

Indian Archaeology After Independence

Amalananda Ghosh and His Legacy

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First published 2026

ISBN: 978-1-041-00258-1 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-1-003-60741-0 (ebk)

Chapter 3

Amalananda Ghosh as Director-General (1953–68)

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DOI: 10.4324/9781003607410-3



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Taylor & Francis Group

LONDON AND NEW YORK

3 Amalananda Ghosh as Director-General (1953–68)

Two broad phases may be distinguished in the history of post – 1947 Indian archaeology, one up to the early 1970s and the other from the early 1970s to the end of the 20th century. ... What one immediately notices after 1947 is a rapid acceleration of discoveries in the field of prehistory and protohistory. Definitive publications on the prehistoric sections of various river valleys began to appear regularly in Ancient India and a more recent Archaeological Survey of India publication, Indian Archaeology – A Review.¹

Within this delineation of post-1947 developments of Indian archaeology, it is important to highlight the comprehensive research agenda of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) under Amalananda Ghosh. This included generation of archaeological knowledge on pre- and protohistory but also excavations of historical sites. Other items on the new DG's list were the setting up of site museums to display the artefacts from excavations to visitors; initiating a village-to-village survey; the standardisation of Guidebooks to popularise the study of cultural heritage; and promoting an understanding of Indian Archaeology within an Asian context, rather than through a Graeco-Roman lens.

Shri A. Ghosh, in whose time the Survey made all-round progress and who had started a new series in the publications of the Survey [*Indian Archaeology – A Review*], in the preface of the *Review* gave the background and the need for a publication of this kind after the *Archaeological Survey of India – Annual Report* had ceased publication; the last issue being for the year 1937–38. In course of time, *the Review* became an indispensable work of reference. During his tenure, Shri Ghosh was able to publish as many as twelve issues – the last being for the year 1964–65.²

This broad mandate of ASI needs to be reiterated, as some scholars have tended to place undue emphasis on the search for sites associated with the

Indus civilisation in newly independent India. Consider for example the following:

The intense explorations to locate sites related to the Indus civilisation along the Ghaggar-Hakra, mostly by the Archaeological Survey of India immediately after Indian independence (from the 1950s through the '70s), although ostensibly following Sir Aurel Stein's explorations in 1942, were to a large extent initiated by a patriotic zeal for the loss of this more ancient civilisation by the newly freed nation ...³

The policies adopted by Ghosh will be evaluated in this and the next few chapters, to present an overview of the development of archaeology under his stewardship and will include the development of archaeology of Buddhism (Chapter 7), salvage archaeology (Chapter 6), and Asian archaeology (Chapter 8). In 1959, the Government of India had deputed Ghosh to head the Indian Co-operation Mission in Nepal and to advise His Majesty's Government of Nepal about the improvement of archaeology in the country. Ghosh visited Kathmandu for ten days in May and June 1960, and one of the outcomes of this mission was the excavations at Tilaurakot and Kodan by a team of ASI, as will be discussed in detail in Chapter 7. The collaboration and cooperation in archaeological excavations in Asian countries is an initiative that lost out with the retirement of the DG as the new emphasis under his successor B.B. Lal shifted to the archaeology of the Epics.

A crucial difference between Ghosh and British Director-Generals (DGs) was that his scholarship was rooted in the cultural history of India, rather than in the Classics or in Romano-British archaeology, as was the case with Marshall and Wheeler, respectively. This point was stressed by Krishna Deva in his interviews with M. C. Joshi (vol. IV) and is evident in the many new initiatives in the post-1947 period, some of which such as the Temple Survey Project will be discussed in this chapter. In forging collaborations with universities and in promoting the archaeology of religions, Ghosh followed in the footsteps of Rao Bahadur K. N. Dikshit and other DGs who preceded him.

The Predecessors

In terms of the scope and function of the Archaeological Survey of India, renamed the Department of Archaeology under the Ministry of Education,⁴ the partition of the subcontinent in 1947 brought about a major administrative change, with the Frontier Circle getting detached from the organisation. In terms of the appointment of Wheeler's successor, N. P. Chakravarti (1893–1956) took over as DG on 30 April 1948. A graduate in Sanskrit and Pali from the University of Calcutta, he continued his studies at the Sorbonne in Paris and the University of Berlin, before completing his PhD at the

University of Cambridge in 1926. On his return to India in 1929, he joined ASI as the Assistant Superintendent for Epigraphy. In 1938, he carried out an extensive survey of the caves at Bandhavgarh in central India and documented the inscriptions. In 1940, he was promoted to the rank of Deputy Director-General of the Archaeological Survey of India and then the rank of Joint Director-General in 1945. This was a special post, which the Government had created on a temporary basis on the recommendation of Wheeler.⁵

Two important events mark Chakravarti's tenure: one was the organisation of an exhibition in New Delhi incorporating the sculptures and objects that had been displayed at a Royal Academy-sponsored exhibition in London in 1947. The second was the visit to India of the distinguished German Professor of Environmental Archaeology at the Institute of Archaeology, University of London, Frederick E. Zeuner (1905–63). In early 1949, the Department of Archaeology, where the post of a prehistorian had been revived under Wheeler, and the Deccan College Postgraduate Research Institute, Poona (with the support of the Wadia and Tata Trusts), jointly organised an expedition to explore the possibility of collaborative research in the prehistory of India. This included students and officers of the Archaeology Department. The lectures given by Zeuner during his visit were subsequently published.⁶ Chakravarti retired on 30 April 1950 though he continued in the Department as Adviser. He was responsible for work connected with monuments in the former Princely States and that related to the setting up of the National Museum. Chakravarti was succeeded by Madho Swarup Vats from 30 June 1950 to 2 March 1953.

