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# Archaeological places: Negotiations between local communities, archaeologists and the state in India

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## Abstract

In South Asia, local communities most often live near or amidst archaeological places. Their lives are in many ways framed and structured by these places. At the same time, these places too are impacted by the communities that live nearby. Archaeological sites in India are being destroyed at a rapid pace, due to increasing population and development pressures. This story gets further complicated by legislative practices of preservation related to monuments and archaeological sites, which are solely in the hands of the state through its institutions. It is this very act of protection that sometimes leads to conflict between the institutions of the state and local communities. At the same time, several archaeological sites have also survived due to local interests because they have been transformed into ritual spaces or are considered as ancestral places. Additionally, monuments have been converted into heritage hotels and have become an important means of livelihood for the families that own them. Thus, for protection to succeed, the critical intervention and involvement of local communities living in close proximity to monuments and archaeological sites is fundamental. Is it then education that can enable

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the survival of archaeological places? School education has the scope of involving and alerting children to their environs, whether it is the natural environment or a built one, and this could be a long-term solution.

### **Keywords**

India, local communities, state, protection, monuments, archaeological sites, legislation, education

The Indian Express of 12 January 2018 had an interesting report on the Harappan site of Rakhigarhi in the North Indian state of Haryana (Siwach, 2018). This was excavated by the Archaeological Survey of India (hereafter ASI) between 1997 and 2000, and then more recently from 2013 to 2016 by Deccan College, Pune, together with the Department of Archaeology and Museums, Haryana, and Seoul National University, South Korea. The site has hit headlines for a reason other than for what it has archaeologically revealed. The excavations have become a bone of contention between the villagers and the ASI. The twin villages of Rakhi Shahpur and Rakhi Khas are together known as Rakhigarhi. The *Rakhigarhi Sangharsh Samiti* (Association for the Struggle of Rakhigarhi) has been recently formed, and says it is no longer interested in the excavations if it means they will be displaced from their homes. The cause for concern lies in the eviction notices sent by the ASI to 201 villagers. The ASI says the villagers have encroached upon the protected area on the various mounds and raised unauthorized and illegal constructions within the notified protected area. The *Samiti* has been supported by the *Rakhi Barah Khap*, a group of 12 Khaps (a community organization representing a clan or a group of related clans) with 17 villages under them. Suresh Koth, of the *Rakhi Barah Khap*, says:

There are sites here of local deities, old ponds and temples which are source of faith for us. How can we leave this place? We have already given up 50 acres of land for historical excavation. Now why are they (the authorities) adamant to dig the entire village? Why can't they scan the entire village with the help of satellites? (Siwach, 2018)

### **How has this situation come to be?**

This report raises two important points. One is the archaeological significance of a place, in this case, Rakhigarhi. Why is this site important to archaeologists and those interested in the ancient past of the subcontinent? Rakhigarhi is possibly the largest Harappan (c. 2600 to 1900 BCE) site within the borders of India, while most of the large (over 100 ha category) Harappan sites fell within the territory of the newly created nation of Pakistan after the partition of the subcontinent. The Harappan sites, as known to Indian archaeology, are seen to represent

South Asia's earliest urban societies, an early 'civilization'. The second aspect that arises from our opening case concerns the displacement of people through the acquisition of their land. We shall see later how, beginning from the colonial period, the protection of monuments and archaeological sites, to some extent, went hand in hand with the displacement of people, making for a contentious relationship between local communities and national institutions, such as the ASI, that are responsible for the preservation and promotion of culture. It is worth noting that the ASI comes under the purview of the Ministry of Culture.

In South Asia, people most often live near or amidst archaeological places. Their lives are in many ways framed and structured by these places. At the same time, these places too are deeply impacted by the communities that live nearby. This relationship is often ruptured by the high population density in the Indian subcontinent. The pressure to clear land for extending cultivation or for constructing homes for animals and humans directly affects the survival of archaeological sites. This pressure has resulted in the loss of several archaeological sites, particularly those of earlier periods where there is little structural evidence. This loss can be seen even with standing monuments that are so conspicuous on the landscape with people occupying them along with their animals (see Figure 1). But as we can see with the case of Rakhigarhi, local people, their lives, their homes and their livelihoods can also be threatened by archaeological sites.



**Figure 1.** Animals occupying an archaeological monument in Orchha.

How do we view the pressures of development and their impact on the archaeological places of the country? There is only so much that authorities of the state, as represented by the ASI, can do to protect archaeological sites. As we shall see, the state/ASI is primarily concerned with those sites and monuments that they have categorized as having ‘national importance’. Ideally, local communities<sup>1</sup> must be involved in the act of protection of monuments and archaeological places, but in many parts of Africa and Asia, it is the state which dominates heritage practices,<sup>2</sup> as the making of a national heritage is intrinsically political in nature. Often it is the state that decides what is ‘worthy of being valued, preserved, catalogued, exhibited, restored, admired’ (Kersel and Luke, 2015: 71). This, in the case of India as in other colonized regions, is a continuation of the colonial policy wherein local communities were considered as threats to a ‘national heritage’.

