

CHAPTER – XII

Conclusion

This Performance Audit was taken up on the occasion of ASI's 150th anniversary. Several aspects of ASI's objectives, processes and results have been reviewed. The most significant failure of ASI related to its core function of field archaeology that included excavation, survey and publication of excavation reports. Presently, ASI's expenditure on excavation is less than one per cent of its total budget. We noted that ASI has no policy governing the selection of excavation sites, timeframes for the completion of excavations and the publication of its findings. As a result, even decades after the commencement of major excavations, viz. Dholavira, Sanghol, Rakhigarhi, Sravasti, Mathura, the excavation reports have not been published. In several cases, the selected archaeologists leading these excavations are no longer with the ASI. In some cases, the archaeologists had died. As a result, excavated antiquities have not been accounted for and in some cases even the excavation sites had gone untraceable.

We noted that the planning function was largely neglected. Exploration and preservation were crucial functions of the ASI; however, a comprehensive policy for these areas had not been formulated. As a result, conservations efforts were grossly inadequate. We noted that the ASI still depended on a manual published in 1923 for most of its field activities. This document was not updated. Most of ASI's important publications, for instance, 'Indian Archaeology a Review' were pending for years.

To ensure effective protection of monuments and sites it was imperative to update policies, publish inventories and fully document monument details. However, these activities had not completed by the concerned entities. The National Mission of Monuments and Antiquities had also failed to fulfil its purposes in a time-bound manner. This Mission lacked direction, vision and appropriate strategy.

In the context of these weaknesses, encroachment of monuments and unauthorised constructions were widespread. Further, in the absence of comprehensive planning and organisational weakness, there was no coordination among the three major wings of ASI, responsible for structural, chemical and environmental conservation.

Success of conservation works was left largely to individual initiatives and an overall departmental perspective was completely missing.

Regarding the financial management of ASI, we noted that the funds allocated to ASI for its mandated activities were grossly inadequate; however, there was little initiative on its part or the Ministry of Culture to enhance the budget allocations or explore revenue opportunities. The manpower management was marked by critical shortages leading to negligible supervision of works and inadequate security.

The ASI was unable to implement the provisions of the Antiquities and Art Treasure Act effectively and the incidence of an illegal export of antiquities was rampant. The proposed legislation amendments to this Act were pending for years.

We observed significant shortcomings in the functioning of the museums. The museums did not have any benchmarks or standards for acquisition, conservation or documentation of the art objects possessed by them. The mechanism for evaluation of acquired objects to verify their genuineness was absent in all the museums audited by us. There was no mechanism to assess the genuineness of artifacts. Poor documentation of the acquired artifacts and the failure to introduce the digital technology for documentation coupled with the absence of physical verification made the artifacts vulnerable to loss. The security system at the museums provided a grim picture in the absence of effective surveillance systems at the sites.

We also noted that many shortcomings relating to the functioning of the ASI had been highlighted through the recommendation of various expert/Parliamentary committees. However, we also noted with distress that these red flags were largely ignored by the Ministry of Culture. In our opinion urgent measures were required to completely overhaul the ASI in light of its mandate and to restore this organisation to its distant former glory.

New Delhi
Dated : 2 August 2013



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