The appointment of Vats was mired in a painful controversy, thanks to Wheeler. During the last year of his tenure, Wheeler had judged his Indian men harshly, except Ghosh whom he had recommended for foreign training. Vats received the worst treatment from him. Despite his careful approach and considered conclusions on the subject, Vats was surprisingly characterised by Wheeler as 'timid' and 'one who lacks initiative' in his Confidential Report as also in Service Books of most other eligible Indian officers including Vats' predecessor, N.P. Chakravarti. Records reveal that this was most likely done by Wheeler in a desperate hope of getting an extension for another term as DG since all juniors were red-inked, and there would be no one fit to replace him.⁷ Trained in Sanskrit, an epigraphist of high order, and an old Harappan hand, Vats must have read the first despatch from Ghosh's camp in 1950 about the discovery of new Harappan sites in Bikaner intently, but he remained equanimous (Figure 3.1).

Vats had excavated at Harappa and Mohenjo-daro, had produced a two-volume tome on Harappa, and had taken trial trenches at two Harappan sites discovered by him on the Sutlej River in (now Indian) Punjab, *viz.* Kotla Nihang Khan and Chak Purbane Syal (1929–30),⁸ and had also declared, after a trial trench at Rangpur in Gujarat (Limbdī taluka), its Harappan affiliation in 1934.⁹ He is credited with suggesting to Marshall somewhere in April 1924, a pre-Iron Age for Harappa and Mohenjo-daro, leading Marshall to his



Figure 3.1 M. S. Vats, DG, ASI (in the centre, with A. Ghosh on his right) during his visit to Bikaner Survey Camp at Suratgarh, 13 Dec. 1950. (Courtesy ASI).

subsequent announcement of the discovery in 1924.¹⁰ Vats, unlike Marshall and later Wheeler, could have summoned Ghosh and made an announcement of new discoveries, but he shunned utilisation of newly found sites to bolster his sinking career, nor was something of this sort done by N.P. Chakravarti, who was the Adviser. Neither personal aggrandisement nor any national streak was on display on that occasion in ASI. The organisation he served was less beholden to him than what he thought and what he deserved.

Amalananda Ghosh and His Journey in ASI

Born on 3 March 1910 in Varanasi, Amalananda Ghosh completed post-graduation in History in 1931 at the University of Allahabad. From the distinguished Sanskrit scholar Kshetresha Chandra Chattopadhyaya (1896–1974) who taught at Allahabad, Ghosh acquired a passion for the study of Sanskrit which stayed with him throughout his life. This is evident from his published papers on Sanskrit literature and Epigraphy. His handwritten genealogy in Sanskrit is perhaps a rare glimpse that he provides into his family and private life.¹¹ Once when asked what life had taught him, he replied, ‘I am not sure if life has taught me anything at all. Even if it has, it is my personal experience and has no relevance to others.’¹²

Ghosh joined ASI in 1937 and worked as Assistant Superintendent (since redesignated as Deputy Superintending Archaeologist) until 1944 when he was promoted to the post of Superintendent (currently redesignated as Superintending Archaeologist). In 1948–49, he attended Advanced Training in Archaeology at the Institute of Archaeology, University of London. From 1949 to 1952, he worked as Deputy Director-General for Exploration and as Joint Director-General from 1952 to 1953. Despite his administrative duties in ASI, Ghosh continued to edit *Indian Archaeology – A Review* and wrote regularly in the ASI publication *Ancient India*. In addition are his numerous contributions on numismatics, art, architecture, and archaeology. His lasting contributions include the two-volume edited work *An Encyclopaedia of Indian Archaeology*¹³ and the three-volume *Jaina Art and Architecture*.¹⁴

Madho Sarup Vats retired as DG on 2 March 1953 and Amalananda Ghosh took charge of the Archaeological Department, and it fell upon him ‘to translate into reality the schemes prepared by his predecessors.’¹⁵ Not one to claim sole credit, Ghosh remarked on the advances that had been made in prehistoric archaeology, while at the same time acknowledging the work done by officials of other institutions such as the Geological Survey of India, as well as foreign explorers. In the field of conservation of monuments, the States had contributed to the preservation of monuments like Sanchi, Ajanta, Ellora, Halebid, Belur, Somanathpur, and Mandu well-known globally for their architecture and beauty. He credited ASI and historians for contributions to Indian Epigraphy and praised the joint efforts of the Archaeology Department for setting up museums. He emphasised the need to collaborate with other countries and scholars for research and for the development of Indian archaeology.¹⁶

During his tenure of one and a half decades, Ghosh formulated a clear policy for excavations-explorations, conservation, and landscaping. He streamlined publications and launched an annual publication entitled *Indian Archaeology – A Review* to provide information on ongoing archaeological projects conducted by the ASI, state governments, universities, and research institutions. The ASI’s centenary celebrations organised under the leadership of Ghosh, turned out to be a major forum for interaction among archaeologists from across Asia. In many ways, the Survey is still working within the standards and methods formulated by Ghosh during his stint as leader of the organization.¹⁷

Many of Ghosh’s initiatives continue to date, such as the village-to-village survey, with some such as the School of Archaeology having been since upgraded. Others like the Prehistory and Temple Survey branches endure, with seven monographs having been published by the latter. In the Budget speech of the Finance Minister in 2020, five of the site museums were set for conversion to iconic status. These included museums at archaeological sites of Rakhigarhi (Haryana), Hastinapur (Uttar Pradesh), Sivasagar (Assam),

Dholavira (Gujarat), and Adichanallur (Tamil Nadu). It is some of these new initiatives of the Archaeology Department that we highlight in the next few sections. In a significant departure interest in Asian archaeology languished among Ghosh's successors as will be shown in Chapter 9. However, it may be best to start with a brief overview of his excavations at the start of his career in ASI to place later developments in perspective.