We must also note that heritage is

a set of values, meanings, and practices differently constituted at local, regional, national... levels by social actors and institutions... For local... communities, heritage is part of an everyday experience and commonsense knowledge. The archaeological ruins, especially for those employed in their preservation, form just part of the social, political, cultural, and economic landscape. For regional and national institutions charged with preserving and promoting culture, heritage is composed of material spaces of intervention, such as archaeological ruins, used to produce symbolic meanings that forge identity, belonging, and community at regional and national levels. (Breglia, 2006: 208)

These concerns are as relevant for the local communities living around Mayan sites as they are for India, with Rakhigarhi considered by archaeologists and the state to be of national importance as well as other sites that are not seen in the same vein.

Thus, what happens when particular archaeological signatures are relevant only for archaeologists or the state while other elements of the built landscape hold symbolic meaning for local people? This story of preservation, conservation and protection gets further complicated by legislative practices of preservation related to monuments and archaeological sites, as well as the custodianship of ‘antiquities’ and art treasures. In order to bring out the complexities of these issues, we will be focusing on the archaeological site of Indor Khera, near Anupshahr in Uttar Pradesh, which we surveyed and excavated between 2004 and 2010. At the same time, we will flag the few instances in South Asia of possible forms of community archaeology and public archaeology.

## **Protection of monuments and archaeological sites in India**

The ASI was set up in 1861 under General Alexander Cunningham, with a brief hiatus from 1866 to 1870, for the survey and description of monuments. Conservation was not part of the original mandate but was added in 1873, with these duties being assigned to local governments. In 1878, The Treasure

Trove Act was passed to authorize the Central Government to claim all excavated archaeological material and to prevent illegal looting by treasure hunters. At the same time, it was also mandated that preservation of 'national antiquities' should be entrusted to the Central Government, and not solely left to local authorities, who may be unaware of their value. In 1880, a curator was appointed for the preparation of a list of monuments as well as their conservation (Roy, 1961: 53–55).

The necessity of taking steps for the protection of monuments and relics of antiquity was impressed upon the Government of India in 1898. Legislation was, thus, required to enable the Government to discharge its responsibilities, and a Bill was drafted for the purpose, which eventually passed as The Ancient Monuments Preservation Act, 1904. The Act dealt with the protection and preservation of buildings under the control of the state as well as under private ownership, with the latter coming in for special attention. The Statement of Objects and Reasons in the context of privately owned ancient monuments notes 'the necessity of goodwill and securing the co-operation of the owners concerned'. The first portion of the Act provides for ensuring the protection of those privately owned properties and, if necessary, to acquire them to ensure their protection. The Land Acquisition Act of 1894 could, thus, be invoked for this reason. Section 5 of the Act of 1904 details agreements to be signed between the Central Government and the owners of such properties. The various provisions of Section 5.2 attempt to make clear the duties and constraints of these private owners over these monuments. In doing so, the Act of 1904 also gave wide powers to the District Collectors to enforce the Central Government's position.

The following piece of legislation in independent India was The Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, 1958, that continued many of the restrictions on private owners of ancient monuments and enforced on them provisions for the maintenance of those monuments. Provisions for compulsorily acquiring land and monuments, under the Land Acquisition Act of 1894, continued to be in force from the 1904 Act. It also proposed to transfer some of the restrictive functions from the District Collectors to the Director-General of Archaeology; in other words, the Centre. At the same time, the management of protected property in the case of village property was vested in the headman or other village officer (Section 7.2). The 1958 Act deemed certain monuments to be of 'national importance'.

The 1958 Act was amended with The Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains (Amendment and Validation) Act, 2010. The 2010 Act was important in laying down that a minimum area of 100 meters in all directions of protected monuments would be the 'prohibited area' for purposes of construction and a minimum area of 200 meters would be the 'regulated area'. As reasons for doing so, the Act states that

the implementation of the provisions of the Act [of 1958] has become difficult especially due to increase in population in the areas surrounding the monuments and sites

which is detrimental to the safety and security of monuments. Besides, the penal provisions in the Act for endangering the monuments, etc., are not stringent enough to provide effective deterrence. As a consequence of increased pressures of habitation, especially in urban area, protected monuments and protected sites are getting hemmed in from all sides, detracting from the aesthetics of the monuments and sites.

The powers of protection and preservation also seem to have devolved on the National Monuments Authority that was to further grade and classify monuments and oversee protection; give approvals, in exceptional cases, for repair and renovation; and to consider the impact of large scale developmental projects that may be proposed in the regulated areas. The Act of 2010 also calls for the preparation of Heritage Bye-Laws in consultation with the Indian National Trust for Arts and Cultural Heritage (INTACH) for each protected monument and area. The 2010 Act also did away with local powers of the headman or other village officer, with all powers devolving on the Centre. Thus, on the whole, it appears that over time, duties of protection have been increasingly taken away from local authorities to the central/national institutions.

