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Chapter Author(s): Sudeshna Guha

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# 6. South Asian Heritage and Archaeological Practices

Sudeshna Guha

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## I

Studies of the histories of heritage inevitably lead us to disciplinary introspection. As with the scholarship of heritage studies elsewhere, research into South Asian heritage has developed from considerations of tangible heritage, and through a focus on the social biographies of historical monuments, built environments and landscape. Academic projects are fed by the non-academic 'heritage industry' in which civilisational histories are routinely invented and used as commercial capital for the global market through the creation, circulation and display of 'historically seminal monuments'. An apt example is the replication of the second-century BC Buddhist *stupa* at Sanchi (Madhya Pradesh, India) as the India Pavilion at the Shanghai Expo in March 2010. This architectural adaptation, which left a 'deep impression' upon one of its more important visitors, the Chinese Premier, was aimed at conveying the 'universalistic values of peace, and the message of healing the harm we bring upon nature'.<sup>1</sup> Such acts of rewriting the forms and meanings of historical topography facilitate the bringing home of 'venerable' heritage from foreign lands, as we see in the case of the recent building of the Taj Mahal at Sonargaon (Bangladesh), and the construction of a version of the Sanchi *stupa* at Louyang (China) between

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1 'China PM visits India pavilion at Shanghai Expo', *The Times of India*, 31 October 2010, <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/China-PM-visits-India-pavilion-at-Shanghai-Expo/articleshow/6845554.cms>

2008 and 2010. Although each instance of re-evaluation, adaptation and replication of tangible and intangible heritage pursues different aims, all demonstrate the importance of engaging with the history of the reproduction of monuments as the 'performative spaces' within which new meanings of the 'actual objects' are created.<sup>2</sup>

Inevitably, the rewriting of heritage as global capital drives academic study of the 'careers' and 'travels' of objects and monuments. Within the context of South Asia, this scholarship has created an important analytical corpus regarding the ways in which the reproduction of historical monuments shape 'popular imaginaries of the disciplines of archaeology and anthropology' and serve 'as grounds on which professional knowledge came to be configured within new public domains of display and scholarship'. However, the pioneering scholarship focuses exclusively upon the colonial and post-colonial histories of heritage-making, and in historicising the relationship between archaeological practices and the heritage industry, reinforces the theory – unproblematically presented in all histories of Indian archaeology – that the antiquarian study of South Asia through the region's historical monuments, sites and objects was a 'western cognitive entity'.<sup>3</sup> The long pre-colonial histories of heritage-making within the Indian subcontinent not only demonstrate the errors of this thinking, but also throw into sharp relief the fact that British orientalist historiography conspicuously celebrated the 'coming of antiquarianism into India' for denying native historical consciousness.

The orientalist historiography, which was established in the eighteenth century, no doubt inspired the pioneering British archaeologist of India, Alexander Cunningham (1814-93), to establish the history of antiquarian scholarship of India through the statement that 'the study of Indian antiquities received its first impulse from Sir William Jones, who in 1784 founded the Asiatic Society of Bengal'.<sup>4</sup> However, when we reflect upon the amassing of old manuscripts, paintings, curiosities and objects of art within

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2 B. Kirschenblatt-Gimblett, 'The Museum as a Catalyst', Keynote address, Museums 2000: Confirmation or Challenge, organised by ICOM Sweden, the Swedish Museum Association and the Swedish Travelling Exhibition/Riksställningar in Vadstena, 29 September 2000, <https://www.nyu.edu/classes/bkg/web/vadstena.pdf>

3 T. Guha-Thakurta, 'Careers of the Copy: Traveling Replicas in Colonial and Postcolonial India', Firth Lecture, Bristol University, 8 April 2009, <http://www.theasa.org/publications/firth/firth09.pdf> and *Monuments, Objects, Histories: Institutions of Art in Colonial and Postcolonial India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), p. 3.