The Excavations at Ahichchhatra

As recommended by Woolley and discussed in Chapter 2, Ghosh undertook excavations at Ahichchhatra between 1940 and 1944 under the then DG, K.N. Dikshit (Figure 3.2). The site of Ahichchhatra was located near the village of Ramnagar in Aonla tehsil of Bareilly district of Uttar Pradesh and was known for its large fortress with 34 bastions locally famous as Pandu's fort. The city finds mention in early Sanskrit texts such as the Vedas and the *Mahabharata* and is described as the capital of Panchala Mahajanpada around the sixth and fourth centuries BCE. It is an archaeologically rich site with remains of Hindu temples, adorned with beautiful life-size terracotta images of the river goddesses Ganga and Yamuna, now in the National Museum, New Delhi. At the same time, it was a centre of pilgrimage for the Jains and a major sacred site for the Buddhists, as Alexander Cunningham identified a stupa about 3 km from the fortifications during his visit in 1862 (Figure 3.3). However, it was its longevity as a settlement that attracted the



Figure 3.2 The mound at Ahichchhatra. (Courtesy ASI).



Figure 3.3 Bodhisattva image found in a house in Ramnagar village. (Courtesy ASI).

attention of Woolley as Ahichchhatra continued to be inhabited until the eleventh century.

As Superintendent in-charge of the Excavation Branch, Ghosh was a member of the team that carried out excavations at the extensive fortified site along with other members in the Department, such as K. N. Puri, K. C. Panigrahi, Krishna Deva, C. C. Das Gupta, S. S. Mukherjee, and Fazal Ahmad Khan. The site had been identified by Alexander Cunningham as the capital of the ancient Panchala kingdom. The excavations unearthed two terraced brick temples and recovered a wealth of terracotta images, coins, and other objects.

A detailed analysis of the pottery from Ahichchhatra by K. C. Panigrahi with an introduction to the excavations by A. Ghosh was published in *Ancient India* number 1, the new Journal of ASI initiated by Mortimer Wheeler.¹⁸ One sentence from Ghosh's Introduction to the site stands out: 'It may be said at once that excavation did not reveal anything prehistoric, and any attempt to connect the city with the Ahichchhatra of the *Mahabharata* must be regarded premature.'¹⁹ This academic rigour and caution in making popular connections with the Sanskrit Epics was a hallmark of the work of A. Ghosh.



Figure 3.4 Detailed view of terracottas in AC V, Ahichchhatra excavations. (Courtesy ASI).

The site of Ahichchhatra yielded a large corpus of animal and human figurines in terracotta covering a period from 300 BCE to approximately 1100 CE, which were briefly presented in the initial report in *Ancient India* 1 (Figures 3.4 and 3.5). Subsequently, Vasudeva Sharan Agrawala worked out a detailed classification of the human figurines from the site. Agrawala was a Superintendent of ASI for the Central Asian Antiquities Museum in Delhi, which he joined in 1946 and resigned by 1950 due to differences with Wheeler and NP Chakravarti.

Agrawala's thematic categorisation carefully notes the in-site distribution of terracotta figurines and their clustering in the part of the mound marked as ACIII.²⁰ The terracotta images from the site were distributed to various museums across India, primarily in the National Museum, New Delhi; the Allahabad Museum; and the State Museum, Lucknow. Clearly the excavations at Ahichchhatra in the 1940s had a somewhat limited objective, which was primarily focussed on working out the chronology of the site based on the pottery sequence.

Stuart Piggott (1910–96) was a self-taught field archaeologist who succeeded Gordon Childe to the Abercromby Chair of Archaeology at the University of Edinburgh in 1946. During the war, he was assigned to the Military Air Photographic Intelligence corps in the RAF in 1942 and was posted to India. He had spent two years in India and wrote to Mortimer Wheeler of his impressions of the state of Indian archaeology and his visit to



Figure 3.5 Three-headed female terracotta image from Ahichchhatra. (Courtesy ASI).

the site of Ahichchhatra near Ramnagar. He expressed his opinion of the archaeological work done as follows:

They have however done some good work at Ramnagar in working out a pottery sequence from Mauryan to Gupta and have produced what seems an adequate section through the rampart and later brick wall surrounding the site. But by normal Middle East standards and still more of course by European ones, the technique is imperfect.²¹

The excavations at the site were resumed during 1963–65;²² 2007–2009; 2009–10; 2010–11 and 2012–14 by ASI in different localities both inside and outside the fortification walls. Subsequent excavations in 1963–65 to recover carbon remains for dating the site have pushed back the beginnings to the Painted Grey Ware phase dated to 1500 BCE. The emphasis in the 2009–11 seasons was to understand the plant economy of the site. The botanical remains were retrieved by water floatation technique from two trenches and Birbal Sahni Institute of Palaeobotany, Lucknow, analysed the samples.²³ This analysis has provided information on advanced agricultural practices in the region.²⁴ Despite these excavations over the years emphasising the

importance of the site of Ahichchhatra, what is missing is a comprehensive publication evaluating the archaeological evidence against other sources such as coins or literary references. One of the few publications on this important site continues to be dated 1939 and is solely based on textual accounts and coins,²⁵ with a readable and comprehensive overview of the archaeological excavations in *An Encyclopaedia of Indian Archaeology*.²⁶

The Prehistory Branch

The beginnings of the study of Indian prehistory are credited to Robert Bruce Foote of the Geological Survey of India and his discovery of the famous sites of Pallavaram and Attirampakkam in Tamilnadu in 1863.

A substantial part of Foote's early collection had been given away by him, either as presents or in barter, to British prehistoric archaeologists at the time of his stay in England in 1868. The remainder, along with his fresher collection, was presented by him to the Geological Survey of India; it then found its way to the Indian Museum, Calcutta. In 1887, while officiating as Director of that Survey, Foote recovered part of it by exchange. Later, when his collection grew too large to be privately housed, he offered it to the Government of Madras, which purchased the whole of it for the Government Museum.²⁷

Ghosh regretted the fact that ASI undertook research in prehistory only in 1942, when it joined hands with H. D. Sankalia for exploring the Sabarmati valley in Gujarat. The Survey deputed a team consisting of V. D. Krishnaswamy, B. K. Chatterjee, a draftsman-surveyor and a photographer to assist in the fieldwork.

