

Chapter-II

HISTORY OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS IN INDIA

To have a clear perspective, and understand the development of methods of archaeological investigations in India it is necessary to trace, briefly, the history of Archaeology.

1, In early 1784 Thomas Jefferson, later on Third president of USA, carried out an excavation suprisingly on modern lines in Virginia. He was interested in the problems of Red man and Negro, and in course of these studies he dug a burial site in Virginia: His report is clear and concise. Modern archaeology is generally believed to have begun with Schlieman who dug at Homeric Troy to prove through Archaeology the truth of Homer. He followed certain principles. (a). Preserving all finds (b). Careful recording of levels in which finds are made. (c). Spot drawing and photographs of the finds. His excavation anticipates vertical excavation distinguishing seven occupational layers.

Archaeology in India, however, is no ornamental embroidery on Indian History. It is deep rooted in the country's ancient literature. Kalhana: the Kashmiri Pandit (circa 11th century

AD) was a genius, with considerable critical ability, understood the value of historical reconstruction from the material remains. He studied coins, inscriptions, inspected the monuments and relics, through careful examination of the topography of the land. His work *Rajatarangini*: is a compilation of a vast assemblage of factual data. Even here Kalhana relied more on legends and myths- for the ancient period where no evidence was available to him. Alberuni showed true scientific understanding and an objective approach but mostly, he devoted on literary antiquities of Hindus. AbulFazal: *Ain-i-Akbari* is a great compilation contains accurate notices of a plethora of historical monuments and sites.

The Archaeological Survey of India was established in the year 1862. But interest in all old things goes back to 1784: when Sir William Jones laid foundation of a society called Asiatic Society on 15th Jan 1784 at Calcutta with the object of enquiring "into the history and antiquities, arts, sciences and literature of Asia". The very first journal named "Asiatic Researches", started in 1788. A Museum was set-up in 1814 at Calcutta, now famous as Indian Museum.

The Asiatic Society later had branches in Bombay and Madras. An army of enquirers pursued systematic investigations on Indian antiquities. A series of pioneering works followed. Monographs on ancient ruins, on monuments, epigraphs, numismatics were published. H.T. Colebrook and H.H. Wilson were responsible for placing Indian epigraphy on a firm and sound footing. Others like Charles Wilkinson, Mallet, William Erksine, Col. Colin Mackenzie and Francis Buchanan published narrative accounts of archaeological remains and Monuments. James Fergusson conducted an architectural survey in the country for 18 years (1829-47) and systematically classified the monuments.

Several scholars mostly worked on epigraphy, the antiquities of Afghanistan, the caves of Ellora, Kanheri, Elephanta

and on the antiquarian remains in Mysore, Bihar, Bengal and in south. William chambers: 1772, 1776. worked on Mahabalipuram and published in Asiatic researches.

COL. COLIN MACKENZIE (1753-1821).

Mackenzie's life aim was to "penetrate beyond the common surface of the antiquities in order to recover the history and the institutions of the South India".

He was first a local survey official, but in 1815 he rose to an exalted position as the Surveyor General of India and devoted his best part of life, say 38 years, in exploration of historical sites and collection of antiquarian remains.

He visited nearly every place of interest in peninsular India, prepared 2630 measured drawings, careful plans and 78 drawings all laid to scale.

The great stupa of Amaravati (Guntur dt. A.P.), was discovered in 1797 and he prepared careful plans and drawings unsurpassed in beauty and accuracy.

Mackenzie was the first who called for special attention of the Megalithic monuments of South India, an entirely new field of investigation. The manuscripts he prepared are voluminous and till date not completely published.

JAMES PRINCEP: 1832-1860:

He was the Secretary of the Asiatic Society, Calcutta, a man of Science, worked as an Assay master at the Calcutta mint. As Secretary of Asiatic society he assumed virtual direction of archaeological work in India. He unlocked the mystery of the ancient scripts deciphered Brahmi and Kharoshthi in 1833 and 1837 respectively. He was a great scholar, a master in Indian epigraphy and numismatics. He was also equally at ease in field survey and precise recording (drawing and plans). His notable works include Manikyala stupa, (1830), Buddhist relics of Kushans

(1833-34), and on Ancient Stupa in Afghanistan.

