

**Archaeology, the Public, Nation and Region:
Case Studies from South Asia**

*Thesis Submitted to the Jawaharlal Nehru University
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Declaration

I, Rachel A. Varghese, hereby declare that the thesis titled "*Archaeology, the Public, Nation and Region: Case Studies from South Asia*", submitted by me to the Centre for Historical Studies, School of Social Sciences, Jawaharlal Nehru University, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, has not been previously submitted for any degree to this or any other university, and is my original work.



Rachel A. Varghese

CERTIFICATE

It is hereby recommended that the Thesis may be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

Supriya Varma

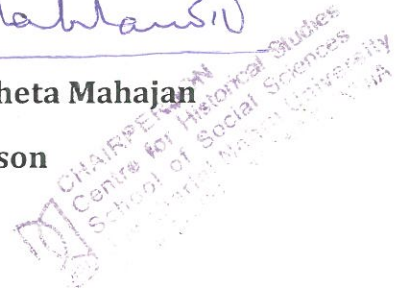
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Prof. Sucheta Mahajan

Chairperson



To

Amma and Appa

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Abbreviations

ABVP	: Akhil Bharatiya Vidhyarthi Parishad
AHM	: Archaeological Heritage Management
ARM	: Archaeological Resource Management
ASI	: Archaeological Survey of India
BCE	: Before Christian Era
BHU	: Banaras Hindu University
BJP	: Bharatiya Janata party
BVK	: Bharateeya Vichara Kendram
CABA	: Central Advisory Board of the ASI
CBSE	: Central Board of Secondary Education
CDP	: Conservation Development Plan
CE	: Christian Era
CHS	: Centre for Heritage Studies
CPC	: Code of Civil Procedures
CPI-M	: Communist party of India –Marxist
CRM	: Cultural Resource Management
CrPC	: Code of Criminal Proceedue
GPR	: Ground Penetrating Radar
IAR	: Indian Archaeology - A Review
ICHR	: Indian Council for Historical Research
ICOMOS	: International Council on Monuments and Sites
IEA	: Indian Evidence Act or Evidence Act
INC	: Indian National Congress
INTACH	: Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage
IRISH	: Institute for Research in Social Sciences and Humanities
JNU	: Jawaharlal Nehru University
KCHR	: Kerala Council for Historical Research
KMB	: Kochi Muziris Biennale
KSICL	: Kerala State Institute of Children’s Literature
LDF	: Left Democratic Front
MHP	: Muziris Heritage Project

MHS	: Muziris Heritage Site
MPRA	: Muziris Pattanam Residents' Association
MRA	: Marthoma Research Academy
NBPW	: Northern Black Polished Ware
NRK	: Non-Resident Keralite
O.O.S.	: Other original Suit
OBC	: Other Backward Class
PES	: Public Engagement of Science
PGW	: Painted Gray Ware
PTI	: Press Trust of India
RDO	: Revenue Divisional Officer
RSS	: Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh
SHP	: Saraswati Heritage Project
U.C. College	: Union Christian College
UDF	: United Democratic Front
UK	: United Kingdom
UNESCO	: United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization
UPA	: United Progressive Alliance
US	: United States
USA	: United States of America
VHP	: Vishva Hindu Parishad
WAC	: World Archaeological Congress
WTTC II	: World Travel & Tourism Council India Initiative
WTTC	: World Travel & Tourism Council

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Introduction

This dissertation seeks to understand archaeology as a discipline and practice in its relation to the present. The discussion focuses on two themes- Archaeology and the Public and Archaeology and the Nation/Region. I use three case studies to explore multiple facets of this broad problematic. The trajectory of this thesis is important to elucidate its overall rationale. Rather than looking for case studies that would illustrate the questions taken up, my enquiry started the other way around, that is, from the case studies outwards. The site of Pattanam in Kerala (the focus of the third chapter) was where I first got training in excavation methods in 2007. This was at a time when the public discourses around the site on an everyday basis had thickened. The archaeologists working on the site had constant exposure to a steady stream of visitors, daily reports of the excavations in the media, and other discussions that the excavations triggered off in the public sphere. For many of the team members, this was their first exposure to field archaeology. Notions on public-archaeology relationships had been vague; these would have to evolve and take shape through interaction. Alongside discussions on the archaeology of the site, its politics and the nature of its public were important concerns for the team. The possibility of developing these questions as an academic enquiry emerged in relation to a paper I had been working on for an edited volume titled *Kerala Modernity: Ideas, Spaces and Practices in Transition* (Bose and Varughese 2015a). Thinking of archaeology and modernity in the context of Kerala provided me a frame within which the developments around the site could be placed and compared with other instances.

In the context of India, any discussion on archaeology in its relation to the present invariably draws into discussion, the role played by archaeology in the Ayodhya dispute (a facet of which I take up in the second chapter). The demolition of the 16th century mosque, Babri Masjid in Ayodhya, on 6th December 1992 is considered a watershed in the post-independence history of India. The event gave the idea of secularism as peaceful co-existence of religious communities a sharp jolt, bringing into question one of the defining principles of this democracy. The period following the 1990s has seen rapid communalisation of political and civil life in the country, and the Babri Masjid Demolition is periodically invoked in the process. While the impact of the event had been felt differently in different parts of the nation, at least a peripheral awareness of the same is an inescapable condition of being in the country.

Hence, for a student of archaeology the ways in which archaeology gets implicated in the dispute becomes an important concern. This is especially so in the contemporary context when political and identity assertions around heritage sites have been proliferating, often exposing them to the threat of destruction.

Thus, this study was initially an enquiry into these two specific cases and their selection had been primarily determined by familiarity. The third case study focuses on art installations where archaeological excavations are an important trope (Chapter 4). The first example of such a work came to my attention while I was working on my case study of Pattanam and the other examples came up through a search for comparable instances.

The absence of overarching frames during the initial stages of the enquiry proved to be advantageous in different respects. This allowed me to approach the case studies from different angles. The two themes that I have focused on in the thesis emerged through such an exploration. Public Archaeology surfaced as a major disciplinary frame in which comparable enquiries have occurred in other parts of the globe, especially in the United States (US) and Europe. The major theme of this enquiry – Archaeology and the Public draws heavily from these works. Another set comprised of studies that sought to understand how the socio-political context of practice results in the constitution of regional traditions of archaeology. The nation state and nationalism have been recognized by many of these studies to exercise a major formative role in the development of distinctive traditions of archaeology. There are also a number of works concerned with the politics of the past, including the archaeological past. Some of these studies take up specific instances from India, including the Ayodhya dispute. These two groups of works have informed the discussions on the second theme of enquiry- the relationship of archaeology with the nation /region.