Krishnaswami finally joined ASI in 1946 as discussed in the last chapter and was posted to the Southern Circle, Madras, where he was entrusted with the task of carrying out a survey of Megalithic sites. In an overview of research in Prehistory written by Krishnaswami, not only did he present a comprehensive survey of sites but also referred to contemporary developments elsewhere in Asia.²⁸ In 1958, an independent Prehistory Branch was set up by the ASI with its headquarters at Nagpur, and the last six decades have seen many important research projects carried out by the Branch.

In the Presidential Address to the Prehistoric Society of India, Third Annual Conference in December 1975, Ghosh recollected that,

when I began, an Indian archaeologist was not expected to know much of the Stone Ages. ... In the late thirties, the University of Calcutta started its work in the Kuliana valley in Orissa, and shortly after that the Archaeological Survey organized an expedition in the Sabarmati valley in Gujarat. Incidentally, the latter, though the first of its kind organized by the Survey, did not include any person from the Survey

itself; this fact is its own commentary on the prevailing technical limitations of the Survey to undertake this kind of work. Somehow, neoliths and microliths seemed nearer to our heart than palaeoliths. In 1940, I collected bagfuls of microliths from the rock-shelters of Pachmarhi. ... It was only in the mid-fifties that the Survey could have a real Prehistoric Branch. By then prehistory had become a progressive branch of Indian archaeology, thanks to the activities not only of the Archaeological Survey but of other institutions, particularly the Deccan College under the leadership of Sankalia, and other institutions did not lag behind. Indeed, year after year, I had to face the criticism of the Central Advisory Board of Archaeology that I was encouraging prehistoric research to the detriment of other branches of archaeology. I regarded the criticism as unjustified.²⁹

This quote, as also the points made in the Presidential Address, presents a counter position to the undue emphasis often placed by present-day authors on the so-called 'nationalist' search for Harappan sites in the country in the early years of Independence.

Site/Archaeological Museums

In his Report, Woolley critically examined the Department's policy on site museums and referred to those that had been set up under John Marshall at Sarnath (1904), Nalanda (1917), Taxila, Mohenjo-daro, Harappa, and Sanchi (1919). He suggested closing many of these, since these often did not fulfil the three functions of a site museum of which housing and preservation of antiquities was only one. The second was to advance knowledge of the site either by study of the objects through its own staff or other researchers, and the third was accessibility to the public. Woolley continued that the concept of the site museum had been adopted from the practice in Greece but was not viable in a large country like India, given the distances and the inaccessibility of many of the archaeological sites.³⁰ Instead, Woolley strongly argued in favour of setting up a National Museum in Delhi.

In 1947 the number of site museums in India was nine, with three having gone to Pakistan. The tenure of A. Ghosh witnessed a phenomenal growth in site museums and their number increased to 20 by 1968, as stated by I. K. Sarma (1937–2013), who joined the Archaeological Survey and later took over as Director of Salarjang Museum, Hyderabad, from 1993 to 1997.³¹ At present archaeological site museums dot the entire country.³² Of these archaeological site museums, the Kondapur Museum will be discussed here.

Located 69 Km northwest of Hyderabad, the cultural deposit at Kondapur extends over a 1-Km area. The site was first explored by Henry Cousens (1854–1933), the Scottish archaeologist and photographer and a member of the Western Division of the Archaeological Survey. In 1941–42

Ghulam Yazdani (1885–1962) excavated the site on behalf of the Archaeological Department of the Nizam of Hyderabad. The excavated material showed that Kondapur was a thriving town from around the second century BCE to the third century CE as indicated by finds of terracotta tiles, large-sized brick, and well-laid floors, though its beginnings date to the prehistoric period.

Terracotta figurines made from double moulds, clay bullae made in imitation of Roman coins, and a large collection of personal ornaments indicate the prosperity of the site. This was further substantiated by finds of nearly two thousand coins including a gold coin of Augustus, ten silver punch-marked coins, a hundred potin coins of the second century CE and a mould for minting punch-marked coins. A wide variety of ceramics, such as mould-made pots, Red Polished Ware, Russet-coated painted ware, and Rouletted ware, indicate the wider networks of the site extending both eastward along the east coast as well as into Gujarat and further south in Karnataka. As was also usual in the Early Historical period, Kondapur was home to a Buddhist monastic community represented in the archaeological excavations by stupas and viharas.³³ Kondapur shares several common cultural features, such as the presence of terracottas made in double moulds with two other sites, those of Sannathi in Gulbarga district and Ter in district Osmanabad. Few inscriptions are known from Kondapur, but it stands out for its production of hundreds of terracotta images made from kaolin. These represent deities such as Boddhisattvas, yaksas, yaksinis, and other religious or semi-religious beings. The modelling of these terracotta images is exquisite and presents expressive faces and elaborate coiffures.

In 1941, a small museum had been set up near the site to house the artefacts recovered during excavations. In 1952, it was transferred from the Hyderabad Government to the Government of India and placed under the Museums Branch of the Department. Steps were taken to provide suitable showcases and labels, to prepare registers, etc., and to form a reserve collection in a classified way. A scheme for adding to the existing building was also prepared.³⁴ The museum has three galleries that display a varied collection of artefacts, viz. pottery, sculptures, terracotta figurines, bone and shell objects, beads, inscribed pottery, coins, and tools. The Buddhapada (stone footprint of the Buddha), an image of a four-armed Vishnu on a door jamb, and storage jars with inscriptions are some of the key exhibits.