4 A. Cunningham, 'Preface', *Archaeological Survey of India: Four Reports Made During the Years 1862-65* (Simla: Government of India Publications, 1871), p. i.

the Mughal Empire, it is apparent that, like the antiquarian scholarship of the British in India, such acts pointed to scholarship of the past, and to the extra-scholarly value of connoisseurship within the politics of imperial self-fashioning. Furthermore, despite the different intellectual genealogies of viewing, collecting, copying and connoisseurship in the seventeenth-century Mughal domain and Britain and Europe, the descriptions of monuments and artefacts from the former were rather similar in nature to the descriptions that were considered essential by the growing breed of self-styled British and European antiquaries to document the incorruptibility of material sources. An example is Emperor Jahangir's description of the Jami Masjid in Ahmedabad, which he saw in his eleventh regnal year, on 6 January 1617/18, and recorded in his *Jahangirnama* as follows:

This mosque is a monument left by Sultan Ahmad, the founder of the city of Ahmedabad. It has three gates, and on every side a market. Opposite the gate facing the east is Sultan Ahmad's tomb. Under the dome lie Sultan Ahmad, his son Muhammad, and his grandson Qutbuddin. The length of the mosque courtyard exclusive of the *maqsura* is 103 cubits; the width is 89 cubits. Around the perimeter of the courtyard is an arcade with arches four and three-quarters cubits wide. The courtyard is paved in cut brick, and the pillars of the arcade are of red stone. The *maqsura* contains 354 columns, and above the column is a dome. The length of the *maqsura* is 75 cubits, and the width is 37 cubits. The *maqsura* paving, the mihrab, and the pulpit are of marble.<sup>5</sup>

Jahangir's description undermines the assertion of Cunningham's latest biographer that the 'earliest notices and descriptions of Indian monuments, architecture and sculpture are to be found in the writings of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century European travellers'.<sup>6</sup> It also exemplifies Alain Schnapp's contention, based on his research into histories of historical enquiries, that 'in widely differing circumstances, and given similar assemblages, antiquaries may produce similar statements'.<sup>7</sup> The British pioneered archaeological practices within the Indian subcontinent during the nineteenth century, and historians of South Asian archaeology continue to follow Cunningham in tracing archaeology's genealogy

5 *The Jahangirnama: Memoirs of Jahangir, Emperor of India*, ed. and trans. W. Thackston (New York and Oxford: Smithsonian Institution in association with Oxford University Press, 1999) pp. 244-45.

6 U. Singh, *The Discovery of Ancient India: Early Archaeologists and the Beginnings of Archaeology* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004), p. 6.

7 A. Schnapp, *The Discovery of the Past: The Origins of Archaeology* (originally in French, 1993), (London: The British Museum Press, 1996) p. 319.

through European views of South Asia's past. Yet identifying antiquarian scholarship in South Asia as a European quest also perpetuates the traditions of colonial historiography, which were developed by the British administrative scholars of the East India Company, and which declared the natives of Hindustan to be historically unconscious because they did not undertake historical enquiries. In this respect, the post-colonial histories of South Asian archaeology, which emphasise the need to research the agency of 'native' scholarship, pose a paradox, as they enshrine the dictates of the colonialist and orientalist historiography, namely that there was little consciousness of historical scholarship within pre-colonial India. The histories asserting a western origin for antiquarianism in the Indian subcontinent have, moreover, been uncritically used to write the grand histories of world archaeology, and as a result the latter wrongly promote the idea that 'systematic antiquarianism did not develop in India prior to the colonial period. Despite impressive intellectual achievements in other fields, Indian scholarship did not devote much attention to political history, perhaps because the Hindu religion and division of socio-regulatory forces between high priests and warriors directed efforts to understanding the meaning of life and of historical events more towards cosmology'.<sup>8</sup>

Beyond the South Asian sphere, most twentieth-century archaeologists, unlike Schnapp, have viewed antiquarian scholarship as a project of modernity within the Enlightened European world. In determining periodisation, they have made a distinction between acts of valorisation of the past in ancient and pre-modern times, and a conscious approach towards historical enquiry through antiquities from the late-sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries onwards. This periodisation has been widely accepted within the growing twenty-first-century archaeological scholarship of heritage studies, in which the origins of a heritage-conscious society are traced back to the emergence of an educated public sphere in Europe during the seventeenth century, that responded to the milieu of rising national consciousness with efforts to seek out and control the past through laws and objective field explorations.<sup>9</sup> The understanding of rational enquiries and 'proper' histories and history writing as products

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8 B. Trigger, *A History of Archaeological Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 77.