From its initial conceptualization, this work has undergone significant alterations. For instance, the title of this thesis suggests South Asia to be the region under consideration and the case studies to have a wider focus than has been the case. When the thesis was initially conceived, ‘South Asia’ was used in the title, by virtue of one case study identified for detailed exploration. The proposed case sought to examine some aspects of the archaeological efforts to identify the exact location of

Kapilavastu, the place associated with many important events in the life of the Buddha. The efforts in this direction had begun in the mid 19th century. By the early 20th century attention had narrowed down to two sites, Tilaurākoṭ in the Nepal Tarai region and Piprahwa in the Basti District of Uttar Pradesh. While Tilaurākoṭ is located in present day Nepal, Piprahawa falls within the political boundary of India. While the two places are just around 20 kms apart, their location on two sides of a national border has fuelled claims and counterclaims on their identity. With the revival of interest in Buddhist sites as heritage locations and as parts of spiritual touristic landscapes in recent years, the location of Kapilavastu has assumed new significations for both nations. What I initially proposed was to examine how the archaeological debate on the location of Kapilavastu related to different imaginations of the nation/region over the years. For this, I intended to go on a field visit to Tilaurākoṭ. The Department of Archaeology at Durham University, the UK, in collaboration with the UNESCO had undertaken a project titled *The Natal Landscape of the Buddha* (“The Natal Landscape of” n.d.) which began in 2011. As part of the project, archaeological excavations started in Tilaurākoṭ in 2012. I hoped to visit the site during the 2016 excavation season which had been co-ordinated by Kosh Prasad Acharya, former Director General of Archaeology of Nepal and Robin Coningham of the Durham University. The excavations were to begin in January. However border tensions developed between Nepal and India after the new constitution was passed by the latter in September 2015. Following protests by the border-dwelling Madhesi community against the constitution, India imposed an official blockade on Nepal (Dixit 2015). Owing to these tensions, I was told that it would not be advisable and possibly impossible for me, as an Indian citizen, to join the team right across the border. I dwelled on this rather lengthy personal narrative not merely to justify the use of the term South Asia in the title of the thesis. This also serves to illustrate how the contemporary political context and categories like the nation state can influence the course and trajectory of academic projects, including works such as mine. In a similar way certain assumptions and categories that informed this enquiry at the initial stage had to be modified, to be opened out, or discarded as the work progressed. These aspects will be taken up in the course of the discussion

Finally, the absence of pre-given frames has allowed me a degree of methodological freedom in tackling each of the cases. I have focused in Chapter 2 and Chapter 4 on

selected aspects of two case studies, while the second case study (Chapter 3) has the nature of descriptive ethnography. Accordingly the sources and methods that have been used vary. Such methodological choices will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter and in the case studies. The challenge of the approach has been to integrate the discussion around the two themes I have focused on.

Chapterization

The thesis has five core chapters

Chapter 1: Archaeology, Nation, Region and the Public: The chapter gives a theoretical and methodological introduction to the study. Its main body is a somewhat comprehensive review of literature. The reviewed works are on the two themes that the thesis focuses -1) Archaeology and the Public; 2) Archaeology and Nation/ region. The chapter seeks to contextualise this work within the existing academic scholarship, to bring out its relevance and scope, and to elaborate on the use of case studies as a methodological tool in the light of the discussion

Chapter 2: Case Study 1 - ‘Order’ing Excavations: The Case of Ayodhya: The case study looks at the 2010 judgment of the Allahabad High Court, which decided on the issue of ownership of the site of the demolished Babri Masjid. The court ordered excavations by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) at Ayodhya in 2003. The excavations were conducted from 12 March 2003 to 7 August 2003. The report of the ASI submitted to the court on 22 August 2003, decisively informed one of the key issues in the lawsuit- whether there was a temple at the site that had been demolished to build the ‘disputed structure’. The 2003 excavations at Ayodhya have been discussed extensively in the academia both following the excavations and after the High Court verdict. The interest of the chapter lies in engaging with the intersection of law and archaeology. In the Ayodhya case, the demand for knowledge production comes from a judicial framework to which archaeology caters to. The central concern of the chapter is the (re)constitution of archaeological evidence as legal evidence. The Ayodhya case saw the convergence of two bureaucratic institutions, with specific categories of people, like the ASI archaeologists, experts appearing for both sides of

the dispute, court appointed observers, counsels and judges, coming into interaction to dispute archaeological evidence through legal parlance.

Chapter 3: Case Study 2 - ‘Un-packing Muziris’: Archaeology and the New Imaginations of the Past - The Case of Pattanam, Kerala:

The second case study seeks to map out the multiple responses to and discourses generated around the archaeological explorations and excavations at Pattanam, in the Vadakkekara revenue village in Paravur *taluk* of Ernakulam District in central Kerala. Unlike the Ayodhya excavations, Pattanam excavations are less rigidly defined by bureaucratic institutions. The case opens up further the possibility of exploring the public in its multiplicity. The chapter is divided into nine sections. In the first two sections, the chapter provides a brief overview of the archaeological exercises at Pattanam and seeks to place them in the context of archaeological practice in Kerala. The local responses that the excavations generated in the early years are dealt with in the third section. Here I try to trace how the local population at Pattanam dealt with the presence of archaeological material before the site came to attention, and mechanisms by which they related to the newly discovered archaeological past in the early years. The public responses that the Pattanam excavations generated were not confined to the village alone. A good share of these diverse responses had to do with the identification of the site with the early historic port of Muziris. Sections four to eight attempt to bring out the multiplicity in these responses. The fourth section sees the claims and counterclaims generated around the Pattanam-Muziris equation at a popular level. The next section examines a specific kind of space that the Pattanam-Muziris debate moved into, which I characterize as quasi academic. Here the debate was carried out primarily through the literary medium of magazines and newspapers. The identification of Pattanam with Muziris also generated particular identity claims and vehement political opposition to these claims which are examined in the next section. In the years that followed the excavation, Muziris as a word and idea became extensively popular and acquired the nature of a brand. The seventh section examines these instances of branding with a special focus on two occasions where Muziris directly enters the global heritage discourse-- the Muziris Heritage Project (MHP) and the Kochi Muziris Biennale (KMB). The eighth section looks at how the Pattanam excavations and archaeology in general become part of the popular culture in Kerala during this period. Over the years, the relationship and attitude of the local populace

towards the Pattanam excavations have changed considerably. The final section of the chapter seeks to characterize these changes. The chapter is a descriptive ethnography that makes use of multiple source categories.

