

Editorial

For quite some time, we have been thinking seriously of publishing Social Orbit theme/issue-based making it more focused and discursive. Several factors – owing to the infirmity in our state of infancy – have held us back from achieving this cherished goal. Now, it is time to choose the ideal path – to become focused and thematic – and to provide micro-level data/knowledge, streamline the results of latest researches in the academic domain, discuss recent trends in social science research, and promote amateur/professional scholars through publication. As a beginning, the present volume of the journal is devoted to archaeology which contains articles on varied topics reflecting recent and ongoing research in this field. Selection of archaeology as the central theme is important because it is a highly promising discipline for its scientific precision and multi-disciplinary value. Its contribution to social science is remarkable and things have developed in such a way that none of the disciplines are able to exist without the epistemological and methodological support of field archaeology.

Indian Archaeology had its beginnings and initial roots in the colonial past and had served as a powerful tool in legitimizing colonial authority. Through the discovery of antiquarian remains, including prehistoric traces and early-historic structures, through area-wise surveys and field-level explorations, and proceeding with the task of creating a classified/catalogued data-base, colonial archaeology, at the hands of the administrator-scholars, slowly advanced to undertake excavations over prehistoric/historic sites enabling them to contribute substantially to early Indian history – all of which helped to strengthen the colonial power structure built upon the claim of the re-discovery of Indian past, salvaging the nation from age-old ‘itihasa-purana tradition’. Despite this Orientalist bias, colonial structure served as the fundamental ordering for the future system and contributed substantially to the disciplinary foundations of Indian archaeology. Political decolonization had its inevitable [manifold] impact; the foremost being diversification of interest in themes and methods – all of which led to uncovering voluminous data and great sophistication in field techniques. Notwithstanding the politicization of archaeology in recent times, mainly with the Ayodhya issue, the advances it had made are tremendous. Thus, from subterranean sites to buried/ruined structures, inland towns to cross-country trade routes, coastal stations to under-water residues, and distinct artifacts to unique cultural systems – the achievements of Indian archaeology is quite remarkable.

Archaeology in Kerala also had its foundations in the colonial past, which of course catered to colonial interests, and which sought to salvage the land from legendary history – represented by ‘traditional sources’ – and develop scientific history – from ‘other sources’ – as Logan tried to explain it. The search for ‘true’ sources led to a sweeping hunt for ‘material remains’ – from ruined structures and scattered objects, or human footprints found in the form of prehistoric art. But the shortage of huge structural remains (palaces, temples, forts, towns), unlike in other areas, and the presence of innumerable, unidentifiable [megalithic] residues, created much confusion among colonial administrator-scholars. In fact colonial historiography was forced to delve much on European travel accounts as a substitute [primary] source for overcoming this difficulty. Despite having laid the early foundations, and encouraging the budding native scholars, colonial archaeology failed to assert itself in Kerala – in fact, they could not solve existing ‘problems’ or explain the historical context of the numerous funerary edifices. But, taking cue from

the colonial legacy, and following the tools and methods the west had introduced through colonial scholarship, academicians of the post-colonial era, though with a slow start, succeeded in addressing select problems (like at Porkalam) and explaining historical gaps through archaeological inputs (like at Pattanam). Overcoming the initial lethargy and institutional/infrastructural disabilities, archaeology in Kerala recorded a leap forward in recent times under the guidance of professional, trained hands, having theoretical, methodological and multidisciplinary perspectives. Although Kerala failed to develop a prestigious institution of the M.S. University type, and a breakthrough excavation as in the case of Keezhadi, the leading role played by several institutions - the Archaeology Department of Kerala University, Kerala Council for Historical Research and Archaeological Survey of India (Trissur Circle) - along with the outcome of excavations at Pattanam, Ummichipoyil, Anakkara and similar sites, have instilled great enthusiasm in academic circles.

Notwithstanding the popularity gained over the years, theoretical and methodological advances made, and impressive discoveries done, Indian archaeology has started witnessing certain obnoxious tendencies. Intense politicization bordering on communal appeal, coupled with the negative impact of globalized liberal economy, has created a situation in which research and publication has been badly hit. Steady withdrawal of the state from the academic sector, leading to reduction of state funding for education, and indiscriminate policy of privatization – all have been transforming research into a commercial enterprise advancing in tune with the interest of the market forces. Researchers and academic institutions are forced to depend on private agencies for raising funds – who in turn are certainly driven by profit concerns – and projects which do not have either market/tourism value or do not uphold a cause for ‘national’ self-esteem are often disregarded. Due to the rising communal passion there is also a tendency to encourage the study or salvage/restoration of [Hindu] temples/religious structures alone. Equally unfortunate is the growing bureaucratic attitude of encouraging face-lifting/restoration work of ruined structures, instead of promoting site excavation, which is very often outsourced to private companies. Thus, when galloping privatization is combined with a surging communalist trend, things develop extremely critical. This is because several sub-fields like maritime/underwater archaeology, ethno-archaeology, landscape archaeology, environmental archaeology, rescue/salvage archaeology, etc. etc. are still in its infancy in India and needs strong state support. Prehistoric/Historic archaeology also has to tread a long path in order to address several, serious, historical issues.

Articles of this volume while reflecting such passions, hopes as well as anxieties, represent some of the best attempts to posit the promising and boundless possibilities of archaeology. Pursuing sincere and constructive research and promoting quality publication is the only means to salvage the discipline from the pitfalls of the emerging academic culture vitiated by the interference of market/communal forces. As a social science discipline archaeology has special relevance; by acknowledging its multidisciplinary value, it has the potential to enrich other disciplines. The rise of public archaeology has opened up new possibilities for the conservation of antique structures/monuments and, despite its un-academic focus, the growth of tourism culture has extended hope and promise for the protection of heritage monuments/sites. However, history in particular needs the epistemological support of archaeology for providing it solid material inputs, which is but dependant on the bright future of this vulnerable discipline.