9 E.g. M.L.S.S. Sørensen and J. Carman, 'Introduction: Making the Means Transparent: Reasons and Reflections', in M.L.S.S. Sørensen and J. Carman (eds.), *Heritage Studies: Methods and Approaches* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), pp. 3-10.

of the modern western world, which the above periodisation fosters, clearly echoes British colonial histories of antiquarian scholarship in India. However, heritage archaeologists, who rightly promote the intellectual need to interrogate the dominance of 'western' historiographical traditions, have overlooked the glaring borrowings from a historiography they explicitly reject in their own histories of the origins of heritage practices.

In thinking through the histories of heritage-making within South Asia, we become aware that the acts of replicating historical monuments, such as the building of a Taj Mahal and Sanchi *stupa* at Sonargaon and Louyang respectively, may have extended well beyond the widely-known twelfth-century AD example of the Buddhist temple at Bodh Gaya, which was reproduced at Pagan on the orders of the ruler Kayanzittha so that his subjects could worship at their venerable shrine. The repeated reuse of the rock and pillar edicts of the Mauryan Emperor Ashoka (268-31 BC) from the first century, by Mahakshatrapa Rudradaman (c.150 AD), until at least the seventeenth century, by the Mughal Emperor Jehangir (r.1605-27 AD), indicate the disparate histories of conscious acts of memorialisation, and encourage us to look beyond the 'western' historiography of the origins of heritage practices. Furthermore, we also note that the restoration of tombs and mosques, of which there are numerous examples from the Delhi Sultanate (specifically between c.1369 and 1503 AD) and the Mughal dynasties (especially from Aurangzeb's rule 1658-1707 AD), echo many aspects of the nascent nineteenth-century archaeological restoration projects, in that they were political acts aimed at redefining the way sacral and historical spaces were experienced. Also worthy of note, therefore, are the popular perceptions within India regarding archaeological practices during the early twentieth century, when archaeological undertakings and scholarship were both becoming increasingly visible through the conservation work and excavations of the colonial Archaeological Survey. The following remark with which the members of the Delhi Municipal Committee feted the departing Viceroy George Nathaniel Curzon (1899-1905) is representative:

'It would not be too much to say that your Excellency has bridged over the 500 years since the time of the Emperor Feroz Shah Tughlak, who was what would be called in modern parlance as Delhi's first great archaeologist'.<sup>10</sup>

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10 13 November 1905; *Lord Curzon's farewell to India: being speeches delivered as viceroy & governor-general of India, during Sept.-Nov. 1905* (Bombay: Thacker and Co., 1907).

Curzon remains the principal architect of the archaeological restorations of historical India, which he facilitated through the restitution of the Archaeological Survey of India in 1902. Yet it is only by looking beyond the connected histories of archaeological practices and heritage that we are able to establish more precise cultural histories of history-making and heritage practices within South Asia.

## II

In reviewing the archaeological scholarship of heritage we are shown the ways in which inferences are often transformed into material evidence. The British scholarship of Indian archaeology began from the nineteenth century and was initiated with the aim of uncovering ancient India's supposedly pristine 'Buddhist' cultural legacy. Among the early excavations that were undertaken were those by Alexander Cunningham at the Dhamek Stupa in Sarnath near Banaras between 1834-36. Through them Cunningham initiated his 'Buddhist archaeology' of India, which gathered further momentum after the Great War of 1857, largely because of his leadership of the Archaeological Survey of India between 1861-65 and 1871-85. In 1863 Matthew Sherring of the London Missionary Society excavated at Banaras with the aim of demonstrating the presence of Buddhism in the city's foundational history. It is clear from the focus of both Cunningham's and Sherring's excavations at Sarnath and Banaras respectively, that the British launched their 'archaeology of India' to establish a counter-narrative to the prevalent 'Hindu' civilisational history of the natives, which they dismissed as mere Brahmanic propaganda. By establishing archaeological, and hence tangible, evidence of a physically absent religion, the excavators sought to demonstrate that just as Buddhism had disappeared from India despite being the national religion for more than 500 years, so too could Hinduism.