Chapter 4: Case Study 3 - Archaeology in Artistic Representation: The Figure of the Artist as Archaeologist: The case study introduces the category of the ‘artist- as archaeologist’ to explore artworks where archaeology figures as a major trope or theme. Through three site-specific installations and one art exhibition, the chapter examines ways in which archaeology informs artistic imagination. The discussion thematically revolves around three ideas- location, authenticity/ materiality and process. Unlike the first two case studies, the central role of the professional archaeologist is absent here and is replaced by the figuration of the artist as archaeologist

Chapter 5: Archaeology in the Present: The final chapter is analytical in nature. It seeks to bring together the observations made in the case studies into an extended discussion around the two key themes of enquiry. Each case study ends with a section titled ‘For Further Discussion.’ The suggestions made here are further elaborated in the final chapter.

Chapter 1: Archaeology, Nation, Region and the Public

This study examines the ways in which archaeological practice and knowledge production engage with and are affected by people and situations outside the professional fold. It uses case studies to situate archaeological knowledge production as mediated by its contextual engagements. The primary focus of the study will be *Archaeology and the Public*. The discussion of this theme should lead to the ancillary subject matter of archaeology and its relation to the nation/region. These two areas have received some attention within archaeological scholarship since the 1970's. However, works related to the context of archaeology in South Asia, and India in particular, are far and few. The thesis seeks to address this gap in academic scholarship. Three case studies are identified as potential sites of enquiry to open up the discussion of specific categories of contextual engagements. The first of these explores the intersection of law and archaeology at the convergence of two state/bureaucratic institutions. The specific reference is to the 2010 judgment of the Allahabad High Court in the Ayodhya case. The context and commissioning of archaeological excavations, the excavation report as legal evidence vis-à-vis the judgment, and the actors involved form the subject matter of the first case study. The second case is that of the excavations at the Early Historic site of Pattanam in central Kerala. The chapter maps the various discourses generated around the excavations in the region, which mark *the public* in its multiplicity. The third case focuses on a single category of the public dubbed as 'the artist as archaeologist'. Here I take up art installations where archaeological excavations figure as major trope and tool.

1. 1. Review of Selected Literature

Contextualising archaeological practice has not been an important concern in the traditional culture-historical, and 'new archaeological' approaches. It is only in the last four decades that the subjectivity of the archaeologist and the political/ideological dimensions of the disciplinary practice attracted academic attention. The discussion will focus on two areas explored in this study. The first concerns disciplinary approaches towards the relationship between archaeology and the public. The second

is an extended treatment of one of the many facets of this engagement, *viz.*, the relationship between archaeology and the Nation/Region.

1.1. a. Archaeology and the Public

Archaeology, by nature of its field practice and through institutional engagements, comes into interaction with the public in multiple ways. The present section examines how this relationship has been explored within the discipline by addressing the following questions:

- What constitutes the public in relation to archaeology?
- Is it possible to imagine public as a singular unified entity?
- What are the multiple ways of looking at public engagements with archaeology?

Public Archaeology: The Formation and Evolution of a Sub-Discipline

Public Archaeology looks into the processes by which the discipline forms part of the wider public culture, and into the outcomes of these. It is one of the broad frames within which archaeology's relationship with the public may be placed and understood. Public Archaeology emerged as a theme in the 1970's and has been understood in multiple ways since then. The extent to which agency is attributed to the public in the engagement with archaeology is central to the multiple approaches in public archaeology.

The term 'Public Archaeology' was first used by anthropologist, Charles R. McGimsey III (1972) in a volume by the same title. McGimsey's work was a response to the rapid destruction of archaeological sites in the United States (US) as a result of developmental activities. The author wrote with two sets of audience in mind. The first included archaeologists who might engage in development programs in their respective states. The second set included legislators and other concerned citizens who could be instrumental in the protection of archaeological heritage. The central concern of the work was to give detailed guidelines for the designing of a state supported archaeological program. The case of the state of Arkansas, with which the author was closely involved, was presented as a case study towards this end. This was

followed by a summary account of the state and federal support to archaeology in the US at the time of writing the book. The work sought to provide directions for the “development of effective, publically supported programs of archaeological research and development” (ibid., 4) and Public Archaeology in this sense was more practice oriented.

McGimsey's work should be seen in the context of historic preservation sentiments that began to gain root in the United States in the first half of the 20th century and the various salvage and relief programs responding to the cultural resource destruction caused by construction and developmental activities.¹ In the early years, Public Archaeology essentially meant Cultural Resource Management (CRM) and conservation (King 1983, Merriman 2004b). CRM is a broad term that can refer to any activity of conservation and the management of cultural resources. CRM initiatives developed in the US in the 1970s as part of concerns related to the detrimental effects on cultural heritage by the processes of urbanization, industrialization and other forms of landscape alterations. It referred to the application of management skills in the preservation of cultural heritage. In practice, in the US the focus of CRM was largely the study and management of prehistoric and historic archaeological resources, and its practice came to be structured by federal laws passed before and after the 1970s.² To follow Merriman (2004, 3), in cases as the one discussed by McGimsey(1972), Public Archaeology and CRM could be equated because the former “relied on public support in order to convince legislators and developers that archaeological sites needed protection or mitigation, and often it relied on non-professionals to do the work”. The CRM approaches usually conceive of the agents of archaeology acting ‘on behalf of the’ public and in many parts of the globe this is a predominant approach towards institutionalised practices in Public Archaeology. In association with CRM, Public Archaeology may also be used in a more restrictive sense. King (1983, 144) for instance, uses the term in the context of the US “to mean the practice of archaeology in connection with archaeology to mean, the programmes in land- use planning and development, supported by government

¹See Jameson Jr. (2004) for a detailed discussion of these developments and for an overview of the major trends in Public Archaeology till the present in the United States. See also Frost (2004) .