As we can see, there is almost no mention of people in the Acts formulated for the preservation of monuments and archaeological sites. The only manner in which they come in is when they are owners of monuments or live within them. The onus of looking after the monuments is then put upon them in the form of agreements between them and the Central Government, and the very real threat of taking it over from them if they fail to protect the structure. In the colonial period, the government made use of the Land Acquisition Act of 1894 for taking over such monuments and sites. While these practices were in keeping with colonial policies in the early 20th century, one would have expected changes in the post-colonial period, which unfortunately have not taken place in India. The involvement of people in the protection of monuments and archaeological sites that forms a part of cultural resource management guidelines in the countries of the Global North today is completely absent in India, as is the case in some parts of the Global South.

The attempts of the State to marginalize the protection of monuments and archaeological sites and, in effect, to undermine its own laws can be seen in the recent proposed amendment to the 1958 Act. According to the new guidelines proposed in The Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains (Amendment) Bill, 2017, the issue of public works in prohibited areas will be referred to the National Monuments Authority for its recommendation and this should be forwarded to the Central Government. It appears that the final discretion and decision would rest with the Central Government, with the latter giving reasons when differing with the National Monuments Authority. However, if the Central Government determined 'public works' to be necessary, they could go ahead with their development projects even in the prohibited areas. We can, thus, see complete centralization of powers and the marginalization of even

national institutions that had been created in the first place to deal with issues of protection.

### **Aspects of protection: Enclosures, issues of displacement and aestheticization**

The manner in which the Indian State has protected certain archaeological sites marks these as significantly different from unprotected sites that are often occupied by communities of people and animals. The protection strategy is one of enclosing, of fencing off. John Marshall's Conservation Manual of 1923 notes in paras 21 (d) and (e) that officers when assessing archaeological monuments must compile information including the ownership and acquisition of land adjoining the site of an ancient monument, as well as the delimitation, clearance, drainage, fencing and layout of the site. The 93 ticketed monuments and places that have been protected by the ASI have been enclosed. Entry to and exit from these monuments and places are regulated by the tickets that are charged, which differ according to age and nationality, and by the times of entry and exit mandated by the State that are written on boards at the entrance, both of which are strictly enforced. These enclosures have created islands or enclaves of protected areas that are often surrounded by people's habitations. The fact that, in 2010, the ASI had to stipulate a 100 meter area around a monument as protected area indicates the human pressure on archaeological sites. These enclosures have protected notified sites from illegal occupation and vandalism but have also created a physical barrier between the site or archaeological place and the communities that live nearby.

The enclosing of land for the purpose of making for a more 'productive' landscape owes its origins to the enclosure movement of 15th century England (Meskell, 2012). The fencing of common land and conversion into privately owned land, initially for agricultural purposes, moved into other terrains, of preserving forests, wildlife and, much later, archaeological remains. Meskell (2012: 19) has shown that the principle of enclosure pushed for people-free landscapes as a strategy of protection, which was exported to Britain's colonies. India, as one of these colonies, was a blank slate on which these strategies of protection of biodiversity and heritage could be inscribed. These resulted in the creation of National Parks and Sanctuaries in every State in India, as well as the enclosing of specific notified archaeological monuments across the country. These fenced areas, in turn, involved the issue of displacement. The Indian State, from the colonial period, has utilized the strategy of acquiring land and displacing people and communities for various purposes. In many situations, this has been for development purposes, such as the building of dams or roads, and more recently, in the face of overarching urbanization and development, agricultural lands have been diverted to commercial, industrial and residential usages. In the case of the building of the capital of New Delhi, land had to be acquired from villagers in 1911, for which recourse to the existing legislation, the Land Acquisition Act of 1894, was made (Johnson, 2015).

The Land Acquisition Act was enacted in 1894 for the acquisition of land for 'public purposes' and for companies, and its primary aim was to determine the amount of compensation to be paid for such acquisitions. Some eight categories were specified under 'public purposes', and provisions were stipulated: for creation of villages or extension of villages; for town and rural planning; 'for planned development of land from public funds in pursuance of any scheme or policy of government and subsequent disposal thereof in whole or in part by lease, assignment or outright sale with the object of securing further development as planned'; for a State-owned or controlled corporation; for residential purposes for the poor or landless or for displaced persons or those affected by development projects; for carrying out educational, health, or slum clearance government schemes; for any other 'scheme of development sponsored by government'; and also the provision of premises or buildings for locating of a public office. The Land Acquisition Act of 1894, and its subsequent replacement by The Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act, 2013 (or the Land Acquisition Act, 2013), continue to be used to dispossess people of their lands for purposes of development centring on dams, highways and cities.