As well as calling into question the place of Hinduism in India's civilisational history, the archaeological finds of Buddhist sites and monuments supposedly ruined and destroyed by the ascendant Muslim rulers from the twelfth century onwards provided visual evidence to support the new Raj's depiction of the Muslims as destroyers of all that was glorious in India's ancient heritage, while also illustrating the relative benevolence of the British towards their heathen subjects. This archaeological history thus demonstrates how historical landscapes are continuously refashioned 'to instantiate particular histories and historicities', and so exemplifies the

manner in which archaeological scholarship of ancient civilisations can contribute towards the construction of intangible heritage.<sup>11</sup>

The material evidence of civilisational origins and legacies, and of past perceptions of cultural geographies, identities and traditions, which the archaeological scholarship of 'prehistoric' and archaic civilisations routinely produces, undermines the assumption that heritage is inherently knowable. However, perhaps because of the palpable materiality of archaeological data, the archaeological literature of the history of heritage practices often misleadingly conveys the assumption that heritage can be discovered, recorded, and mapped, despite the fact that many archaeologists now increasingly search for innovative, discipline-specific methodologies to help clarify the ways in which 'interpretations may be constructed from data'.<sup>12</sup> As the theories discussed below regarding the Indus (or Harappan) Civilisation illustrate, the archaeological constructs of civilisational heritage force us to revisit some old-fashioned disciplinary concerns, such as explanations for cultural continuity and change, schema of classifications and periodisation, and the kinds of data that are selected as evidence of cultural boundaries. Critical reviews of the archaeological constructs would show the shifts and transformations over time in notions of valid evidence, and encourage us to reconsider the existing methodologies by which material traits are translated into cultural forms. In this they also remind us of the need to consider the ethical aspects of heritage-making and its scholarship.<sup>13</sup>

### III

The object of sustained archaeological study since 1924, the Indus Civilisation physically straddled the border between India and Pakistan, two countries

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11 N. Abu El-Haj, *Facts on the Ground: Archaeological Practice and Territorial Self Fashioning in Israeli Society* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2004), p. 13. On the nineteenth-century archaeological explorations of Banaras see S. Guha, 'Material Truths and Religious Identities: The Archaeological and Photographic Making of Banaras', in M.S. Dodson (ed.), *Banaras: Urban Forms and Cultural Histories* (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), pp. 42-76.

12 Sørensen and Carman, 2009, p. 4, see also p. 24.

13 The scholarship of heritage ethics is growing. It has provided a critical stance to the practices of archaeology, and concerns with many different issues. For two different approaches to considerations of ethics see L. Meskell, 'Human Rights and Heritage Ethics', *Anthropological Quarterly*, 83(4), 2010, pp. 839-60, and L. Smith and E. Waterton, *Heritage, Communities and Archaeology* (London: Duckworth, 2009).



whose shared cultural histories were officially divided by the partition of 1947. As a result of the partition, the post-colonial scholarship of the Indus Civilisation in Pakistan has been facilitated to a large extent by 'non-native' archaeologists. Therefore, embedded within the historiography of this Bronze Age phenomenon of the third millennium BC, are competitions and contestations regarding the authorship of knowledge and 'important' discoveries, unequal intellectual encounters, disparate claims to 'cultural legacies', and conflicts and tensions regarding the granting of permission to 'foreigners' to dig the 'native soil' of others. The ninety-year-long archaeological scholarship of the Indus Civilisation therefore provides us with a seminal archive of creations, representations and contestations around the ownership of evidence of heritage.

The history of Indus scholarship also highlights the waning influence of British scholarship upon Indian archaeology after the Raj, and the concomitant spread of North American theories and methods within South Asian archaeology. This epistemological shift has left a rich collection of official correspondence, which offers an insight into the spectacular conflicts between the British old guard, some of whom, such as Mortimer Wheeler (1890-1976), continued to serve as diplomats of Indian archaeology, and the young American entrants into the field, such as Walter Fairservis Jr. (1921-94).<sup>14</sup> The numerous examples of professional clashes between the British and American camps demonstrate the fallacy of reducing the power politics of post-colonial archaeological scholarship in South Asia to a simple dichotomy of foreign versus native.