² For a detailed discussion on the development and early years of practice of CRM in the US see Fowler (1982).

agencies and regulated industries, usually via contracts”. A related development in the 1980's and 1990's especially in the United States is that of Educational Archaeology (for a detailed discussion, see, Jameson Jr. 2004, Frost 2004, McManamon 1991) which referred to actual classroom situations and also to diverse methods of conveying archaeological information to the lay public. A detailed discussion of the CRM approach to Public Archaeology and Educational Archaeology would not be within the scope of this discussion. Rather, my concern here is with the broader definitions that Public Archaeology has gained during the four decades following the publication of McGimsey's work (1972).

While the CRM based approaches discussed above dominate the discussions on Public Archaeology in the US, the term has different resonances elsewhere on the globe. Drawing on a debate between Francis McManamon and Cornelius Holtorf,³ Ascherson (2006) underlines the difference between what Public Archaeology means in the US and the United Kingdom (UK):

The American usage —admittedly more faithful to what the two words are usually held to mean— sees Public Archaeology as one of the pragmatic branches of the discipline among others: roughly doing the sort of archaeology which interacts with the public. The British version, in contrast, has become a *Stoa*⁴ in which the most fundamental theories about the past, its exploitation and political role of archaeology are questioned (Ascherson 2006).

Ascherson discusses this difference in approach to mark out the range of meanings that the term public archaeology comprehends in different cultures. The term has had different trajectories of development in different parts of the world. For instance Lea and Frost (2011) trace the development of Public Archaeology in Canada as having been furthered through the efforts of certain key individuals. The particular conditions of regulation and governance of archaeological practice in Canada, they point out, meant that these individuals had been functioning outside mainstream archaeological practice and also in isolation from each other. Because of the absence of a forum of its own for Public Archaeology in Canada, both the USA and the UK versions of Public Archaeology found their way into practice there. In other parts of the globe the term

³ The debate will be discussed in detail in a later section of the chapter

⁴ Italics in the original

Public Archaeology does not have much currency, as in China (Wang 2011) and to a large extent, India. However, we would see in the following discussion that the absence of terminology does not necessarily mean that concerns that fall within the domain of Public Archaeology in the west are not addressed in these regions.

Over the last more than four decades, Public Archaeology has acquired the status of a sub-discipline that looks into a wide range of issues of which CRM and Educational Archaeology are but a small part. This is best illustrated by the definition of Public Archaeology made by Tim Schadla-Hall (1999) in the editorial to the volume of the *European Journal of Archaeology* dedicated to Public Archaeology. Schadla-Hall (ibid., 147) defines Public Archaeology as “any area of archaeological activity that interacted or had the potential to interact with the public.” This broadening of definitions occurs in response to reconsiderations of the nature of public involvement in archaeology over a period of time. In the essay Hall attempts a survey of the broad trends in the evolution of the discipline in the west that justifies the changed definition that will be discussed in the following section. There are six essays in the volume which deal with issues like legislation in cultural heritage (Domanico 1999), value assessment in Archaeological Heritage Management (Deeben et.al. 1999), state of database management systems in archaeological information management (Sanjuán and Wheatley 1999), archaeological authenticity in relation to the public as consumers of the past (Holtorf and Schadla-Hall 1999), and neglect of archaeological archives in CRM (Merriman and Hedley 1999). The regional focus is on Europe and we see that the range of issues that are dealt with relate to but are not limited to CRM.

Another related development is the emergence of the term Community Archaeology. In the issue of *World Archaeology* dedicated to the subject Marshall (2002) uses the term to mean partial control of the community at every step of an archaeological project. Marshall notes that while many of the concerns of Community Archaeology overlap with those of CRM, the recognition of the same or the use of the term Community Archaeology is absent, especially in some parts of the globe like the US. The crucial difference of a Community Archaeology project is, understanding it as part of academic research. Thus while CRM and heritage management are crucial to Community Archaeology initiatives, it also is “a specific approach to all aspects of

archaeological practice” that looks to “transform the nature of the discipline in fundamental ways” (ibid., 215).

Public Archaeology, the first journal dedicated to the subject, began publication from the year 2000. The editorial (Ascherson 2000) to the first volume captures in a much more effective way than Schadla-Hall (1999) does, the transformations that the sub-discipline has undergone since the 1970's. Ascherson (2000, 2) examines what caused the term Public Archaeology to 'explode' from its narrow meaning as “archaeology conducted or conserved for the general body by public authority”. The self-reflexivity that came in the discipline post the 1980s has rendered it less Eurocentric and led to a realisation that the present and not the past has been the real locus of archaeology. Thus there has been recognition within the discipline of its political nature. Ascherson attributes the broadening of the scope of Public Archaeology to these changes within the discipline. Central to his understanding of Public Archaeology is the question of ethics. All the new territories to which the discipline has expanded its enquiries, for him, “are about the problems which arise when archaeology moves into the real world of economic conflict and political struggle. In other words, they are about ethics” (ibid.).

A seminal volume of articles on Public Archaeology edited by Nick Merriman (2004a) was published in 2004. Apart from the introduction, there are 15 essays in the volume that are divided into two broad sections. The first deals with communication and interpretation and the second with the question of who the stakeholders in archaeology are. While a significant number of essays are from the contexts of North America and the UK, there is a notable presence in the volume of essays that extend these concerns to different parts of the globe like east and south-east Asia, Brazil and Africa. The attempt in the volume, Merriman (2004b) points out, is to show how new and wider debates can open up when one moves away from the narrow definitions of the CRM based approaches to Public Archaeology.