The 1904, 1958 and 2010 Acts categorically invoked the Land Acquisition Act of 1894. These had stipulated that a protected monument could be acquired under the provisions of the Land Acquisition Act, 1894 in the event of it being destroyed, injured or allowed to fall into decay. This was then used to shift people in the case of sites considered significant for research with people living there considered an impediment to that research. The same impetus seems to be guiding the call for relocation of people at Rakhigarhi. The dispossession of people from archaeological sites considered as national heritage is not specific to India alone. Local populations have been relocated in the case of Angkor Wat and Angkor Thom in Cambodia, Chichén Itzá in Mexico, Tsodilo in Botswana, Gurna in Egypt and from the old cities of Hebron and Jerusalem in West Asia, as well as Bahia in Brazil (De Cesari and Herzfeld, 2015: 176-84; Meskell and Brumann, 2015: 32; Nodoro and Wijesuriya, 2015: 144-145). In some cases, these relocations were not permanent. For instance, in the case of the old city of Hebron, Palestinians who had been dispossessed of their homes between 1967 and 1994 were eventually brought back by 2013. This was enabled by the Oslo Agreements in 1994, which led to the setting up of the Hebron Rehabilitation Committee (De Cesari and Herzfeld, 2015: 184).

One of the prime duties of the offices of the ASI continues to be the emphasis on the beautification of notified archaeological monuments. The horticulture wing of the ASI maintains two kinds of gardens. The first category encompasses those monuments that originally had planned gardens as part of their design, such as those alongside Mughal buildings. In the second case, the ASI constructs new gardens to beautify the area around monuments.

In many cases, where the landscape is dry and rugged, the environment is developed through raising lawns and a few trees and hedges. For those monuments which are



within or near large cities and attract a large number of visitors, more ambitious gardens are generally planned, but not losing sight of the fact that it is not the objective of archaeologists to provide public parks. In either category, caution is taken against modernizing the gardens. (<http://asi.nic.in/horticulture-branch/>)<sup>3</sup>

The emphasis on constructing gardens may be traced back to colonial initiatives, and more specifically to Lord Curzon. Herbert (2011) points out that Curzon's initiatives regarding the gardens surrounding the Taj Mahal became the pattern for landscaping other Indian monuments. This involved restoring the formal pattern of the Char Bagh and planting various varieties of flowering and evergreen trees, shrubs and plants. Herbert (2011: 202) also suggests that Curzon's general principle may well have been: when in doubt, plant grassy lawns. It is these grassy lawns that are ubiquitous presently at Indian monuments. Thus, those archaeological sites that are under the ticketed category are used as recreational areas in addition to their archaeological significance. However, the archaeological sites and monuments that are free for entry in a city like Delhi are interesting as they jostle for space within commercial areas and residential colonies. Despite being free, these are walled off, surrounded by gardens, and yet are used by people in everyday ways: playing cards, eating lunch and for varying kinds of negotiations ranging from commerce to romance. It is not quite clear whether their historical pasts and contexts are understood, but these structures are clearly part of the cultural, social and economic landscapes of the people who use them.

### **Non-governmental institutionalized conservation and protection**

The Archaeological Survey of India was set up in the mid-19th century, initially for survey and documentation of monuments and archaeological sites. Subsequently, conservation and protection of monuments and remains of 'national importance' also came to be included within its ambit. Over the years, the ASI has realized that the challenge of protection and maintenance of numerous monuments and archaeological sites is too great for them to deal with alone. Certain monuments and archaeological sites are centrally protected and come under the jurisdiction of the ASI, while others are protected by various State departments of archaeology. However, as per the INTACH charter, the 'majority of architectural heritage properties and sites in India still remains unidentified, unclassified and unprotected, thereby subject to attrition on account of neglect, vandalism and insensitive development'. This has become the purview of INTACH that was set up in 1984, which sees it 'necessary to value and conserve the unprotected architectural heritage and sites in India by formulating appropriate guidelines sympathetic to the contexts in which they are found' (<http://www.intach.org/about-charter.php>).

A major initiative that makes a break with earlier practices of conservation and protection has been the work of the Aga Khan Trust for Culture (AKTC). The Trust focuses on the physical, social, cultural and economic revitalization of

communities in the developing world. Their largest cultural project to date, in India, from 2004, has been the restoration and revitalization of Humayun's Tomb, including its gardens. The significance of their work has been the empowering of local communities with the realization that conservation of monuments cannot be divorced from communities of people (Nanda, 2017).

The Aga Khan Trust's practices of involving local people follow global trends. This has also, more recently, spurred the ASI to evolve initiatives of involving the public in looking after the built heritage. From September 2017, the ASI has floated a scheme called Adopt a Heritage (<http://www.adoptaheritage.in/>), on the lines of a similar scheme first devised in Scotland. The idea for the Adopt-a-Monument Scheme in Scotland was developed in the 1990s. Between 1991 and 1998, the Council for Scottish Archaeology (CSA) ran Adopt-a-Monument (<https://archaeologyscotland.org.uk/adopt-a-monument/>) in response to the number of archaeological societies who wanted to look after and take responsibility for cultural heritage sites in their area. A second phase (2006–2009) was funded by Historic Scotland, and was intended as a pilot scheme to assess its popularity. The third phase is currently being helmed by Archaeology Scotland. Adopt-a-Monument

is a nation-wide Community Archaeology scheme that provides volunteer groups with practical advice and training they need to care and conserve their local heritage. The project encourages groups to get involved in hands-on activities to improve the condition, accessibility and interpretation of their chosen site.