ALEXANDER CUNNINGHAM: (1861-1893) PL. I

Alexander Cunningham came to India in 1831. He urged the Government of India to help in (a) Preservation of ancient Monuments (b) to study the religious arts by appointing a suitable officer at Government expense who should be an epigraphist and numismatist. He is the father of Indian Archaeology.

Monuments in India are "for variety, extent, completeness and beauty unsurpassed, perhaps unequalled in the world". Sir Alexander Cunningham, the first Archaeological Surveyor (18th December, 1861), stressed the need for preservation of monuments not by local administrations but by the Govt. of India i.e the Central authority, that "would be always held in judgement of the civilized world primarily responsible for maintaining intact this great inheritance". Two years later (Sections XIII-XXIV, 1863), an Act was passed vesting on the Central authority (then British Govt.) "To prevent injury to and preserve buildings remarkable for their antiquity or for their historical or architectural value". Again, Lord Curzon stressed on 23rd September, 1900, "I cannot conceive any obligation more strictly appertaining to a Supreme government than the conservation of the most beautiful and perfect collection of monuments in the world or are more likely to be scamped and ignored by a delegation of all authority to provincial administration". As a consequence, the ancient Monuments preservation Act was passed as early as 1904 to "provide for preservation of the ancient monuments and for the protection and acquisition in certain cases of Ancient Monuments and of objects of archaeological, historical and artistic interest". We should bow in admiration and respect to the British Administrators for the care and concern displayed by them towards protection of the stupendously rich Indian Heritage.

Lord Canning, the first Viceroy of India laid foundation for the Archaeological Dept. of North India. Naturally, Alexander Cunningham was appointed as the first Archaeological Surveyor of India and the ASI was thus founded in 1861. The objectives of the ASI were clearly spelt out in this way "to make an accurate description of such remains as most deserve notice, with the history of them so far as it is traceable and a record of the traditions that are retained regarding them."

There was no attempt at the preservation of monuments from 1862 to 1865. Cunningham's activities were confined only to North-west provinces, present U.P. and Bihar. Cunningham had taken the travels of Hiuen Tsang as his guide. He published 21 Volumes of the Reports of Archaeological survey of India. **Corpus. Inscription Indicarum Vol. I. Inscriptions of Asoka** (1877), Ancient Geography of India (1871), **Stupa** of Bharhut (1879) and Book of Indian Eras (1884). Cunningham unearthed at Harappa in 1870 a pictographic seal along with many specimens of Harappan pottery. But he did not realise then as the relics of a great civilization (ASI, Report 5. Calcutta, 1875, P.105). But Cunningham was the first to stress the importance of field work, accurate description and precise measurements and he shared with Prinsep the honour of liberating the archaeology of its "Literary affiliations".

Cunningham's excavations of the stupa at Sarnath was the first attempt in an ancient site, towards scientific archaeological investigation. This effort brought to light the complete structural history of an important class of historical monuments. So with Cunningham Archaeology was a search for past architectural styles, inscriptions, coins, and his methods are an example of objective precision. His excavations were however regarded as unscientific.

HISTORY OF INDIAN ARCHAEOLOGY : (1904-20)

Lord Curzon arrived in Feb 1899 and next year he refounded the department. His aims are well defined. "It is, in my judgement, equally our duty to dig and discover, to classify, reproduce and describe, to copy and decipher and to cherish and conserve". He is the kindler of Archaeological conscience in the country and placed Archaeological Survey of India on a sound and secure foundation. In 1901, the post of Director General was revived and in 1904 John Marshall took charge as Director General.