A second edited volume of essays titled *New Perspectives in Global Public Archaeology* was published in 2011 (Okamura and Matsuda 2011). The introductory essay to the volume (Matsuda and Okamura 2011) seeks to provide a broad and inclusive definition for Public Archaeology given the diverse implications that the discipline has on a global scale. The essays in the volume bring together perspectives

from a wide geography including, Jordan, Japan, China, Korea and Thailand in Asia, Melanesia, Peru and Senegal. For the authors, the diversity that occurs when the discipline is considered on a global scale is due to three major reasons. The first is the variation in the theoretical underpinnings of the discipline in different parts of the globe. The second is the difference in archaeological practice across countries owing to differences in their socio- economic conditions. The third is the contingency of public perception of archaeology with the history of its development in each local context. Further diversity in the meaning of Public Archaeology is brought in by what *the public* means in each society. Here the authors elaborate upon the dual division of the public as officialdom and people, that Merriman (2004b) has touched upon, to stress how the meanings can have other connotations especially in non- Anglophone contexts. The elaborate and inclusive definition, which takes into account all these factors proposed in the book, is that Public Archaeology is “a subject that examines the relationship between archaeology and the public, and then seeks to improve it”(Matsuda and Okamura 2011, 4). If one compares this with the definitions proposed by Schadla-Hall (1999) or Merriman (2004b) discussed above, one sees that there is a stress within the definition itself for both research and action. Matsuda and Okamura (2011, 4) call this an “ever-evolving two-stage cycle.”

In the Indian context works that place themselves within the frame of Public Archaeology are very few. In a study of public education of archaeology in India, Neelima Dahiya (1994) examines certain aspects of introducing archaeology at an informal level in history teaching in the school curricula. This is through a questionnaire based survey among teachers and statistical analysis of experimental and traditional teaching sessions with students in selected schools that follow the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) curriculum in the states of Delhi and Haryana. On the basis of her statistical observations she argues that archaeology, especially through effective use of teaching aids, can help make the study of ancient history of India meaningful to the students. An analysis of Dahiya's findings is not within the scope of this discussion. However, it is important to note that Dahiya finds archaeology to have a transformative role in modifying the student's attitude towards Ancient History as a discipline at an ideological level. “The teachers of Indian national history,” she argues, “should therefore give more recognition to archaeology because it makes a specific contribution to social solidarity and the national and

emotional integration which are the most avowed objectives of history in Indian schools” (ibid., 300). She also suggests that archaeology allows one to move beyond a focus on kings, queens, wars etc., to look at events, processes and on their impact on the society as a whole. This, she assumes, would help the students develop a scientific and rational outlook.⁵ She also demonstrates through her studies that particular attributes of archaeological sources, like materiality, would be efficient vehicles of teaching. While Dahiya's work is not directly that of a public archaeologist, it clearly indicates the potential of Educational Archaeology in ideological inculcation, in this case, nationalism. For her this is an ideal consequence and hence she is not critical of the role of the educator. The discipline is positioned at a higher level than the student in terms of its rational and scientific credentials. By virtue of his/her mastery of the discipline, the educator would share this superiority. The student must undergo a set of well defined transformations in his/ her perceptions and ideology through the education he/ she receives.

Selvakumar’s (2006) article titled ‘Public Archaeology in India: Perspectives from Kerala’ is one of the pioneering works from India that concerns itself with Public Archaeology. Selvakumar analyses the public responses to two excavation projects that he was involved in, and uses a questionnaire based survey to study the public attitude towards archaeology in the state of Kerala in South India. Newspaper reports and other media resources are used to supplement his observations. The article discusses the activities of the different governmental and non-governmental organisations working in the field of heritage and archaeology in Kerala. He compares his findings with a broader Indian scenario, based on generalized observations, to characterize the Kerala public as a category that is distinctly pro-active and able to influence the research decisions of the archaeologists.⁶ It is significant that Selvakumar (2006) places his work within the frame of Public Archaeology, thereby addressing a disciplinary lacuna with reference to India. He also moves beyond the CRM based understanding, to consider the importance of the changing discourses on

⁵ Dahiya does not elaborate upon her use of the term ‘scientific’ and ‘rational’. The terms are used as givens and are assumed to be inherent in the insights that archaeology allows.

⁶ The observations made by Selvakumar (2006) will be discussed in more detail in the following sections.

heritage, the politics of archaeology and the influence of public perception on the discipline.

This brief overview of some of the key texts in Public/Community Archaeology was intended to mark the emergence of the sub-discipline and the widening of its scope over the years. One sees that from a limited and practice-oriented sense the discipline has entered into much broader avenues of research and practice. The use of certain terms like CRM, Archaeological Heritage Management (AHM), Archaeological Resource Management (ARM), Public Archaeology and Community Archaeology would differ regionally, or by personal choice. On the basis of the contributions to the *World Archaeology* volume on the theme, Marshall (2002) notes that, there was a higher number of contributions from Australia and New Zealand, and it appeared that Community Archaeology is “more explicitly articulated as a specific set of practices” in these regions (ibid, 212). She also notes that what could fall within the given definitions of the sub- discipline was not always articulated as Community Archaeology. In some parts of the globe, including India, terms like Public/Community Archaeology are conspicuous by their (near) absence. However, as we will see further along this discussion, there are a number of works from these regions that address one or more concerns that could fall within the broad definitions of Public Archaeology discussed above. The range of topics that can come within the scope of the discipline⁷ makes any single definition either redundant or too broad to have any significant explanatory potential. A more effective way to bring together these studies and to understand their relevance in the context of this thesis would be to

⁷ The following list of concerns given by Ascherson (2000, 2) well demonstrates this aspect.

Ascherson’s list includes,

- “- the sale of unprovenanced and frequently looted antiquities;
- the symbiotic relationship between the emergence of modern nationalism and the profession of archaeology;
- the recent "privatisation" of the profession...the emergence all over the world of "contract" archaeology;
- the position of human rights in archaeology...
- the representation of archaeology in fiction, film, TV and other media;
- the law on portable finds or treasure trove;
- the enigma of what we mean by authenticity, and the ethical dilemmas posed by historical theme parks and re-enactments of the past
- the archaeologist as the long arm of state power, or the archaeologist as catalyst for local resistance to the state.”

come to terms with the conceptual explications of the Public that these studies articulate.

