that the sociological interpretation of archaeological facts would become more meaningful if ethnological data of the right kind are brought into adequate use. An archaeologist will have much to gain by a study of
the material and social facts in the neighbourhood of the site where he is working; for they may even help him to look for new facts in his own excavation. Leshnik suggests that a team of archaeologists should be accompanied by a professional ethnologist, if the former can not carry out the necessary investigation themselves.

Arnold opines, “In the last several years there has been a great deal of interest in studying modern peoples from an archaeological perspective. This relatively new field (called Ethno-archaeology or living archaeology) focuses on the study of material ... The current interest in material culture, however is a shift away from cultural Anthropology to archaeology because of the failure of ethnographers of material culture to deal with topics of interest to archaeologists” (1984:12).

According to Leshnik, “Most archaeologist are cultural historians whose concern is to understand past societies as a functioning whole. Ultimately such an understanding must rest upon a knowledge of how the societies were organised to meet the various problems confronting them. This means not only economic organisation which has from the beginning attracted archaeologists’ attention, but social and political organisation as well” (1967:10).

In archaeology, as in all historical procedure, interpretation is achieved through inference from more or less direct data. At best, an archaeological interpretation can always only be a probable one. The mode of thought applied to the evidence can not by definition, result in proofs.
The nature of material elements within a single context and their relationship to other aspects of culture is either defined or overlooked altogether. The latter attitude is frequently involved when the archaeologist is concerned with determining the spatial-temporal limits of his culture.

The theories of the relationship between material elements and social or political organisation, economic system etc. have been the sturdy fortresses of Marxists and evolutionists for over a century. Again and again ethnologists have warned that cultural development is not uniform, so that a people with a simple technology may have an advanced social structure or form of worship.

"The fact is that we archaeologists know much too little about the ways other aspects of culture might be reflected in material remains" (Leshnik 1967:12).

Before any valid generalization on the cultural role of material elements can be made, field studies on this topic amongst societies at various levels of development and existing in different environment are required.

"The fragmentary nature of the evidence with which they continually deal, archaeologists are prone to take a piecemeal view of culture. However if an approach to the understanding of society as a functioning whole is to be made, an organic view of culture is likely to be more productive. If it is accepted that culture is patterned, it may be expected that this pattern will in some part at least be reflected in each of its components, and therefore, also in the material elements" (Leshnik 1967:12).
He recently had completed a study which has a population composed of harijans and 'clean' castes. He found this social division to be reflected in the material elements of the village in several ways. The houses of the two groups were spatially separated, of different size and architecture. Moreover the contents of the houses differed from group to group. The harijans, for example, used a different type of mortar and pestle than did the clean castes. The reason for this difference in usage he was unable to discover (probably historical), but the fact indicates how social divisions may be reflected in material objects (1967:13).

It will not be easy to recognise associations of elements that were once meaningful to the society concerned.

Each type is an abstraction from many individual objects, while each object is the manifestation of abstraction in the unique. Like all other science archaeology places emphasis on detection of the general, whereupon it turns to ethnographic parallel for explanation. Here it becomes the importance for an anthropologist. This is the exclusive domain of anthropologist.

The functional school propounded by Graham Clark opined in this manner "According to school only native ethnographic parallel are admissible namely ethnographic data on the country (or at least the continent) yeilding the archaeological material which is to be interpreted" (1952). This is important for this fact that through this work (1952) he wants to restore the whole picture by piecing it together from fragments (or all
heaps of ethnographic evidence only survival and relies, fragments and more fragments.

This view get further prop from Klejn (1973:313). According to him fragments are explained by fragments. Opposite views are voiced against this proposition.

But Klejn feels that archaeology will not benefit from the rejection of such parallel, it may be only in part. Rather he opines that for the most efficient identification of ethnographic parallel it is helped to distinguish three categories. And each is applicable to different set of archaeological problem.

1. These are ethnographical parallel in materials of peoples that have left archaeological evidence or in materials of kindred peoples (survivals) are most suitable for the study of problems of ethnogenesis and for the interpretation of remains associated with ethnic customs, traditions and ritual peculiarities.

2. These are ethnographic parallels in materials of the country or continent in which archaeological monuments were discovered are of some practical significance for the solution of the above problems, but are most useful for the explanation of archaeological findings of economic character.

3. These are ethnographic parallels in materials of remote countries and non-kindred peoples that either retain a substantial portion of traits characteristic of earlier stages or continue in the primitive state make it possible not only to decipher enigmatic archaeological findings but also to recognise the functional meaning of archaeological evidence associated with the most important institutions of the primitive society, to reconstruct
whole culture systems and earlier stages of developments and to attach to them archaeological artifacts. Of course it is most desirable to compare the materials of societies of the same kind, with similar production conditions, levels of development and peculiarities of the environments.