In a Note on Archaeological Museums, Ghosh stressed their specific requirements in terms of presenting a holistic understanding of a site and its collection, rather than merely focussing on the aesthetics of the sculptures or the imagery. Archaeological excavations unearth a range of objects and material remains, and these need to be displayed in such a way as to engage the attention of the visitor. He also cautioned against thinning out duplicates of an object found in excavations and relegating the additional specimens to reserve collections. He explained:

If enormous numbers of the same or similar objects have been found in an excavation, the fact is singularly significant in that it reveals that these objects played such an important part of the economy or practices of the people that they had to be used in large numbers.³⁵

However, the setting up of archaeological museums did not appeal to the Committee set up by M. C. Chagla, Minister of Education, in 1965 to suggest improvements in the working of ASI. The four-member Committee was constituted under the chairmanship of Mortimer Wheeler and included Niharranjan Ray, H. D. Sankalia, and Nurul Hasan. The Report suggested that

Site-Museums are an important addition to sites which are themselves of instructional interest, sites such as Delhi Fort, Sarnath, Nalanda or Sanchi. But a Site-Museum difficult to access and situated half a mile from a site of which nothing can be seen above ground is almost valueless. The site in question is Kondapur in Andhra Pradesh, where a Curator of the Survey has been at some pains to arrange a Site-Museum which very few people are likely to visit. It is essential that a site be worthy of its site-museum.³⁶

This recommendation goes against the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO's) December 1956 Recommendation on International Principles Applicable to Archaeological Excavations which specifically mentions the need for site museums.³⁷ As will be discussed in Chapter 6, Wheeler had to backtrack on his decision to close down the site museum at Nagarjunakonda, but he does not seem to have learnt from it.

National Museum, Delhi

The proposal for a museum in Delhi was first mooted when the capital was shifted from Calcutta to Delhi in 1912.³⁸ At that time the suggestion was to set up an Ethnological Museum in Delhi, though this had to be shelved for lack of funds. In 1936 a five-year plan for the development of Delhi was contemplated, and the requirement of a Central Museum worthy of the capital found mention in it. There was however no unanimity on the site to be selected for the purpose.³⁹ Mortimer Wheeler, Director-General of the Archaeological Survey of India, strongly supported the setting up of a national museum and in 1945 drew up a detailed proposal for the purpose.⁴⁰ The *Hindustan Times* of 20 August 1945 carried the report that a New Museum was proposed to be built in Delhi under the Reorganisation scheme of the Archaeology Department at an initial cost of Rupees one crore and with a recurring expenditure of about Rupees seven lakhs. The scheme, the newspaper stated had been generally approved by the Education Standing Committee

presided over by the member for Education, Health and Lands, which met in Simla during the weekend.⁴¹ The National Museum was initiated under the aegis of the ASI, but there was still a long way to go before these recommendations could be implemented and the museum became a reality.

An exhibition was organised in 1948, which went to London a year later. On its return, this exhibition was housed in Rashtrapati Bhavan; a catalogue was printed for it and an album of representative art objects was brought out. In his report to the Central Advisory Board of Archaeology (CABA) Meeting on 14 August 1953, Ghosh stated that the National Museum has continued in the Rashtrapati Bhavan since 1950 and pending the appointment of a Director, the Archaeology Department had been made responsible for its maintenance and administration (Figure 3.6). In 1951–52, the Archaeology Department had submitted a six-year scheme, but progress had been slow and only the first stage was reached by 1953. Many sculptures exhibited in the open in the main foreground in Rashtrapati Bhavan were shifted to the sculpture gallery in the Central Asian Antiquities



Figure 3.6 The Education Minister Maulana Azad addressing the CABA meeting of 1953. A. Ghosh is seated to his right after Humayun Kabir. (Courtesy Asim Ghosh).

Museum premises. While a few state governments agreed to the Museum retaining objects that had been sent to London, others asked for them to be returned.⁴²

A series of 14 lectures by eminent scholars was held, and the Films Division of the Government of India produced a documentary on the collection.

Immediately after the close of the exhibition, the National Museum idea gained more strength than ever before, and appeals by the Government to the owners of the exhibits for the extended loan of all the art objects that had gone to London having generally borne fruit, it was decided to make continued use of the State Rooms of the Government House (now Rashtrapati Bhavan) for temporarily housing the National Museum.⁴³

The Museum continued to be in the charge of the ASI until 1958 when it became an independent institution under the control of the Government of India.

The core of the National Museum's early collections resulted from purchases, as also gifts by wealthy Indian families who had amassed or inherited Indian objects at a time when European items dominated the definitions of aesthetics and Indian objects were barely admired for their artistic value. The National Museum's collecting committee comprised seasoned connoisseurs and scholars including Moti Chandra, Karl Khandalavala, and Rai Krishnadasa. The Ministry of Education proposed that letters of request specifically be sent to the Maharajas of Bikaner, Udaipur, Jaipur, Mysore, Rampur, Jodhpur, Gwalior, and Hyderabad in order to secure their family treasures for the National Museum.⁴⁴

Imre Schwaiger (1868–1940) was, in his age, a well-known collector and dealer of art. He was based in London and Delhi between the two World Wars. He was among the first to collect Nepalese art and organised the first exhibition of Nepalese bronzes in Calcutta in 1912. Many important pieces of the Victoria and Albert Museum, particularly of its Mughal collection, but also four pieces of Gandhara art, came from him. The first few objects to be acquired for the National Museum were purchased from Schwaiger, while subsequently the Museum received gifts, permanent loans from the ASI, as also objects in exchange until 1987.

The foundation stone of the present building of the National Museum on Janpath was laid by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the Prime Minister of India, on 12 May 1955, and the first phase was formally inaugurated by Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, the then Vice President of India, on 18 December 1960. The Government appointed the American museologist Grace Louise McCann Morley (1900–1985) as the founding director of the National Museum. Morley had worked in the San Francisco Museum in the United States and as a consultant to UNESCO but had no training or

competence in Indian art. In an interview in 1982, she credited C. Sivaramamurti, an eminent scholar in Sanskrit, art history and iconography and other members of her staff for support. Sivaramamurti later became assistant director and eventually succeeded Morley in 1966.⁴⁵ Wheeler envisaged close collaboration between the museum and the Archaeological Survey, with field archaeology and conservation of structures remaining the domain of the Survey, while indoor archaeology and preservation of movable objects would be with the museum. With the appointment of Morley, the National Museum became an independent institution that reported directly to the Ministry of Culture and the umbilical cord that joined it with ASI was cut.