The history of the Indus Civilisation encompasses a remarkable geographical shift around the year 2200 BC, when cities within the Indus valley, including the type-sites of Harappa and Mohenjodaro, declined and new cities, such as Rakhigarhi, Kalibangan and Dholavira, emerged in regions to the east and south-east. This geographical change creates the need to consider the manner in which past perceptions of territoriality have been sourced through the archaeological scholarship, and provokes an enquiry into the way in which archaeologists have established material evidence of the indigenous. The understanding of the Indus Civilisation as 'sub-continental' in its 'roots' and 'style' is a specifically North American contribution to the historiography, and was formally suggested in 1967

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<sup>14</sup> Details in 'Wheeler Papers', Box 459, archives of the British Academy, London.

by Fairservis, who endowed the Civilisation with 'Indian' features by historicising its 'ethos' as village-orientated.<sup>15</sup> Fairservis subsequently stated that 'the story of prehistoric India, which stretches back to a time so remote that it conforms to a Hindu Kalpa of untold generations reaching to a primordial world, nonetheless repeats again and again the pattern which was not to change until the East India Company ships moved up the Hooghly'.<sup>16</sup> Fairservis's view of a uniquely Indian civilisation whose characteristic features – a Hindu society with a village- and caste-based culture – had remained essentially unchanged since time immemorial, followed the trends of contemporary orientalist historiography. However, this view also prevails today within the functionalist and systemic modelling of an overarching construct of 'Cultural Tradition', whereby the Indus Civilisation is now regarded as demonstrating the continuity of an exclusively indigenous cultural history of South Asia.

#### IV

The archaeological construct of 'Cultural Tradition' was initially developed in the context of studies of the settlement patterns of prehistoric Mesoamerica in order to record cultural change and continuity and measure the processes of cultural integration.<sup>17</sup> It was widely adopted by the processualist school of New Archaeology during the 1960s, and was introduced into South Asian archaeology a decade later by Jim Shaffer through his research on prehistoric Baluchistan. Since the early 1990s, Shaffer and his co-author Dianne Lichtenstein have gradually extended the scope of the model. They now propose an overarching 'Indo-Gangetic Cultural Tradition', encompassing the long-term cultural developments in northern South Asia which link 'social entities over a time period from the development of food production in the seventh millennium BC to the present'.<sup>18</sup> In an earlier model of this theory, which was published in 1995, the authors conceived the continuity as being economically and culturally

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15 W.A. Fairservis Jr., 'The Origin, Character, and Decline of an Early Civilization', *American Museum Novitates*, 2302, 20 October 1967, p. 19.

16 W.A. Fairservis Jr., *The Roots of Ancient India* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1971) p. 381.

17 See G.R. Willey and P. Phillips, *Method and Theory in American Archaeology* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1958).

18 J.G. Shaffer and D.A. Lichtenstein, 'South Asian Archaeology and the Myth of Indo-Aryan Invasion', in E.F. Bryant and L.L. Patton (eds.), *The Indo-Aryan Controversy: Evidence and Inference in Indian History* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), p. 93.

focused upon cattle. Now, with due regard for the danger of slipping into orientalist historiography, they insist that by charting an unbroken indigenous cultural continuity for northern South Asia they nonetheless recognise 'significant *indigenous discontinuity*', and do not 'propose social isolation *nor* deny any outside cultural influence'.<sup>19</sup> However, despite all these qualifications and careful nuances, Shaffer and Lichtenstein's 'Indo Gangetic Cultural Tradition' still evokes orientalist and colonialist historiography in the basic assumption that this tradition can be recognised because its core features have remained unchanged over millennia.