SIR JOHN MARSHALL (1902-1934): PL. II

In him the country had an ardent and forciful champion, a golden period to the survey. The years 1904-1920 belong to the 1st phase of Sir John Marshall's and 1921-1928 the 2nd phase of his remarkable tenure as DG, ASI. For nearly 30 years Sir John Marshall guided the policy of the Archaeological Survey of India. He later on continued as an officer on spl. duty from 1928 to 1934. He left India finally on 15th March 1934 for writing a series of the artistic aspects of conservation, without impairing the original features of the building, his assessment of types and requirements of monuments etc. are noteworthy acts. The Ancient monuments preservation Act 1904, was set to motion. The main aims of this act were "to ensure the proper upkeep and repair of ancient buildings in private ownership excepting such as were used for religious purposes: to prevent the excavation of sites of historic interest by ignorant and unauthorised persons: and to secure control over the traffic in antiquities". A great volume of work was done in the fields of conservation, exploration and Research.

First Phase: It was, however, interrupted by the First World war (1914); but nevertheless scores of the inscriptions and several religious monuments were discovered and a number of sites

excavated principally in Northern India— Taxila, Nalanda, Sanchi, Sarnath and Bharhut.

Second Phase: The chance discovery of Mohenjodaro and the rediscovery of Harappa, (first discovered by Cuningham in 1873), revolutionised the conception of Indian Civilization and culture. Sir Marshall wrote in 1924- "Hitherto India has almost universally been regarded as one of the youngest countries of the world. Apart from palaeoliths and Neolithic implements and such rude primitive remains and the cyclopean wall of Rajagriha, no monuments of note were known to exist of an earlier date than the 3rd century B.C, when - Greece had already passed her zenith and when the mighty empires of Mesopotamia and Egypt had all been but forgotten. Now, at a single stroke, we have taken back our knowledge of Indian Civilization some 3,000 years and have established the fact that in 3rd Millenium before Christ, and even before that peoples of the Punjab and Sindh were living in well built cities, mature culture with a high standard of art and craftsmanship, developed a system of pictographic writing". Mohenjodaro excavations continued upto 1931 and at Harappa till 1935.

Sir Marshall was spl. officer after retirement from September 1928 till 1935. The first problem oriented excavation, explorations were undertaken in Indian Archaeology with the discovery of Mohenjodaro-Harappa civilization. To trace the special distribution of this civilization; i.e. explorations were undertaken by Sir Aurel Stein in Baluchistan and Indo-Iranian borders: N.G. Majundar explored Sindh (Amri, Chanhudaro). Marshall excavated Mohenjodaro; horizontally but the site was not dug substantially to record the origins of this civilization.

PRE- HISTORIC INVESTIGATIONS:

Earliest prehistoric artifacts were found from various sites

by geologists like R.B.Foote; Burkitt etc. The bounds of Indian archaeology were widening. Field work in respect of prehistoric remains started on a larger scale.

First prehistoric Expedition : Kashmir valley: 1935:
Cambridge University

University of Wales - De Terra and Patterson. (Soan Valley)

The Cooperation between Universities and Archaeological Survey of India started with the Deccan college and Gujarat. The university of Calcutta was given licence for Bangarh excavation. Large scale excavations were undertaken by K.N. Dixit at Ahichchatra during 1940-44. Particular attention was paid for classification of historical pottery wares.

MORTIMER WHEELER (1944-48): PL.III

Sir Wheeler's (30th April 1948) arrival heralded many a great change. He had the unique combination of theoretical and practical training, varied experience of archaeological work, discipline and an innate sense of planning. He emphasised on a trained body of workers. He invited the Universities to depute students for excavations at Taxila(now in Pakistan) and Brahmagiri(Kamataka). He insisted on a "Time Table" the pressing need of Indian archaeology. Thus archaeology in India achieved a clear path. A rough time table of cultures was prepared by Sir Wheeler for the southern, western, south eastern India. His principle was to "Proceed from known to unknown".

IMPORTANCE OF POTTERY:

After Marshall's work at Taxila, Mohenjodaro and Harappa, pottery of similar type, fabric and design was studied carefully, Wheeler's comparative study of Mediterranean associated wares etc. the Amphorae, N.B.P. ware Black and

Red ware led to a corpus on Indian Pottery: Earlier archaeologists were depending on coins and inscriptions but now pottery and stone tools were considered more trustworthy as indicators of past cultures. As coins migrate very easily and survive for longer period while inscriptions provide limited information of a family record or script, pottery belonged to the people at large and almost imperishable and when studied intelligently brings forth several aspects of the life of people. Distribution maps giving us the range of a culture is indicated by types of pottery, stone tools etc.

