

Title of the Thesis:-The Working of the Archaeological Survey of India from Curzon to Independence

Name of the Supervisor:-Prof. G. P. Sharma

Name of the Scholar:- Ravi Prakash

Department: History & Culture

Abstract

Since the British ruled India, it was in their interest to construct an image in which they appeared as the saviours and guardians of sub-continental monuments. It is however in our interest to look beyond the framework that was created for India and reconstruct a picture where the mapping of the Indian archaeological universe is shown as being related to the larger imperial agenda of the British Raj.

The preservation of the cultural heritage of India is one of the primary and major functions of the Archaeological Survey of India. Today, the problem of preserving ancient monuments in India is bigger, not only due to the enormous richness of these national treasures, comprising rock shelters, rock-cut caves, temples, mosques, tombs, churches, palaces, forts, reservoirs and bridges, all belonging to different periods of India's history, but also owing to climatic factors.

The study brings to light the Archaeological Policy of the Raj towards the conservation and preservation of monuments. Since the British ruled India, it was in their interest to construct an image in which they appeared as the saviours and guardians of sub-continental monuments. Among other things, instead of the stereotyped image of Curzon as the conservator par excellence, a more complicated picture emerges where the destruction/exclusion of cultural meanings accompany the conservation of cultural property. Equally important is the sense that the "natives" were not just conforming to British notions of them. Instead of a passive acceptance of conservation measures proffered by the government, indigenous groups appeared to articulate their sentiments and policies around their own agendas; agendas that were not exclusively shaped by those of the colonial state.

India has a rich cultural heritage in the form of temples, forts, palaces, churches and mosques. Monuments of different types are spread all over the country. These edifices are being protected in order to preserve their artistic and historic value and pass them on to posterity. The causes for decay are complex and the reasons are varied and therefore the job of a conservation specialist has become tough.

The protection laws in the country, broadly speaking, can be divided into two distinct periods, viz. the British and post-British periods. Before the British occupation of India, no codified volume of such laws is forthcoming. Perhaps this was also not necessary in the circumstances prevailing then

During the British period, the framing of antiquarian laws was a slow and steady process, which was necessitated considering the

exigencies of each given situation or circumstance. The antiquarian laws framed by the British mainly emphasised penal clauses for the defaulters rather than moral admonishment. Indeed the former were more purposeful than the latter.

The antiquarian laws after the British period, though modified periodically, did have, in spite of their having served the country for so long, some deficiencies in their application or operation..

The beginning of European archaeological interest in India was far earlier than the establishment of the Asiatic Society by William Jones in Calcutta in 1784. From the sixteenth century onwards there are copious references to Indian monuments in the writings of European travellers in the country. These writings constitute the first group of archaeological writings on and of India. The tradition continued well into the eighteenth century but from about the middle of that century, there is clear evidence of the beginnings of systematic scholarly attention to archaeology.

The nature and distribution of Indian historical antiquities came to be understood within the framework of local religious and political history by the middle of the nineteenth century.

On Marshall's departure from India in 1934, the Survey was thrown into a crisis, mainly due to the recommendations of the Retrenchment Committee, which drastically reduced the organisation's budget and, thereby its activities and staff. However, the Survey's command over the administration of archaeology at an all-India level was not eroded despite its physical decline and bankruptcy. The credit for this goes to Marshall, who entrenched the Survey's authority over the archaeology of India during his tenure.

Therefore, although the Archaeological Survey's powers waned during the 1930s, the organisation did not collapse. Marshall's failure to groom a successor was suggested as a reason by his distant successor and the colonial Survey's last British Director General (1944-48), Sir Mortimer Wheeler, for the Survey's inability to cope with the crisis that followed the financial cuts of the 1930s. Yet, by ensuring the value of the Survey's work and its administrative command over archaeology of India, Marshall made it possible for Wheeler to invoke the colonial Survey's authority at the cusp of India's independence. Marshall's efforts and vision laid the foundation that allowed Wheeler to direct and frame the Survey's afterlife as the supreme administrator of the archaeology of sovereign India.

Conservation in India is at the crossroads. It can provide the impetus and ideology for a conservation-oriented development policy, or be content with arguing about authenticity and matters “educated and artistic people think worthwhile...”