The Public in Public Archaeology

The literature that deals with public-archaeology relationship understands the association of the two components and the concept of the public in different ways. McGimsey (1972) has a two-fold approach to the public. Firstly, he imagines a universal singular public which has a “birthright” (ibid, 5) to knowledge including knowledge about the past. This loosely defined public has a right to the entirety of archaeological data recovered, of the availability and security of artefacts and of the necessary data related to these. Secondly, McGimsey talks about the specific sets of public who come into association with specific archaeological material. Their relation to archaeology is defined and limited by the extent to which it is seen to facilitate or hinder universal public right to knowledge. The legitimate goal of archaeological activity is the preservation of 'scientific' archaeological data for the universal knowledge repository. While, amateur or private institutions may engage in archaeology, it becomes legitimate only in so far as they assume the responsibility to adhere to this goal. While in principle McGimsey agrees to the “total participation of all interested parties and the public” in archaeology, he concedes that in practice “the vast majority of the public is not going to become involved beyond appreciating the need for proper archaeological recovery and preservation and perhaps taking some interest in the result” (ibid., 7). Their involvement is mostly limited to providing support to the development of federal and state programs, recognition and willingness to financially support archaeology as well as an assumption of individual responsibility to protect archaeological sites under their control. The dedication of the volume,

To the people of Arkansas and their elected representatives, who together have had the foresight and determination to blaze new trails in archaeological legislation and public support, and by so doing have provided Arkansas with a potential for the best state program of archaeological research, preservation and development in the country (ibid.)

summarizes this view to some extent.

In the initial decades that followed the use of the term Public Archaeology by McGimsey, the problem of defining a universal generalized public began to be articulated. Fagan's article (1977) on educating the public about archaeology in the context of the US, published five years after McGimsey's seminal work (1972), qualifies the public further. The public, here, is not singular in nature, but displays a wide range of attitudes to archaeology, including extreme attitudes and possible actions harmful to archaeological record. The public also may have an interest in archaeology, the manifestations of which may be diverse. This, for Fagan, is evidenced by a proliferation of publications for the lay public, popular television shows and also a range of fantastic explanations of past phenomena. He recognises the multiplicity of public attitudes to archaeology. He is also aware of the role of agents other than academic archaeologists, such as the media, in the formation of these attitudes. Fagan still makes a broad two-fold division of the public into those with a responsible attitude to archaeology and the casually interested clientele. The main concern of the article is on designing an appropriate introductory course for a section of the latter namely, the lay student. Fagan is sensitive to the possibility that the expectations of the lay student would be in tandem with the larger public attitudes to the discipline, and that there would be great diversity in expectations among the students in a classroom situation. The archaeologist as a course instructor needs to be sensitive to these and set aside his/her own compulsions as a specialist in order to sustain the enthusiasm of the student. He recognises that the simplistic and persuasive popular arguments would be more appealing to the lay student and hence the archaeologist would need to directly engage with or make his/her argument as interesting as any of these through "unashamed entertainment" (ibid., 123). While multiplicities in the perceptions and expectations of the lay public regarding archaeology are captured well in Fagan's argument, he does not consider these alternative public attitudes as valid and thus the educator's role is to modify "the student attitudes. The fundamental point is to influence societal and cultural attitudes to archaeology. Our long-term...objective for our students should be to influence their thinking about archaeology as a part of the contemporary world in a permanent way" (ibid., 122). Thus the role of the archaeologist as educator is a transformative one directed towards the public whose attitudes towards the discipline are perceived as deficient and hence requiring modification.

King (1983) understands Public Archaeology much in the same trajectory as McGimsey (1972) and refers to the predominantly contractual practice of archaeology in relation to land use planning and development and supported by government agencies and regulated by industries in the context of the US. However, unlike McGimsey (1972), he does not consider the use of 'public' as a universal category as having much practical value in the discussion of professional responsibility in Public Archaeology. While listing out the objects of a public archaeologist's professional responsibility, he discounts the usefulness of the term 'public' as one of the objects. This is because, for him the term public is "too amorphous to be useful" (ibid, 146). While the Public Archaeologist claims to be working in the public interest the actual object of his/ her interest would be a limited one which differs according to how he/she perceives the public. For King, there are primarily six objects to which the public archaeologist may be responsible, viz., the resource base, colleagues, research, the clients, the law and the non-archaeologists living in and around the site. The conflicts regarding professional responsibility among archaeologists primarily arise due to differences in their perception, and disagreements regarding the objects of responsibility.

Unlike King (1983), McManamon (1991) considers the 'General Public' as a valid category when discussing public education of archaeology. Their interest is important in strengthening academic departments of archaeology as well as in resource preservation activities and programs. However he points out the necessity of subdividing this all encompassing category, because the different subgroups will have different interest levels and consequently the messages and means of delivery will have to be organised and presented accordingly. For him, the importance of such targeted education is in creating an atmosphere that is conducive to archaeology teaching and practice. For instance, linking archaeology with stewardship and patriotism is expected to garner political support from the congress and the executive branch, an important subset in the context of the US from where McManamon is writing. Much like what McGimsey (1972) suggests, here the expectation from each subgroup of the public is fixed. Like Fagan (1977), for McManamon as well, educating the many publics is reaching out and addressing the deficiencies in their knowledge base. He compensates for the absence of statistical data on archaeological literacy by using data on scientific literacy. The equation between archaeological and

scientific literacy that he draws clearly indicates that in his understanding the possibility of public(s) as interpreters of archaeological knowledge, and alternative understandings of archaeological material are completely ruled out. Even so, McManamon also acknowledges that within the general public there can be sections like the 'Native Americans' who are "directly connected to the past societies" (McManamon 1991, 127). This categorization is outside other subdivisions of general public in terms of scientific literacy and professional and academic involvement at varying levels. He acknowledges their claims for repatriation of archaeological resources as legitimate. However, this is subsumed within the larger aim of training them to be participants of mainstream archaeological practice.

In the early studies that were concerned primarily with management of archaeological heritage and public education, concepts like public interest and the understanding of archaeologists working in public interest had been taken for granted. However public attitudes towards archaeology can be complex and might often conflict with that of the archaeologist. One of the areas where the complexity of public attitudes towards archaeology is clearly marked out to receive early attention relates to the studies of remains of indigenous groups in North America, Australia and elsewhere (McManamon 1991; Hubert 1994; McGuire 1994, 2004). McGuire (1994) observes how the approaches of archaeologists themselves differ towards graves of indigenous groups and those of others. While excavation is an automatic preference in the case of the former, White Christian cemeteries are seldom subject to excavations. Such differential treatment reflects the public attitudes held by sections of people who relegate the indigenous cultures as something belonging to the past. There are often demands from indigenous groups for removal of the remains of their ancestors from public displays in museums and sometimes to rebury these remains or those that are excavated with due ceremonial respects. Archaeologists and heritage institutions have had varied responses to these demands. Hubert (1994) discusses in detail instances of such organised demands and occasions where archaeologists and heritage organisations responded by removing public displays of indigenous remains, or formulated guidelines for consultation with indigenous groups regarding their course of action.