THE STRATIGRAPHICAL METHOD OF DIGGING:

Wheeler introduced the stratigraphical method in Archaeological excavations and the three dimensional system of recording the finds unearthed from the strata. This is exactly a geological method extended to archaeological field work. The objects were not only recorded in their correct positions but placed on plan. Thus Wheeler's contribution lies in training several Indian students in Field Archaeology, conservation, excavation, and explorations, etc. He introduced into India the study of stratification in an excavation. An international standard was achieved. Specific problem oriented excavations were undertaken at Taxila, Arikamedu, Harappa, Brahmagiri, (PL.IV) Chandravalli etc. Firm datum lines in Indian archaeology for future excavations and field work were drawn. After Wheeler Dr. N.P. Chakravarthi took over as DG, ASI, from May 1948. Archaeology came both under Union and state jurisdictions and a concurrent subject. Sri M.S. Vats took over as DG from June 1950, AMASR Act 1951 was passed. A.Ghosh headed the ASI as DG from 3-3-53 to 1968.

We furnish here the great personalities who devoted to provide proper direction to the Archaeological matters of this vast country. The ASI is one of the best organisations of the kind in

the world engaged in unravelling the mystery and grandeur of India's past.

**THE DISTINGUISHED HEADS OF
THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY OF INDIA**

Alexander Cunningham(1861 - 1893)
(First Archaeological Surveyor)

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Sir John Marshall
Director General (1902 - 1928)

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Sri H. Hargreaves, D.G.
(8th October 1928 - 29th July 1931)

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Rai Bahadur Daya Ram Sahani, D.G.
(July 1931 - 1935)

|

Sri J.F. Blakiston
(1st June 1935 - 20th March 1937)

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Rao Bahadur K.N. Dixit
(21st March 1937 - 1944)

|

Sir Mortimer Wheeler
(1944 - April 1948)

|

Dr N.P. Chakravarti
(30th April 1948 - 31st April 1950)

|

Sri Madho Sarup Vats
(30th June 1950 - 2nd March 1953)

Sri A. Ghosh
(3rd March 1953 - 8th February 1968)

|

Sri B.B. Lal
(February 1968 - June 1972)

|

Sri M.N. Deshpande
(8th June 1972 - November 1978)

|

Sri B.K. Thapar
(1st December 1978 - 31st January 1981)

|

Dr.(Mrs) Debala Mitra
(12th May 1981 - 31st December 1983)

|

Dr. M.S. Nagaraja Rao
(5th January 1984 - 4th January 1987)

|

Sri R.C. Tripathi
(5th January 1987 - 15th November 1987)

|

Sri J.P. Joshi
(16th November 1978 - 1990)

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Sri M.C. Joshi
(1st August 1990 - April 1993)

Presently the apex post of DG, ASI is held by the senior Administrative Service Officers. (IAS)

Equally noteworthy were some of the Indian states, which took up archaeological activities on a large scale like explorations of sites and Monuments (architectural Surveys), epigraphical and

antiquarian researches of a high order. Mysore state has formed the Archaeological Department in 1890 and passed in 1924 an Ancient Monuments Preservation Regulation. Travancore State formed the Archaeological Dept. in 1908. Kashmir in 1913, while Hyderabad State in 1914.

SCHOOL OF ARCHAEOLOGY:

The ASI has established in the year 1960, a School of Archaeology imparting an intensive training in various aspects of Archaeology. It also undertakes, sponsors higher Research on a national level. This is now elevated as Institute of Archaeology, (1st April 1985) and selects on an All India basis, professionals for specialised training in various branches of Field Archaeology including study of Indian Monuments, their preservation and conservation methods, laws and manuals governing the protection and preservation aspects etc.

Indeed, "to day no part of the world is better served in archaeological matters than is the Republic of India" (Sir Mortimer Wheeler, May 1956).

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