In India, the Ministry of Tourism in close collaboration with the Ministry of Culture and ASI has planned an Adopt a Heritage scheme with a view to 'developing heritage sites and making them tourist friendly to enhance their tourism potential and cultural importance, in a planned and phased manner'. This is a reflection of the global trend wherein heritage is closely intertwined with tourism (Salazar and Zhu, 2015). Unlike the Scottish case which sought initiatives from volunteer groups, in India,

Expressions of Interest have been invited from interested Private/Public companies and individuals interested in partnering with Ministry of Tourism, Ministry of Culture and ASI for adopting heritage sites to provide, operate and maintain world class tourist facilities and amenities at the selected destinations.

These companies/individuals who would adopt monuments would be called 'Monument Mitras'. The scheme is to be first extended to 93 ASI ticketed monuments and then expanded to other sites of natural and cultural importance across India. The 'adoption' for the purpose of providing basic amenities and for overseeing complete operations and maintenance would be for an initial period of five years, and subject to regular monitoring and feedback.

Institutionalized practices of protection and conservation have largely remained confined to monuments and select archaeological sites considered to be of national

importance. While INTACH has taken the responsibility for the numerous unprotected monuments in the major cities, what remain at risk are archaeological mounds/places that we shall move to in the next section.

### **Moving to the local: Archaeology at the village of Indor**

While archaeological sites are often investigated, what is usually neglected, particularly in South Asia, are issues related to the current social contexts of those sites. Indor Khera merited archaeological attention in its own stead and has been studied (Menon and Varma, 2011; Menon et al., 2008; Varma and Menon, 2011). It, however, becomes imperative to address questions such as (1) local perceptions to the mound, and the daily negotiations of the local residents with the mound; (2) the challenges of undertaking archaeological research at sites that are still inhabited by local communities; and (3) difficulties and hindrances in enforcing regulations and protection of archaeological places, such as Indor Khera. In the 19th century, the village occupied about one-fourth of the area, which has now expanded to over two-thirds of the mound. For the villagers of present-day Indor Khera, the archaeological mound has a material presence and, in many ways, is an obstacle that they have to tackle on a daily basis.

This is a physical reality. The mound measures, at its maximum, a height of 17 meters from the surrounding plain. Families live all over the northern, eastern and southern sides and they have built their houses on the top and the slopes of the mound. The edges of the mound, also slightly above plain level, are used for making temporary structures for housing animals such as buffaloes and cows. Thus, for all purposes, be it visiting other families, going to the the post office or buying provisions, taking animals for pasturing, going to the fields or to the main road to leave Indor Khera, would have meant climbing up and down the mound.

Mounds in Western Uttar Pradesh are locally known as '*khera*'. Past strata and remains are omnipresent to the villagers within their house plots, and along the path that circumvents the mound. Interested visitors are shown exposed sections of the mound. Villagers often point out things in the sections, such as bits of white, foamy, glassy slag, which they use for medicinal purposes. The mound appears also to have been mined for materials. Thus, the large bricks that are recovered from levels dated between 200 BCE and 500 CE are often found re-used in present-day village house walls and floors.

Our first archaeological forays at the site were for the purpose of surveying a 2×2 km area around the site. Subsequent to the survey, we obtained the license to excavate the site. Indor Khera was excavated for the first two years with the Wheeler method of excavating in baulks and with the use of labour. In the last two seasons, we excavated without baulks but continued to use labour.

Labour in Indian archaeological excavations usually comprises local villagers being inducted for the task. Archaeologists, often, have little choice in the selection of labour that will be employed by them. There are varying local power dynamics at play, which archaeologists have to learn to navigate while undertaking their field

work. In fact, in North India, often it is the village headman (*pradhan*) who dictates the names of the men who will be employed at the site with no women allowed to work either at the site or the camp. However, in other parts of the country, women are an important part of the excavation team, carrying out tasks of hand sorting the excavated deposits and removing the spoil. At Indor Khera, while women did not work with us, they came to visit us often in the camp, quizzing us about whatever we were doing.

Locals have been involved since archaeological investigations began as part of a colonial endeavour in uncovering the Indian past, with people, often from the nearby village, being recruited as labour for archaeological tasks. Wages were paid at Public Works Department (PWD) daily wage rates and rosters were maintained of inducted labour. This practice still continues because the ASI excavates only with the help of hired labour. The ASI's Archaeological Works Code (1937/1979) pays much attention to the maintenance of muster rolls showing daily attendance of labourers, certification of such rolls, and notifications of payments made on the basis of attendance. The ASI gives fieldwork grants to universities and research institutions at a percentage of the grants generated by the institutions involved, and these grants can only be used for the purpose of hiring labour.