We saw in the previous section how the definitions of Public Archaeology have become broad in recent times (Ascherson 2000; Marshall 2002; Schadla-Hall 1999). Central to this is a rethinking of the characterization of the public which moves beyond mere listing out of subcategories and an automatic assumption that archaeology serves the larger public interest. Schadla-Hall's (1999) major stress is on the need to problematize public interest in archaeology as a given by looking at studies and instances pointing to the multiplicity in public attitudes to archaeology. His argument is that the separation of archaeological research and practice from other factors that affect archaeology is an artificial one. Public attitudes towards archaeology are complex. Schadla-Hall stresses the need for the archaeologists to recognize the involvement of the public in the different issues related to archaeology as opposed to the automatic assumption of a generalized public interest in the protection and recording of archaeological sites.

Ascherson's (2000) list⁸ of themes that could fall within the concerns of the *Public Archaeology* journal similarly indicates the revised understanding of the public-archaeology relationship. There is an acknowledgement in the themes that the relationship need not necessarily be unidirectional as we have seen in the cases discussed earlier. The suggestion is that the engagement is a discursive one through which the discipline and its practitioners are also reconstituted. However, Ascherson does not discuss this aspect in detail. The very idea of community archaeology that Marshall (2002) elaborates in discursive terms proposes that the community should have partial control over all aspects of the archaeological project including devising research questions and analysis.

Merriman's introductory essay (2004b) to his edited volume (2004a) is of immense significance to this discussion as it takes up the question of public in relation to archaeology as a central theoretical concern. At the outset, he points out that the use of the term public as a blanket category is unsatisfactory to describe the diversity of people who come into relation with archaeology. Rather they are best understood as "shifting sets of cross-cutting interest groups" (Merriman 2004b, 2). He sees that the predominant understanding in the discipline fails to grasp this dissonance and diversity, especially the tension that characterizes the relationship between the public

⁸ See footnote 7

as state and its institutions and the public as people who can have very varied interests. The early studies and CRM based approaches have a narrow understanding of the state acting on behalf of a generalized public interest. In opposition to that Merriman holds the notion of the public as a “critical body external to that of the state” (ibid., 1). Seminal to this notion is the Habermasian conceptualisation of the public sphere⁹. The widening of definitions of Public Archaeology that has happened in the recent years¹⁰, for him, relates to three major factors. One is the strong influence of archaeological theory (Marxian to Post-modern) that led to recognition of the historical contingency of the discipline and multivalence of interpretation. The second are the recent market tendencies that have forced many of the means of Public Archaeology like museums, heritage sites and exhibitions to compete in the commercial leisure market. The third is the notion of ‘active citizen’, where citizenship is seen as active and individualistic and exercised through choice mostly in the context of consumerism. Merriman also points to the need to place archaeology in the context of the debates around heritage that have emerged in recent years where issues of identity and conflict along with issues of tourism and economics become central concerns. Seen thus he defines Public Archaeology as the study of “the processes and outcomes whereby archaeology becomes part of a wider public culture, where contestation and dissonance are inevitable” (ibid., 5). This allows one to rethink the archaeology-public relation as the top down kind, where knowledge is handed down by the archaeologist to the latter, and to talk about “the processes by which meaning is *created from archaeological material in the public realm*” (my emphasis) (ibid.). Schadla-Hall’s contribution (2004) in the same volume carries this discussion forward by looking at what he calls alternative archaeologies espoused,

⁹ Habermas put forth his idea of the public sphere in his seminal volume *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1991) originally published in 1962. Central to his notion of public sphere is the idea of spaces where private people freely come together as a public, forming public opinion, exercising criticism and control *vis-à-vis* the ruling structures of the state. The existence of public sphere presupposes the existence of public reason. Habermas’s conceptualization of the bourgeois public sphere coming into existence in the 18th century has been criticized especially for the assumptions he makes regarding inclusivity. Here Merriman (2004b) uses the concept to mark the public as external to the state.

¹⁰ He marks this tendency through the trend in the US towards direct public engagement in archaeology and through the definitions of Public Archaeology as proposed by Schadla Hall (1999) and Ascherson (2000) that we have discussed above.

especially, through books and television programmes in the West that created modern mythologies. Schadla-Hall notes that defining what constitutes alternative archaeology, is in itself difficult as the parameters for an acceptable archaeological opinion changes through time, and what was once part of mainstream archaeology can be relegated later on to the sphere of alternative. The recognition of historical contingency and the multivalence of archaeological interpretation would mean that the archaeologists often have to find ways of accommodating alternative interpretations rather than rejecting them.

This recognition is entirely absent in earlier approaches where clear cut separation is assumed between the archaeologist and the public and thereby between archaeological and alternative interpretations. In such an understanding the effort would be to counter any alternative explanation. Schadla- Hall notes that this has been the tendency in the US and the UK. This has changed in recent years. The difference in theoretical perspective favouring historical contingency and multivalence of archaeological interpretation, that Merriman (2004b) also discusses, is cited to justify the recent tendency towards accommodating alternative interpretations of the past. For Merriman and Schadla-Hall, the selection of alternative interpretations becomes an ethical choice that the archaeologist makes whereby he/she qualitatively differentiates between different alternative interpretations and challenges those that posit regressive ideology or accommodate gross distortions towards commercial ends.