Following Shaffer's work, an archaeological narrative of northern South Asia has been established on the basis of constructions of cultural traditions that historicise the indigenous and the foreign as being respectively internal and external to this vast region. Yet such distinctions lead to misleading histories of 'others' and 'otherness', reminding us of the observation of the noted historian B.D. Chattopadhyaya that even the region's Muslim communities were not regarded as 'others' by the Hindus until the twelfth century because 'the notion of territorial outsider in a political sense [was] not compatible with the early cosmological/geographical concept'.<sup>20</sup> We should not forget that the Indus Civilisation was historicised as indigenous by all early excavators, notably John Marshall, who described the authors as being 'born of the soil', and Mortimer Wheeler, who stated that 'the population would appear to have remained more or less stable from Harappan times to the present day. Invasions of these regions, however important culturally, must have been on too small a scale to bring about marked changes in physical characteristics'.<sup>21</sup> Although Marshall and Wheeler established the indigenous nature of the Civilisation with reference to its inhabitants, they explained many of its socio-cultural features as elements of 'borrowing' from the bronze-age cultures of west Asia. They studied the Civilisation at a time when the 'Aryan invasion' of northern India in the second millennium BC was considered an undisputable historical fact, and were hesitant to historicise a sophisticated city-type civilisation, which predated the 'Vedic Civilisation' of the 'Aryans' by more than a thousand years, as an indigenous product of South Asia. The intellectual understanding of

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19 Ibid.

20 B.D. Chattopadhyaya, *Representing the Other? Sanskrit Sources and the Muslims* (Delhi: Manohar, 1998), p. 90.

21 J.H. Marshall, *Mohenjodaro and the Indus Civilization* (London: Arthur Probsthain, 1931), p. 109; R.E.M. Wheeler, *The Indus Civilization*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), p. 72.

the Indus Civilisation as indigenous in the twenty-first century arises from the convincing evidence against any 'invasion' of the Indo-Aryan speaking people, which has effectively removed all 'foreign hands' from the cultural make-up of South Asia's ancient past. However, the on-going academic debate regarding the exact physical location of the first perceptible 'roots' of the Indus Civilisation points to the need for greater sensitivity towards the manner in which the archaeological search for evidence of an indigenous civilisation contributes to issues of cultural ownership.

Thus, although the Indus Civilisation is now celebrated as a pure-bred product of South Asian soil, the question of its precise origins remains a contentious topic. In particular, Indian nationalist archaeologists reject the 'Baluchi story' of their North American colleagues who excavate the 'Harappan' sites of Pakistan, according to which the roots of the Civilisation's incipient technologies can largely be traced through the evidence of domestication at Mehrgarh in the Kacchi Plain. Instead, they put forward an alternative origin story focused upon evidence gathered within India, which highlights the origins of rice and millet domestication in the 'Indus-Hakra-Ghaggar alluvium' and the innovations in metal technologies in the 'Aravalli hills during the fourth to mid-third millennium BC'.<sup>22</sup> These assertions have provoked the surprising counter-claim that possible evidence for the indigenous growth of Taxila, Charsada and Peshawar (Pakistan) into important commercial cities by c.600 BC calls into question the 'time honoured models' describing the derivation of 'Indian culture' from 'a Gangetic homeland'.<sup>23</sup> A surprising claim because although the region of Magadha in the Gangetic valley was the heartland of the classical kingdoms of ancient India, it has never been regarded as the 'homeland' of 'Indian culture'. In all models since the nineteenth century the 'homeland' has remained the Sapta Sindhu, believed to be in and around the area of Punjab which is in Pakistan today, where the early Vedic hymns were supposedly composed. The nationalist and counter-nationalist claims may seem childish, but they clearly demonstrate the performative uses to which evidence of the indigenous is put within the scholarship of South Asian archaeology.

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22 D.K. Chakrabarti, *The Oxford Companion to Indian Archaeology: The Archaeological Foundations of Ancient India, Stone Age to AD 13 Century* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 134

23 J.M. Kenoyer, 'New Perspectives on the Mauryan and Kushana Periods', in P. Olivelle (ed.), *Between the Empires: Society in India 300 BCE to 400 CE* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 46.