What impact has the recent archaeological work at Indor Khera had on the local population? As we had excavated using labour, this had a direct impact on the livelihood of the local people. Young men, who normally migrate to Delhi for work, found they had an alternative in their own village. Thus, they could live at home and earn a living through the daily wages they received for their work at the site. That this was hugely desirable could be seen in the keenness of men to be employed in the excavations. Moreover, it was regarded as a matter of prestige for these men to be employed in the excavations. It is possible that this prestige emanated from the fact that we were not locals and our work was perceived to be associated with the Central Government as the permit had been granted by the ASI. Their interest in being associated with our project was reflected in the continuing queries requesting more fieldwork for several years long after the excavations had ended. Like many other inhabited archaeological sites, these excavations have entered the social memory of the local people. There is also the curiosity value with the presence of a large number of visitors, including residents of Indor Khera and neighbouring villages, who watched while the excavations were being carried out.

The other impact, however, accrued not so much due to our excavations, but because of the implementation of The Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains (Amendment and Validation) Act, 2010. Indor Khera is a centrally protected site, and in 2013, the ASI decided to put up their blue boards (see Figure 2) marking protection and prohibition of construction within the 100 meter zone. This has had a somewhat detrimental impact on the local villagers as they are now prevented from repairing their houses and digging in their house plots.<sup>4</sup> To an extent, this has to do with local politics being a factor as the village is divided into differing caste groups.



**Figure 2.** ASI's blue board indicating the 100 meter protected area at Indor Khera.

Admittedly, the mound is getting cut at the edges due to the activities of villagers. Yet, the site has managed to survive surprisingly well. To what do we attribute this survival? Part of the reason is to do with the fact that an enormous amount of brick was used for constructing houses in the ancient past, and too much work would be required for levelling land for cultivation. Many of the smaller mounds in the vicinity of the main mound, too, have survived for a similar reason. While the main mound is too large to be demolished, a small part of it in the southwestern side was cut away by a bulldozer to create a Primary Health Centre for the village. It is ironic that even though Indor Khera is a centrally protected site, another arm of the State sees no issue in violating its own rules.

### **The way forward: Involving local communities and the public**

There may be many reasons for the preservation of monuments and archaeological places in different parts of India. The most obvious are the officially protected monuments and sites that are considered as constituting national and regional heritage. These monuments and sites protected by the Central and State Governments comprise a very small part of the vast numbers of archaeological places in India. A critical question that remains to be tackled is the conservation of those places that are outside the ambit of State protection.

Monuments that are privately owned, and are outside the ambit of State protection, can be commercialized through tourism. This has been the route taken in

Gujarat, Rajasthan and more recently in Shahjahanabad in Delhi with the conversion of local *havelis*, belonging to families who have turned them into ‘heritage’ hotels. The buildings themselves have survived, and will continue to exist, albeit in a highly commoditized fashion. In many situations, these conversions have been economically beneficial to local residents as such properties are managed as family enterprises. Moreover, the restoration of these properties has benefited a whole host of tertiary services. At the same time, the fact cannot be erased that over-tourism has its own problems of having a negative effect on local residents through increasing prices of real estate and other items of daily requirements (Milano et al., 2018).

Sites can survive for other reasons, as in the case of Rohana Khurd. The archaeological mound is located about 200 meters to the south-east of the present day Rohana Khurd village near Muzaffarnagar in Uttar Pradesh (Menon and Varma, 2016: 94–105). The small rural settlement that began from the 4th century BCE was intermittently inhabited and was finally abandoned around the 11th century CE. Today, the central portion of the mound is occupied by structures that are mainly religious in nature. Apart from the three main temples on the top of the mound, there are several smaller shrines that have been built by the residents of the present-day village in the memory of their deceased ancestors. At present, these structures cover almost 30 per cent of the mound and their number is continuously increasing. On the western edge of the mound, a Muslim cemetery occupies a small area, which could be late medieval or early modern and is currently not being used. At present, it is difficult to date exactly when the mound began to be used as a ritual space but the site continues to survive for this reason.

In other cases, there may be an emotional connect between local communities and archaeological sites, where the latter are seen as ancestral places. This would be the case with northeastern India, where a site like Chungliyimti shows that the settlement with its megaliths is seen as an ancestral place by local inhabitants (Jamir, 2014; Pokharia et al., 2013). Thus, places identified with ancestors or with ritual remain protected to an extent. Similarly, at Siruthavoor near Chennai in Tamil Nadu, local people worship at a nearby Chola period temple and see it as a part of their cultural landscape. Recent efforts to conserve the temple, wholly with local resources, show the close links of the people with the temple. As a result, not only the temple but the inscriptions on its walls may well continue to exist in future too. At the same time, the megaliths at this site have survived only because these are in a Reserved Forest area, whereas the burials in the village outside the Reserved Forest are fast disappearing (Jaya Menon, 2018, personal observations).