Beyond the Taxila Training Camp

Woolley mentioned the Department's policy in encouraging volunteers to join the excavations. In the previous chapter reference had been made to Indian scholars who had been trained under Marshall in the Archaeology Department. Some of them joined the Department, but others such as Syed Muhammad Yusuf, Assistant Director of Archaeology in the State who was sponsored by the Nizam's Government in Hyderabad, was trained for 18 months in 1930 and returned to his parent Department in Hyderabad.⁴⁶ In another case, a request was made by Travancore State to the Archaeology Department in July 1931 when Daya Ram Sahni had taken charge as DG to train R. Vasudeva Puduval for three months. Puduval was a graduate of Madras University and had worked in the archaeology department of Travancore for three years. The DG turned down the request as three months was too short a time to gain deeper knowledge of the different aspects of archaeology. As a compromise (as there were no digs in that year due to budgetary constraints) a six-month training was agreed and organised in the succeeding year 1932.⁴⁷

This practice of involving students and officers from different parts of the country during excavation continued after 1947. At the site of Sisupalgarh near Bhubaneswar in Odisha, the excavations were carried out by the Excavation Branch of the Department with assistance from other members of the staff. Over 40 research students from universities and attaches from China and Sri Lanka joined the excavations. The work was facilitated by the Odisha Government, who also deputed their officers and lecturers.⁴⁸ Nor was this a solitary example, as students from India and other countries continued to participate in ASI's excavations. For example, in 1953–54 trainees joined the camp at Rupar in Punjab and among others included a Chinese and a Thai student.⁴⁹

Before the establishment of the School of Archaeology in 1959, ASI had also undertaken training of interested students in epigraphy and field archaeology and permitted many of them to join the excavations at Ujjain and Lothal in 1957–58. The Department received applications for training

at excavation sites not only from universities within the country but also from officers sponsored by the Governments of Nepal, Malaya, and Burma for the purpose. Many of the foreign trainees came under the auspices of the Technical Cooperation Scheme (Colombo Plan) – 1957–58.⁵⁰ As detailed in a letter from Shri N. R. Banerjee, Superintendent, Excavations Branch, the excavation camp at Ujjain could accommodate either ten men candidates or eight men and two women candidates. The trainees would be provided with rent-free furnished tent accommodation, and they could earn their messing by their work at a common mess run for the staff and trainees.⁵¹ The selected candidates were required to join the Excavation Camp at their own expense, and there was no guarantee of employment on completion of the training. Applications had to be recommended by the Head of the Department of the educational or other institution.

In a letter to the in-charge of excavations, Ghosh forwarded a two-page form detailing the training to be imparted to the student and also the assessment of the trainee by the in-charge of the excavations.⁵² After the excavations at Ujjain, some trainees requested that they be allowed to join excavation camps in their home states. A case in point is that of Rajendra Prasad Das, Lecturer in History, Ravenshaw College, Cuttack, who requested permission to join the excavation camp in Jaugada before he rejoined the Excavation Branch, Delhi, for training in methods of interpretation of archaeological data.⁵³ Unfortunately, his request could not be accepted as the training camp was about to close. Training was by no means a routine matter as Ghosh was personally invested in following up on the training requirements of the trainees. For example, he suggested to Shri Durgalal, Curator, Central Museum, Jaipur, sponsored by the Government of Rajasthan to join the excavations at Lothal. After that, he should also visit the excavations at Ujjain and study the pottery collection in Delhi.⁵⁴ Some familiar names who benefitted from the training programme included M. C. Joshi (department candidate), American scholar Lawrence S. Leshnik, T. N. Roy, R. C. Sharma, K. K. Thaplyal, Ms. K. Purna Aiyer, Ms. Sharda Kapahi, and many others.

In 1959, ASI revived the training programme with the setting up of a School of Archaeology, which offered a 20-month Diploma in Archaeology including both theoretical and practical training in the discipline. The intake was limited to ten so that successful students could find ready employment on completion of training. Ghosh argued that formally scientifically trained archaeologists were necessary for a 'correct' archaeology where fieldwork figured as a very important aspect. This was the expectation behind the establishment of the School of Archaeology:

A prerequisite to an expansion of archaeological activities in the country is training, for it goes without saying that lack or inadequacy of training would lead to unskilled work and unreliable results, which are worse than no work and no results.⁵⁵

Prof. Niharranjan Ray speaking at the Second Convocation of the School of Archaeology gave three reasons for welcoming the decision of Shri A. Ghosh to institute a course in the modern concepts and techniques of archaeology:

First, because it was necessary to de-amateurize archaeology. ...; secondly, to divest the subject of its long and almost absolute obsession with art and monuments on the one hand and written records, be it even epigraphy or numismatics on the other; and thirdly, to enable us to systematize the knowledge and experience our leading professional archaeologists have been acquiring since Sir Mortimer Wheeler came into the field of Indian archaeology; and prepare more and more young men and women for a serious pursuit of the subject on modern lines.⁵⁶

The 1965 – Wheeler Committee Report made some useful suggestions regarding the Training Programme conducted by ASI. It recommended that lectures should include the archaeology of adjacent regions such as Iran, Iraq, Anatolia, Egypt, and Southeast Asia to widen the students' geographical and cultural knowledge. 'When conditions permit, it should be possible to send small teams from the Survey to take part in excavations in these overseas territories, as was recently done in the UNESCO salvage operations in Nubia.'⁵⁷

In 1985, the School was renamed the Institute of Archaeology and continues to train post-graduates in archaeology though over the last four decades, the intake has risen nominally to 15. In 2000 the Government of India set up a review committee with B.B. Lal as Chairman. One of the terms of reference was the restructuring of the Institute of Archaeology. As stated by Lal, the Committee recommended that a full-fledged autonomous National Institute of Archaeology and Art History should be set up, but no action seems to have been taken on this.⁵⁸ It is significant that the Institute now renamed Pt. Deen Dayal Institute of Archaeology continues to honour the memory of Amalananda Ghosh by holding a Special Lecture on 25 August to mark his Death Anniversary each year (Figure 3.7).

