

Chapter 9: Explorations and Excavations

Excavation of archaeological remains is one of the primary responsibilities of the ASI. In this chapter, audit observations connected with exploration and excavation related activity of ASI have been discussed.

9.1 Exploration activities in ASI

Exploration forms part of excavation activities which include functions such as excavation, exploration, building survey, temple survey, pre-history, under-water archaeology and village to village survey. ASI has dedicated branches for undertaking these activities.

9.1.1 Village to Village Survey

In the previous Report, audit had pointed out that due to shortage of human resources, village to village survey was not being undertaken by ASI. Though the village survey process was restarted by ASI, it was not uniformly undertaken in all the Circles. During 2014-15 to 2019-20, no survey was conducted in four Circles⁶⁸ while in four Circles⁶⁹ survey was conducted only in a single year. ASI did not provide any specific reason for undertaking village survey in selected Circles/year. However, some of its Circles cited shortages of human resources as the reason for fewer village surveys.

Ministry/ASI stated (January 2022) that all Circles have been instructed to include village to village survey in their annual strategy plan.

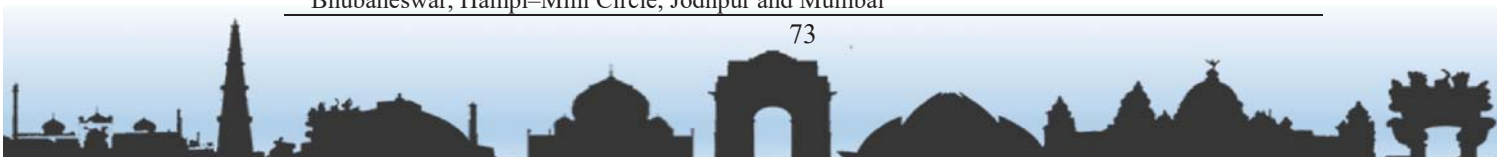
9.1.2 Maritime Archaeology

Maritime archaeology is a specialist branch in ASI for its under-water exploration. In the previous Report it was pointed out that the branch, established in 2001, had become defunct due to lack of specialised human resources. During the follow-up audit, it was noted that the status had not changed. Apart from shortage of human resources, there was no perspective plan or policy with ASI for maritime archaeology.

Ministry/ASI intimated (January 2022) that the thrust of training the willing archaeologist for underwater archaeological exploration had been recognized and initiated and accordingly, a separate cell in ASI to focus on this area had been strengthened.

⁶⁸ Amravati, Delhi, Guwahati and Srinagar

⁶⁹ Bhubaneswar, Hampi–Mini Circle, Jodhpur and Mumbai



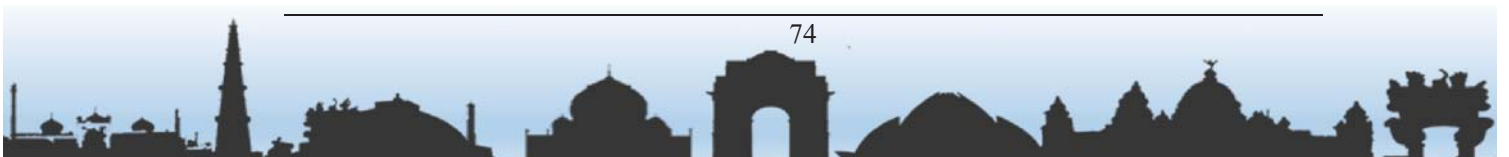
9.2 Excavation activities in ASI

Excavations at archaeological sites is an important function of ASI. The ASI grant excavation licences, based on the proposals received from different agencies like ASI Circles, Branches, Universities and Research institutions. *The PAC while discussing the excavation related issues had asked the Ministry to draw an action plan under the exploration and excavation policy and ensure adequate allocation and effective utilisation of funds for these activities.*

During the follow-up audit, it was noted that the recommendations made by the PAC and below mentioned excavation related issues as highlighted in the previous Report have not been resolved:

- The ASI had no action plans based on its Exploration and Excavation Policy. The excavation work was being undertaken without any priority list, perspective plan or setting up measurable performance parameters and guidelines.
- ASI had no centralised information/monitoring system displaying excavation proposals received by it, reasons for their recommendation or rejection, status of accepted proposals and their monitoring.
- There was significant delay in writing of the report on excavation. In some cases, reports were pending for more than 60 years. For some major excavations *e.g.* Mathura, Sravasti, Ropar, started in 1954-55, 1958-59 and 1953-54 respectively, reports were yet to be completed. In this regard, ASI had reported constraints that due to expiry and retirement of the excavator the work of report writing get delayed.
- In Bhubaneswar Circle, antiquities recovered from excavation sites (since 2011-12) were found to be kept by excavators for report writing. Also, out of 5,915 antiquities pointed out in previous Report as kept in store of Excavation Branch, 4,272 were still at the store room of which only 449 were documented.
- The expenditure on exploration/excavation was still below one *per cent* of total expenditure of ASI (*refer Para 5.1.1*).

In the previous Report, status of excavation sites and their protection was commented upon by audit. Neglected condition of excavated site at *Purana Qila*, Delhi, which was regularly used by ASI for excavation since 1954, noticed during joint physical inspection is depicted through photograph below:





Protection of Archaeological Sites

The Excavation Policy of ASI identifies over 500 archaeological sites in India as important for excavation/exploration. From the list, two sites in Delhi region viz. Mandoli and Bhorgarh were last excavated by Delhi State Archaeological Department in 1987 and 1992-94 respectively⁷⁰. According to the excavation reports, the findings had revealed vestiges of Late-Harappan period. It was noted that despite important findings, further action to secure these sites was not taken. During the follow-up audit, visits to these two sites revealed that both have been fully encroached upon and were no longer in existence.

Ministry/ASI intimated (January 2022) that efforts were being made to conserve the excavated remains immediately after their exposure⁷¹.

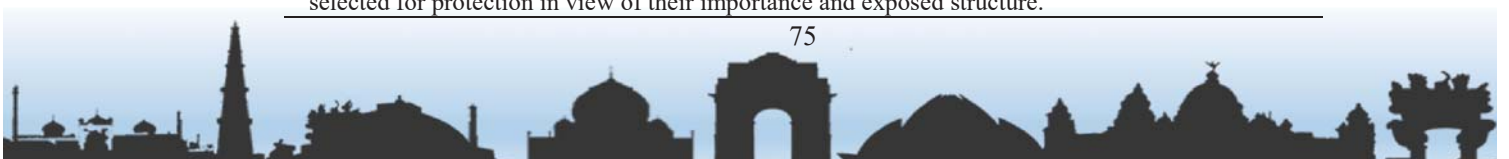
The PAC had desired focused streamlining of the public resources earmarked for excavation and exploration of archaeological remains. However, in the absence of action plan, adequate allocation of funds and monitoring, there continues to be no assurance on concerns raised.

Ministry/ASI stated (January/February 2022) that the draft excavation policy incorporating all observations and comments would be shortly finalised. A monitoring format for excavation activities was being put in place and respective regional officers were being involved.

It accepted the delay in writing of excavation reports and submitted that this was being prioritised and the new policy also takes this issue into account. In respect of observation pertaining to Bhubaneswar Circle it submitted that the documentation of antiquities recovered from excavation was being prepared.

⁷⁰ ASI and its officials were involved in the previous excavations of these sites.

⁷¹ Excavated sites viz. Gottiprolu, Andhra Pradesh (2018-2020) and Sitagarha, Jharkhand (2020-21) selected for protection in view of their importance and exposed structure.