Safvi’s (2018) recent work mentions several monuments in Delhi that are part of the sacred landscape of local residents. However, the converse is also true where local communities are not vested in preserving monuments that lie abandoned adjacent to their homes. For example, in Zamrudpur in South Delhi, there are five tombs that are used as cattle sheds, living spaces, toilets and rubbish dumps. Clearly, the local residents of Zamrudpur have scant interest in the maintenance of

these structures as historical places, while institutions that should be dealing with the protection of such places are unable to do so. As has been pointed out,

‘secular’ conservation policies have dominated the ASI’s approach to Delhi’s landscape, and worship has been actively prevented in many of Delhi’s historical mosques and tombs after Partition. This secular conservation paradigm has not only not succeeded in preserving this historical landscape – hundreds of monuments have disappeared or been encroached upon in Delhi since independence – it has also led to growing public apathy about built heritage. (Taneja, 2018)

At Indor Khera, too, the mound is not seen as part of their past. Indeed, several people have in the memory of their forefathers come to this village from elsewhere. The strata that they see and what they find when they dig do not resonate with them, other than a recognizable artefact similar to those used in the present as, for example, sherds of pottery or a bead from a necklace. The mound is seen as created by an upheaval with everything within having turned upside down. And yet, it is a moment of revelation when structures just like theirs are recovered in the excavation. At the same time, this revelation will not lead to the preservation of archaeological remains.

How can an archaeological place or a monument become relevant for local people? Does the archaeological site then only matter to the local population in the short-term during excavation by providing livelihood, or in the long-term through the creation of a museum or the incorporation of those remains in a tourist circuit? This may work for a Dholavira or a Rakhigarhi, but will certainly not for an Indor Khera or the Zamrudpur tombs. Yet, at the same time, as we have seen with Rakhigarhi, remnants of the ‘Harappan’ past have now become a threat to local villagers.

Involvement of local communities forms the main thread of a relatively new field in archaeology studies, that of community archaeology. The field flags initiatives that local communities have taken in relation to the archaeological site they live near or associate with. One could think of examples from Australia, North America, Africa and Asia (Jamir, 2014; Phillips and Allen, 2010; Schmidt, 2017; Schmidt and Pikiyai, 2016; Smith and Waterton, 2009). In North America and Western Europe, community archaeology has largely come within Cultural Resource Management (CRM) or Heritage Management fields. In South Asia, there is barely any recognition of such a field, while the challenges and potential are immense.

There can be two kinds of communities that may have associations with archaeological sites (Marshall, 2002). One kind of community comprises those who live either on or in the vicinity of the site, and this is clearly the case with Rakhigarhi. The second kind of community involves descendants that include those who can or choose to trace their descent from the people who once lived at the place that is now an archaeological site, such as in northeastern India. Thus, collaboration with descendant communities is necessary where those communities are directly affected

by archaeological practices. But as is understandable, the relationship between archaeology and the descendant communities who 'own' the site can often be fraught with tension.

The involvement of local communities is understood to 'foster respect for the value of the archaeological resource, and thus discourage vandalism and the looting of sites' as at the site of Quseir in Egypt (Moser et al., 2002: 221). Collaboration between archaeologists and local communities comprises an ethical practice in archaeology but should not remain as just that; in turn, inputs by local communities should be of major importance to research questions. Other successful examples of community based participatory research initiatives include attempts at Chungliyimti in Nagaland (Jamir, 2014) and Çatalhöyük in Turkey (Atalay, 2012).

Along with community-based archaeology, another emerging field is public archaeology (Merriman, 2004; Okamura and Matsuda, 2011). Archaeology has always related to a much wider public than just archaeologists. That the relationship between archaeology and the public needed to be studied was not taken seriously till the 1970s–1980s. When the term 'public archaeology' was coined in the early 1970s, it referred to endeavours by archaeologists to record and preserve archaeological sites and remains that were threatened by development works. Such efforts were usually made on behalf and with the support of the public. Over the years, the ambit of public archaeology has widened and now includes a range of themes, such as archaeological policies, education and archaeology, politics and archaeology, archaeology and the antiquities market, ethnicity and archaeology, public involvement in archaeology, archaeology and the law, the economics of archaeology and cultural tourism and archaeology (Matsuda and Okamura, 2011: 2). Some also see public archaeology as a commitment made by archaeologists to make archaeology more relevant to contemporary society.

In India, we can cite at least two cases of public archaeology initiatives. The first is the example of the Sharma Centre for Heritage Education, Chennai, that has been carrying out archaeology workshops for school children to create awareness about the discipline (<http://www.sharmaheritage.com/about-us>). Similarly, under the aegis of the Heritage, Science and Society Program of the School of Humanities at the National Institute of Advance Studies (NIAS), Bengaluru, archaeology workshops are held for children in schools located in close vicinity (Smriti Haricharan, 2018, personal communication). These are just a few instances of public archaeology that can be flagged.