Temple Survey Project

Another initiative taken by Ghosh was the setting up of the Temple Survey Project. Alexander Cunningham's nineteenth-century search for Buddhist sites nevertheless led him to the recovery of a varied archaeological landscape, including the earliest Hindu temples dated to the Gupta period in central India at Nachna, Eran, Tigawa, and so on. Rare examples of ninth- and tenth-century Saiva monasteries were discovered at Ranod (1864–65) in Gwalior and at Chandrehi, though Cunningham underestimated their importance. This was matched by finds of Yogini temples at Khajuraho (1864–65),



Figure 3.7 A. Ghosh with his colleagues K. N. Puri, B. K. Thapar and others at an archaeological mound. (Courtesy Asim Ghosh).

Bheraghat (1873–74), Ranipur Jharial (1874–75), Surada in Kalahandi district, and at the foot of the Annamalai Hills in Coimbatore district. These circular structures open to the sky were however termed ‘Hypaethral’ after Greek analogy.⁵⁹

In subsequent years, many of the temples were excavated by ASI, such as the temple at Deogarh by P. C. Mukerji in 1899 and Daya Ram Sahni in 1917–18 and by Madho Sarup Vats.⁶⁰ Especially significant for this discussion is the Dasavatara temple at Deogarh, on the right bank of the river Betwa in the district of Jhansi, dated to the fifth and sixth centuries CE. From these early beginnings, the site shows continued presence of both Hindu and Jaina temples well into later periods.⁶¹ A modest shrine with richly carved doorway and outer walls, the Dasavatara temple stands upon a ten-foot high plinth that was originally decorated with a continuous band of narrative reliefs that included scenes from the *Mahabharata*, the *Krishnacarita* (Life of Krishna), and the *Ramayana* around the perimeter of the plinth, placed approximately four feet from ground level. When discovered, the temple was in ruins and though the temple was conserved the relief sculptures were removed to the National Museum in New Delhi. Ten panels were identified from the plinth of the temple and depict several scenes largely relating to Rama’s exile. These include his transformation of Ahalya (*Ramayana*, I.49); Rama, Lakshmana, Sita crossing the river; visiting the hermitage of Atri (*Ramayana*, II.109); Lakshmana disfiguring Surpanakha (*Ramayana*, III. 16–7); Rama killing the demons, abduction of Sita (*Ramayana*, III.47),

Lakshmana garlanding Sugriva (*Ramayana*, IV.12); and Ravana threatening Sita in the Asoka-vatika.⁶²

Other early temples were the pyramidal temples unearthed at Ahichchhatra, which Ghosh wrote about in a letter to Stella Kramrisch, a leading American art historian:

In all their stages ... they [ACI and ACII] are square in plan with projections in the west for flights of steps. The fully exposed temple [ACII] has three storeys in its last three stages. The first and earliest stage being buried very deep below the later superstructures was imperfectly explored. The plan of each single storey is square. There is no shrine on each storey, the only one being on the top. Each terrace leaves a sufficient space between the central part and the parapet for serving as ambulatory. The axis of the temples consists of a hollow central shaft, filled with debris, on the top of which the sanctuary was erected. In neither case has the central shaft been exposed to the lowest depth. In one case it was dug down to 12 feet from the top. The earliest stage of the temples evidently belongs to the Gupta period, as one of them was founded on a level yielding typical pottery of the Kuṣāṇa period. ... They continue in their last stages till the end of the tenth or eleventh century.⁶³

However, since excavations had to be halted before the remains of the temples in ACI and ACII at Ahichchhatra could be fully exposed, the nature of the brick temples continues to be debated – more so since the temples underwent restoration and modifications during their lifetime.

This early engagement with archaeological excavations of temples came up for discussion in the CABA meeting of 1953. R. C. Majumdar, one of the members of the Board wrote a letter dated 17th July 1953 to the Government recommending that

two special officers be appointed to make a proper survey and supervision of the old temples of India – one in the north and the other in the south. They should be consulted in all cases of restoration and repairing of temples.

While Ghosh wholeheartedly supported the Resolution, he pointed out to the Member that entrusting the Special Officers with protection and preservation of the temple structures would create unnecessary complications in the conservation process, which falls under the jurisdiction of the Circle Superintendents. Hence, Ghosh requested the Member to revise the proposal, which was subsequently passed and accepted by the Government.⁶⁴

In 1955, the Temple Survey Project (Northern Region) was established at Bhopal to survey, recognise, document, and analyse temples throughout the

north by systematic studies and analysis. Shri Krishna Deva was the first Superintending Archaeologist of this Project at Bhopal, while a second branch of the Project was formed in Chennai to cover south India. As mentioned by Ghosh in the Preface to the first volume in the series on temples by K. R. Srinivasan, co-ordination between the *silpa-sastras* and the monuments was kept out of the purview of the Project which was aimed at documentation. The survey was planned keeping regional and chronological priorities in mind, though this entailed taking recourse to dynastic labels – a pitfall that Ghosh cautioned against.⁶⁵ This constant reminder to separate information contained in Sanskrit texts, such as the architectural treatises or *silpa-sastras* from an archaeological documentation of the temple was an important perspective that underwrote Ghosh's work at ASI. It had wider implications for an understanding of the past, as will be discussed in the concluding chapter.

The 1965-Wheeler Committee report was appreciative of the Temple Survey Project and lauded the fact that in the ten years of its existence it had surveyed and documented most of the important groups of temples in central and south India.⁶⁶ It recommended that the Project should be continued and in addition, domestic architecture should also be taken up for recording and a database prepared.

Publicising Art and Archaeology through Exhibitions

An important event of the year 1955 was the organisation by the Department of Archaeology of an exhibition of Buddhist art and antiquities in Rangoon in response to an invitation from the Government of Burma. The exhibition was opened by the Prime Minister of Burma on 29 January 1955 and continued for 50 days, during which no less than a lakh and a half persons visited it. Illustrated catalogues were printed in English and Burmese, and a series of lectures on Buddhism and Buddhist art in India and Burma was arranged.⁶⁷ This brief note that appeared in *Indian Archaeology – A Review* does not explain the complexities involved.