9.2.1 Excavation at Kanaganahalli, Dharwad, Karnataka

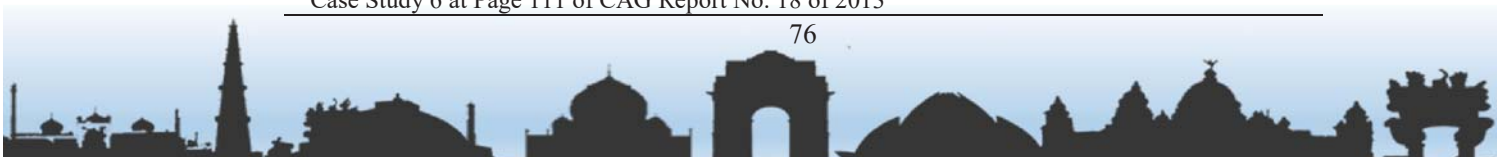
Kanaganahalli is an important and rare Buddhist site under ASI Dharwad Circle. The excavations at the site carried out by ASI (between 1994-2001) had revealed remains of a unique Mahastupa, pre-historic artefacts, structural remains and ancient vestiges dating back to first century BCE⁷². In response to shortcomings in conservation and protection of the site, as pointed out in the previous Report, ASI informed about various steps taken by it. These include construction of temporary sheds for excavated panels, their chemical preservation works and creation of a Committee (in July 2020) to suggest suitable measures for the preservation and conservation of the excavated site. Joint physical inspection carried out during the follow-up audit revealed that following concerns at the excavated site were still persisting.

- Even after 20 years of excavation and reporting by audit, the panels and other remains of the site were lying scattered in open, subject to vagaries of nature.
- Walls of the closed sculpture shed created for preservation of Buddha idol had developed big cracks. Cement beds created at the open shed for placing artefacts had cracked.
- The site spread over an area of 23 acres was covered with thick vegetation and grass posing fire threat to the artefacts. The CCTV camera installed at the site was not functional while the lighting system was not adequate.



Ministry/ASI stated (January 2022) that the conservation of the excavated remains of *Kanaganahalli* and providing shelters/shifting to the nearest building will be its priority in the coming financial year 2022-23.

⁷² Case Study 6 at Page 111 of CAG Report No. 18 of 2013



Shifting of Antiquities discovered during excavation at Sanauli

During the year 2018-19, ASI's Institute of Archaeology had undertaken excavation at ancient site of Sanauli in District Baghpat, Uttar Pradesh. The major excavation finds were life size chariots, implements like swords, chisel, knife, mirror, combs, etc. made of copper and dating back to 2000 BC to 1800 BC.



The discoveries from archaeological excavation at Sanauli were considered significant as they provided a new insight into the chalcolithic culture of the Indian sub-continent and provided data for interpretation of Great ancient Indian literatures such as *Vedas*, the *Mahabharata*, etc⁷³.

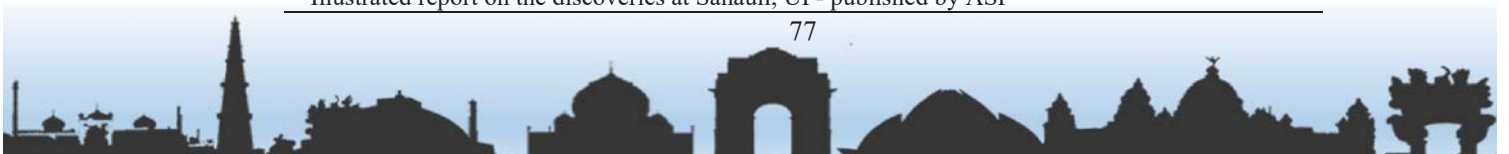


Artistic visualisation of excavated chariot.



It was noted that after their discovery at Sanauli, ASI had shifted all the valuable antiquities to Red Fort, Delhi and then again to the newly created office at Greater Noida. As mentioned in Para 6.4, there was no policy or standards for shifting these antiquities. However, ASI intimated (December 2020) that while moving antiquities it takes utmost precaution regarding their safety.

⁷³ Illustrated report on the discoveries at Sanauli, UP- published by ASI



Conclusions:

Issues connected with exploration and excavation activities viz. non-existence of action plan, absence of centralized information and monitoring mechanism for excavation activities, delay in report writing work, insufficient budget allocation etc. as pointed out in previous Report have not been resolved.