According to him ethnographic parallels are certainly of importance where archaeological types are concerned, but they are applied to determine and explain the latter and not to single them out.

"Since human activity varied in different epochs and in different surroundings, we need historical specification to give concrete expression to own general logico-psychological associations" (Klejn 1973:316).

It is seen that archaeological materials have continuity without break from past till present. Leshnik (1967:8) said “In many parts of the East there is an unbroken continuity between the past and the present”. Sometimes the objects recovered from archaeological site are found in ethnographic context with little change.

Ethnography, as we know it is the study of culture and mode of life of all present day people of the globe. Chang (1973:312) says “In short archaeology is a learning about people namely ethnology”. Further Chang harps on this point “Where as ethnolo-gists usually start from the people where as archaeologists must start from the things. But this significantly contributes to the understanding of the people living during past, who did not leave any direct written record. Past is always tacit, it deos not speak
for itself but it is not lost, it remains recorded in the material cultural items collected from past as well as present”. It is the material evidence that acts as a connective bridge between the cultures separated from one another by wide span of time. It may form a continuum. Sometimes it seems to be broken in this place of origin. It may occur other than the place of its origin. It may be buried sometime by a new cultural tradition; temporarily it may be shifted to a new place and continue to exist. Time does not crash it.

“The principal of historical purpose in the integration of archaeology and ethnology means, first of all, that this coordination is not an end in itself” (Klejn 1973:312). According to Chang (1966:232) “the most obvious application of archaeological results to ethnology in matters of cultural process concerns the history of ethnic elements and entities”. The archaeological and ethnological evidence are compared to study history in its various aspects and to develop historical sociology, with its generalization of the historical process and its formulation of historical laws. Klejn (1973:312) offer his bold statement “It is only with the aid of ethnology that our archaeological data acquire social connections and historical significance. Ethnology on the other hand when integrated with historically interpreted archaeological evidence is offered considerable scope for checking the distribution of its materials among various levels of cultural development and for better understanding their prospects and their relationship with the present”. Klejn (1973:312) continues further with example of a
Neolithic graves. "Neolithic grave is explicable in terms of our ethnographic knowledge of the beliefs of various people concerning death and the after life. At the same time, these Neolithic graves show us how old the beliefs of the different peoples are, how deeply they penetrate the contemporary ideology ...................."

"The principal historical purpose means that in the practical integration of archaeological and ethnographic materials the criterion of historical conformity will define the ethnographic evidence most promising for explanation of archaeological artefact. According to this criterion the clearest and most precise analogies to archaeological artefacts are to be found in ethnographic data that in the level of their historical development and structure approach closely the culture of the society that left the archaeo-logical evidence" (Klejn 1973:314).

E.B.Tylor in his researches had the living primitive societies constantly in his mind while tracing the history of civilization. He says "In judging how mankind may have once lived it is also a great help to observe how they are actually found living" (quoted from Roy, 1977:12).

"Ethnographic evidence can be of considerable help in reconstructing the archaeological remains, especially those relating to technology, economy, material culture and settlement pattern" (Malti&agar,1975:14). This approach has been most successfully developed by Grahame Clark (1967).

Fiireer-Haimendorf (1948:88) pointed out over two decades ago the rich
potentialities of Indian ethnography for archaeological reconstruction.

"Traditional patterns are transferred from generation to generation irrespective of the place chosen for settlement, so that the tribes moving to new places retained their former way of decorating their pots" (Mongait, 1961:42-43).

Deetz states that in the mind of every artisan there exists an idea of a proper form which his handiwork should take.

As a part of ethnological problem a study on ceramics exhibits two broad facts; these are the historical orientation and non-historical orientation. The former consists of the evolutionary and diffusionary approaches. The evolutionary school includes Morgan, who was later on championed by Engles (Piggot, 1960:89). Engles transformed it into a creed of communist world. And this was followed by the development of White’s neo-evolutionary theory. Likewise the hard core diffusionary school that was sponsored by Elliot Smith was replaced by German diffusionary school. This was further moderated by archaeologist like V.Gordon Childe and scientifically or analytically described by Clarke (1968). The second one is non-historically oriented one which stands on the foundation of functionalism.