The idea of the exhibition started with a letter from the Prime Minister of Burma writing to the Prime Minister of India in April 1954 requesting that a cultural exhibition be organised during the conference of the World Fellowship of Buddhists in Rangoon from November 1954 to February 1955.⁶⁸ The Director-General of Archaeology suggested that to make the exhibition representative would require the cooperation of state museums. He also wanted to know if the exhibition should travel to other Southeast Asia countries. Besides, the Government of India had to ensure adequate financial support for the purpose. Once these issues were clarified and the Ministry of External Affairs was on board along with the Ministry of Education, Ghosh wrote to Curators of many State Museums, such as those of Lucknow, Patna, Hyderabad, Madras, and so on.

The DG was deputed to attend the opening of the exhibition, which had three hundred objects from India on display and to deliver a few lectures on

Buddhism and J. K. Roy, Superintendent, Museums Branch was made in-charge of the exhibition. Fourteen public lectures were delivered during the course of the exhibition: three by Ghosh; two by P. Banerji of Indian Museum, Calcutta; one each by J.K. Roy and Satya Shrava of the Archaeology Department: two by U Lu Pe Win, Director of Archaeology, Burma; three by U Tha Mynt, Cultural Director, Ministry of Culture, Burma; one by Nihar Ranjan Ray who was then Cultural Adviser to the Burmese Government; and one by G. E. Luce, Professor Emeritus, University of Rangoon. The themes of the lectures covered Buddhist Art and Archaeology in India and Burma and the list stands out as an indicator of the close collaboration fostered with Burmese archaeologists. As suggested by Ghosh, the Government of India also permitted gifts of five objects comprising two stone Buddha images from Sarnath and Nalanda: one Buddha head from Gandhara and a votive stupa and terracotta plaque from Nalanda to the Government of the Union of Burma.

The Prime Minister and the Chief Justice of the Union of Burma were present during both the opening and closing ceremonies. On their side, the Government of Burma provided display cases for the exhibits and arranged for guides at the venue. On conclusion of the exhibition, the Secretary of the Union of Burma wrote a letter of thanks to the Secretary, Government of India and commended the efficiency and professionalism of the officers of the Archaeology Survey of India who had been deputed to set up and organise the exhibition. He went so far as to state that the ASI exhibition had set a model for future exhibitions to follow.

Another exhibition did follow and this time it was held in Essen in Germany from 14 May to 30 September 1959. The venue of '5000 Years Art from India' was a nineteenth-century mansion built by the German industrialist Alfred Krupp in 1870–73 known as Villa Hügel. After World War II it was opened to the public for exhibitions and housed the Ruhr Cultural Foundation with an art gallery, the historical archive of the Krupp family and company, and a concert venue. DG Ghosh and K. N. Puri, Joint DG of the Survey, were entrusted with the charge of curating the exhibition along with Carl Hundhausen (1893–1977), a managing Board Member of Villa Hügel. A catalogue in German and English was brought out for the occasion, which included messages from the Indian President S. Radhakrishnan and Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru; a report on the exhibition; and details of the exhibits.⁶⁹

The initiative for the exhibition came from deliberations held in 1955 at Villa Hügel and was followed by a meeting the following year between Alfred Krupp von Bohlen und Halbach and Jawaharlal Nehru in Delhi. After a formal invitation from the Federal Government of Germany, the Archaeology Department was tasked with the job of organising and coordinating it with the German authorities. Ghosh visited Germany in the summer of 1958 along with Barada Ukil, a renowned student of Abanindranath Tagore and Secretary General of the National Academy of Art. It was decided that the exhibits will



Figure 3.8 A. Ghosh with Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. (Courtesy Asim Ghosh).

be drawn only from the collections in India, and it is to the credit of the organisers that 25 museums across India sent objects for display.

To conclude this chapter, it is evident that initiating village-to-village surveys, training, research in prehistory, and other branches of archaeology, such as temples and the display of archaeological finds in site museums formed an integral part of the new DG's vision (Figure 3.8). Added to this is the editing of new publications like the *Indian Archaeology – A Review* for reporting archaeological finds made by ASI during the previous year. His efforts were well recognised and in 1962, the Government of India awarded him the fourth-highest civilian honour – the Padma Shri.

Reducing these activities to merely exploring Harappan sites on the Indian side of the border is analogous to doing disservice to the legacy of Amalananda Ghosh. In the following chapters, we will present results of the explorations undertaken by Ghosh in the Bikaner district and at Buddhist sites in India, the challenges faced by the conservation of monuments and archaeological sites in the country (Figure 3.9) and also examine ASI's engagement with the archaeology of countries outside India, which was critical to the broader vision of archaeology adopted by ASI in the 1950s and 1960s.



Figure 3.9 A. Ghosh inspecting one of the monuments in Hyderabad. V. D. Krishnaswami is on the right. (Courtesy Asim Ghosh).

Notes

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We did not accept Dr. Wheeler's suggestion and appointed Dr Chakravarti in his place. If Dr Wheeler's remarks against Dr Chakravarti were considered unacceptable then I do not see any reason why his remarks against Mr. Vats should be given so much importance now. Mr Vats has spent practically the whole of his life in the service of the department. His service record has all along been satisfactory. We cannot therefore ignore his services covering practically the whole of his life simply because Dr Wheeler made some general and big remarks against him at the fag-end of his career. This is more so as we now know that Dr Wheeler's remarks were directed not only against Mr. Vats but against other senior officers as well and he held that no Indian was fit to take over charge from him

[Abul Kalam Azad, Minister, Education]

... Dr Wheeler's comments on Mr. Vats cannot be implicitly relied upon. There is prejudice and bias practically in every word of his report...

[Vallabhbhai J. Patel, Minister, Home]

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