Is it then education that can enable the protection of archaeological places such as Indor Khera? School education has the scope of involving and alerting children to their environs, whether it is the natural environment or a built one. Since archaeology is not taught as a separate discipline, either in schools or at the undergraduate level, there is unfamiliarity with its methods and ambit. Thus, extra-curricular workshops are one manner of outreach to familiarize students at different levels, in metropolitan cities, towns and villages. The potential of innovative archaeology education programs to raise awareness about the preservation of archaeological





**Figure 3.** Discussions between archaeologists and residents of Suthari village.

sites have been in place for the last 30 years in USA and Canada (Smardz Frost, 2004) and could be drawn upon for implementation in South Asia.

## Conclusion

Due to an over-centralized State regulating practices of heritage protection and conservation, the establishment of non-governmental institutions and the formalization of CRM initiatives have been largely neglected in India. While recognizing that there are far too many monuments and archaeological places that can be protected by them, the ASI has handed over the responsibility of unprotected sites to INTACH. However, this task is far too enormous for State institutions and INTACH to manage, when in fact the efforts of many more non-governmental bodies and local communities are required.

Lowenthal (1998: xv) cautions us that heritage has little to do with history. 'History explores and explains pasts grown ever more opaque over time; heritage clarifies pasts so as to infuse them with present purposes'. Heritage is also seen as being both 'intensely personal and intensely political' (Kersel and Luke, 2015: 71). While heritage making as a political act can be seen through the intervention of the State, one can cite the case of Suthari on the Hindon River in Ghaziabad District of Uttar Pradesh in the context of the personal (Supriya Varma and Jaya Menon, 2014, personal observations). Suthari is a village with three mounds, one largely

destroyed by mining of earth for construction (occupied roughly from 600 to 1600 CE), the second that is intact (occupied in the first millennium BCE) and the third on which the present village is located. The efforts made by a young man, Yogesh Kumar Yadav, to bring the archaeological remains at Suthari and the need for its conservation to the attention of every institution that he could think of, the UP State Archaeology Department, the ASI, the INTACH and so forth, are noteworthy. Yogesh Kumar Yadav has subsequently set up the *Hindon Ghati Sabhyata Sanrakshan Evan Vikas Samiti* (Association for the Cultural Protection and Development of the Hindon Valley) in Suthari village. He is trying to develop river tourism on the Hindon and a historical circuit that will feed into that tourism endeavour (see Figure 3). Thus, one can discern three different perspectives regarding the site, none of which, however, converge. The interest for archaeologists would be to unravel the complicated material pasts of Suthari; for the larger local community, the mounds are just a part of their natural landscape; while for Yadav, they symbolize the potential of yoking tourism to heritage. The danger, however, lies in a possibility of a mismatch between the archaeological narrative and the reshaping of Suthari's 'heritage' for tourism.

The challenge, thus, lies in formulating ways of involving local communities in the preservation of monuments and archaeological sites in South Asia. Article 51 A(f) of the Indian Constitution states that 'it shall be the duty of every citizen of India to value and preserve the rich heritage of our composite culture'. While this is an admirable insertion in our Constitution, the ground reality is starkly different. What we have argued is that survival of monuments and archaeological places is largely dependent on three factors: either there is a direct emotional connect between local communities and monuments/archaeological remains, where the latter are seen as ancestral places; or where monuments and remains continue to be used for ritual and other daily practices; or where archaeological places can be seen as attracting tourists and help in boosting the local economy. Thus, going back to where we started with Rakhigarhi, this Harappan site is vitally important to archaeologists and the State, but has little meaning for the local residents. Perhaps the archaeological project would have had more relevance for them if it had been able to ensure a sustained inflow of visitors and tourists to the Harappan site. This, in turn, could generate long-term revenue for residents of the village through homestays and employment at a site museum. Without these, the reality is that for the residents of Rakhigarhi the places marked by local deities, ponds and temples will remain far more significant than the ruins of a Harappan city.

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## Notes

1. We are using the broad term 'local communities' for people who live near archaeological places, but we are aware that this cannot be considered as a homogenous category.
2. For more on the politics of heritage, see Breglia (2006), Lowenthal (1998) and Meskell (2015).
3. This echoes Marshall's (1923: para 128) notes in the context of gardens:

In laying out or restoring ancient Indian gardens it is important to preserve the essential character of the originals, whether that character expresses itself in the symmetrical handling of the design as a whole, in the careful balance maintained between its component parts, in the schematic arrangement of parterres, causeways, watercourses and the like, or in the formal treatment of other features.

At the same time, he demurs: 'But it is not necessary to attempt to reproduce with pedantic accuracy the original appearance of the garden in all its particulars by banishing from it any trees, flowers or fruits etc., which were not grown by the ancients'.

4. Section 5.2.c of the Act of 1904 had itself restricted the owners' right 'to destroy, remove, alter, or deface the monument or to build on or near the site of the monument'. This was clearly used to reinforce the restrictions within the 100 meter limit.

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