## V

Functionalist, adaptive and processualist approaches to culture and cultural change have given rise to numerous inferences about the presence of an incipient caste-based, multi-ethnic population within the Indus Civilisation. However, since archaeologists now also strive to ensure that their scholarship is anthropologically informed, we cannot overlook the fact that their representations of the Civilisation's social structures and ethnicities, which are mainly inferred from specialist craft production technologies and stylistic similarities in artefact types and their decorations, go against the caution of social anthropologists that people 'can't be put into a box anymore'. Moreover, India and Africa are now identified by anthropologists as 'obvious examples' of places that include societies of long-standing superdiversity.<sup>24</sup> The historical fact of this superdiversity – understood as the 'diversification of diversity' – in South Asia leads us to question the way in which archaeological inferences about social identities are forged from artefacts, and to dismiss the assertion, often made by archaeologists, that past markers of identity can simply be uncovered and understood through archaeological fieldwork.

In order to identify continuities between the Indus Civilisation and the subsequent cultural histories of early India, archaeologists of the twenty-first century have also shown a renewed interest in sourcing Sanskrit and Pali texts, many of which are vastly disparate in terms of both chronology and intent, from which to glean the 'idea of an ancient Indian/South Asian Civilisation'. On the basis of comparisons and juxtapositions of patently mismatched textual and archaeological 'sources', we are told that 'the very fact that authorities both in the Harappan and Ganges civilisation expressed their ethos in similar material symbols – various forms of fortification, circumvallation – indicates that the forms of authorities in these two civilisations may have been similar as well', and that the 'deep structure' of the South Asian Civilisation, which developed from the Neolithic period onwards, can be defined by 'five traits; namely, agricultural economy, an orally transmitted code of conduct, an orally transmitted sacred knowledge, an idiosyncratic sociocultural system, and a set of ritual and sacrificial practices'.<sup>25</sup> This new archaeological literature

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24 J.N. Jørgensen and K. Juffermans, 'Superdiversity', November 2011, <http://hdl.handle.net/10993/6656>

25 P.A. Eltsov, *From Harappa to Hastinapura: A Study of the Earliest South Asian City and Civilization* (Boston, MA and Leiden: Brill, 2008), pp. 165, 185.

seeks to be politically correct in terms of its intellectual framework, and constitutes the grand civilisational tradition of South Asia since the distant past as one which was multi-ethnic, multi-lingual and religiously diverse. Nonetheless, even this new literature overlooks the blatant essentialism embedded in the idea of a unique South Asian civilisational ethos. After all, few academic archaeologists would care to propose the archaeological history of a unique, age-old civilisational ethos for western Europe, North America, Britain, France, the United States, or any other regional or national domain of the 'western' world.

Processualist archaeology was developed by the New Archaeologists of the 1960s, but had fallen out of favour by the late 1980s, when archaeologists came to recognise that the inherent positivism of the processualist approach encouraged an abject disregard for human agency, and hence also for the basic responsibilities of archaeological scholarship. Although the processualist school of thought has long been out of fashion in theoretical archaeology, its tropes have continued to guide studies of the Indus Civilisation, especially in North American scholarship on the subject since the late 1980s. This outmoded approach, which is most obviously apparent in the schemes of periodisation that are developed on the basis of the functionalist constructs of traditions, eras and phases, takes no notice of the theoretical slippage that occurs in establishing evidence of social identities through evidence of a society's production technologies. Thus, inferences regarding the existence of specialist craftsmen within the Indus Civilisation are routinely drawn upon to show the presence of kin and caste groups, and evidence of the spatial demarcation of the different crafts and manufacturing processes within the cities is presented as evidence of social segregation, and of the possible existence of a caste system.<sup>26</sup> Given that western archaeologists often criticise their non-western counterparts for failing to adopt new theoretical approaches, the continued dominance of the processualist school of thought in the archaeology of the Indus Civilisation is somewhat surprising, and demonstrates the theoretical poverty of even 'western' studies of South Asian archaeology. In this respect, the archaeological construct of a 'Great South Asian Tradition' through the modern scholarship of the Indus Civilisation forces us to interrogate the intellectual and moral obligations of today's 'post-colonial' archaeology.

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26 For an early example see K.K. Bhan, M. Vidale and J.M. Kenoyer, 'Harappan Technology: Theoretical and Methodological Issues', *Man and Environment*, 19, 1994, pp. 141-57.