Thomas contends, "While chronology is merely a stepping stone something one must do study of past cultural adaptions is directly relevant and compatible to modern anthropology. Reconstructing non-defunct modes of survival can be considered the ethnography of extinct societies, directly comparable with data collected from
modern function-ing societies” (Thomas, 1974:3).

The same view echoes in Heider’s comment. He regards an archaeologist as a historian to some extent who pieces together the story of cultural development and change. He also looks upon archaeology as a special branch of ethnology (Heider, 1967:52). Erich, too finds the interpretations of the archaeologist and ethnologist similar. According to him, “excavation reports for example, serve two functions. Firstly he reconstruct with possible limitations, the ethnography of a given people at a given time. Secondly, by comparative studies he traces resemblances and differences between contemporary social groups as well as group separated in time and space. Hence the archaeologists work on an ethnographic level and also on a cross cultural level, ethnological level to which time dimension is added. Both in archaeological and ethnographical researches the investigator classifies and analyses his data and identifies the form or function of the material or cultural traits”. Further, he contends that typological classification is implicit in every approach, and it is the differing level of abstraction and the validity of categories selected for study which make up the basic difference of interpretation (Erich, 1950:468-69).

On the question of diffusion, the stand taken by Clarke (1968:437) is more scientifically oriented and carries significant meaning in realising the cultural changes. He states that cultural traits transmigrate from one culture to another following possible and predictable ways.
According to Childe and Kassima similarities in material culture between two different societies/cultures may be possible when both of them exhibit common ways of life (Trigger, 1968:529).

Karl Marx argues convincingly that the means of production and relations of production are relative in the sense that a technology can work within an appropriate economy or system for distributing the product and that the relation of production in term determine in the long run the ideological superstructure and religions beliefs, artistic expressions etc. (Childe, 1956:53).

Pottery sometime serves as reflector for human needs. Besides, the ceramic products embody concrete expression of human ideas, and action/function at a given time.

Clarke (1952;1959) advocates that study on archaeological data from pre-historic context and their interpretation call for using the ethnographic parallel which, according to him, will offer potential contribution to the interpretation of archaeological facts. Randall-Maclver seems to be more optimistic in this regard; he opines that without anthropology, archaeology is blind of one eye and short sighted with another. Further, he claimed that social anthropology and material culture are even more important as ‘ancient man is necessarily more or less primitive’ (Orme, 1974:200). Regarding the ethnographic parallel, Paterson holds, “Wherever archaeologists are seeking the explication and explana­nation of assemblage differences and similarities in more than
strictly limited terms, ethno-graphic analogy has an important role, for analogy implicit or explicit lies behind all descriptive reconstructions of the past” (Orme, 1974:208). Childe’s views (1956:48) as to using ethnographic parallel is more significant and pragmatic. He, however, warns archaeologists against over simplification and over application of the ethnographic parallel in interpreting the archaeological past. He stresses on the need of using the local parallel as the same helps us to draw more reliable inferences than the exotic ones. He, further says that in the absence of any such continuity of tradition, ethnographic clues to the function of any archaeological datum are always to be somewhat suspected and may prove misleading as well (1956:48). He further opines “In fact no existing society today is so exactly representative of any past society, known exclusively from archaeological data, that in ritual or social institutions can provide precise and reliable explanations of more puzzling relics and monument recovered from the prehistoric past. A study of superstitions, institutions and experiment of the simpler peoples of today reveals the endless diversity of human behaviour and can suggest use to which otherwise inexplicable archaeological data may have been put” (Childe, 1956:48).

Aschar expects archaeologists to perform four tasks: formulation and refinement of concept, data gathering and processing, interpretation of data and synthesis. He further states that one of the most used tools of archaeological interpretation is analogy (1961:317).
Ethnoarchaeology generally deals with material cultures. It also relates them to the ancient society and culture. This type of study has variously been termed as palaeo-anthropology (Woodall, 1978), living archaeology (Gould, 1968, 1980) and ethno-archaeology (Gould, 1968, 1974, 1977, Stiles, 1977). A number of studies have been undertaken with this approach in Africa, North America and Australia. India also offers tremendous scope for using ethnographic evidence in archaeological reconstruction as whole and this part of India in particular.

An endeavour is made to offer some explanations basing on the analogy between the past and present temples. The archaeologists are indeed thankful to the ethno-graphers for providing such insights. These sources may be utilized for model building. In Binford’s words, “The crucial point, however, is that our understanding of the past is not simply a matter of interpreting the archaeological record by the analogy to living societies as has been commonly asserted (i.e. Thompson, 1956:325). Our knowledge is sound to the degree that we can verify our postulates scientifically, regardless of the source of their inspiration (1972:661).