Models of Public Engagement with Archaeology

Some of the scholars who have traced the trajectory of development of Public Archaeology as a discipline, have tried to summarize the multiple approaches discussed above appropriating models used for relations between science and society in studies on Public Engagement of Science (PES). Merriman for instance, uses two models. The first is the Deficit Model where the public is seen to need the correct education in order to appreciate archaeology. We see that this is the inherent assumption in some of the studies that we have discussed above (McGimsey 1972; Fagan 1977; King 1983). Such a model, as Merriman also argues, presupposes a separation between the professional and the non-professional where the former is the repository of authoritative knowledge. Hence, the Deficit Model is unsuitable to address the concerns that emerge with the understanding that meaning is created from

archaeological material in the public realm. Over this, Merriman prefers a Multiple Perspective Model, which recognises that “non-archaeologists will re-appropriate, re-interpret and re-negotiate meanings of archaeological resources to their own personal agendas” (Merriman 2004b, 7). The major difference of this model from the Deficit Models of Public Education or CRM is that it recognises the agency of the public. While Merriman seems to favour the multiple-perspective model in favour of the Deficit Model he is also wary of an uncritical celebration of multiple perspectives, which can result from extreme relativism. Here, he seems to agree with Ascherson (2000) who suggests that Public Archaeology is in many ways about ethics. This attribution of agency to the public has direct consequence in understanding the two major concerns of the volume *viz.*, Communication and Interpretation, and Stakeholders in archaeology. As far as the first is concerned, “archaeologists will have to work *with* rather than *against* the fact that people constantly derive meanings from what is provided by reworking it into something that relates to them personally” (Merriman 2004b, 11). When it comes to deciding who a legitimate stakeholder is in archaeology, Merriman agrees with the view that, the archaeologist has to be more politically engaged than assume ‘neutrality’.

Holtorf (2007) proposes three models for engagement of archaeology with the public. He discusses these in the specific context of the evaluations that archaeologists make regarding their portrayal in public culture. The first of these, the Education Model, emerges from the concern that people might get a ‘wrong image’ and seeks to correct this. Its aim is to make as many people as possible see the past and the role of the archaeologist in the same way as the professional archaeologists themselves. The second model called the Public Relations Model is closely linked to the Education Model. However while the latter assumes a clear set of value-laden distinctions between what is proper and what is populist archaeology, the former seeks direct engagement of the archaeologist with popular perceptions/ culture. “(I)n the Public Relations Model people are sought to be manipulated in order to make their opinions more compatible with the interests of professional archaeology” (ibid., 116). In both these models, the understanding is that the Public is deficient in their knowledge about archaeology, an idea which is central to the Deficit Model discussed by Merriman (2004b). The third model suggested by Holtorf is the Democratic Model, which seeks to disturb this top-down notion about archaeology-public relationship.

The Democratic Model “does not seek to improve existing knowledge, change attitudes of audiences or imply what it takes to be a real archaeologist: instead it expects the professionals to change according to what people actually want from archaeology” (Holtorf 2007, 119). As per the model, as expected in a democratic society, archaeologists “ought to accept how mature adults prefer to depict both the past and archaeology” (ibid.).

Matsuda and Okamura (2011) sub-divide the Deficit Model offered by Merriman (2004) into Education and Public Relations model as Holtorf (2007) does, and his Multiple Perspective Model (2004) into critical approach and multi-vocal approach. The first, through critical epistemology, “aims to reveal and challenge the socio-political mechanism sustaining specific archaeological practices of the socially privileged over the socially subjugated” (Matsuda and Okamura 2011, 6). The multi-vocal approach on the other hand seeks “to identify and acknowledge various interpretations of archaeological materials made by different social groups and individuals in various contexts of contemporary society” (ibid.) and thereby has a hermeneutic epistemology. Abu-Khafajah’s (2011) study of the local community’s responses in relation to the citadel of Amman in Jordan, in order to look at the processes involved in understanding the site in terms of cultural heritage, is an example for the multi-vocal approach. Through in-depth interviews conducted among a sample of the local population, she traces the multiplicity in local responses to the site and the heritage and commercial uses to which the site is put. She demonstrates that the multiplicity in views is constituted also as part of the contemporary socio-political context as well as personal experiences and memories (both individual and collective). The archaeological sites get imbued with meaning through this kind of engagement. She notes that these alternative meanings might be entirely different from a conventional understanding of cultural heritage. Far from relegating these alternative meanings to the realm of the unscientific she argues that it is through these processes of ascribing meaning to the archaeological sites that they “are transformed from being merely material of the past into cultural heritage having relevance to local communities’ contemporary contexts and cultures”(Abu- Khafajah 2011, 183).

Both the critical and multi-vocal approaches recognise agency of the public and the possibility of alternative interpretations of the past. The positions also recognise that

the archaeologist as a political subject either seeks to highlight a particular reading of the past or tries to have a holistic reading of the past as opposed to imposing a singular subject-centred reading upon the public. Matsuda and Okamura place the first as intellectually belonging to the 'traditional' left and the second to the post- modern liberal left. For them predominance of a particular approach differs from one country or area to another and is an indicator of how archaeology works and is situated in each of these contexts. Apart from taking a position that recognises the alternative interpretations of the past and the agency of the public, the authors also seek to understand what it means for the archaeologist to deal with different/fragmented pasts. Here again, the authors stress upon the regional differences that determine the extent to which the archaeologist gets involved and the nature of such engagement with the politics of the past. They seem to favour the critical approach over a relativist position that acknowledges all interpretations of the past as equally valid. This could either promote suppressed pasts or explore unexplored alternative accounts of the past. They emphasize the Foucauldian understanding of knowledge¹¹ whereby the archaeologist by virtue of his/her possession of knowledge about archaeological methods and methodology is in a position of authority when it comes to public discourses on archaeological pasts. However, rather than advocating a deconstructive position, the authors opt for a reflexive position whereby the archaeologically interpreted past becomes the basis of the archaeologists' engagement with alternative pasts. This mirrors the position on ethics that Ascherson (2000), Merriman (2004) and Schadla-Hall (2004) also espouse. The difference here is a detailed articulation of the location of the archaeologist as a political subject who is in a position of authority with regard to the interpretation of the past by virtue of his/her possession of expertise and knowledge.

In a very recent article Matsuda (2016) recapitulates the discussion on the four models proposed in his earlier work with Okamura (Matsuda and Okamura 2011) and takes the discussion forward in the context of neo-liberalism. He points out that in the last few decades the most important divide in Public Archaeology approaches was between Education and Public Relations approaches on the one hand and Pluralist and

¹¹ For Michel Foucault knowledge and power relations cannot be separated. The exercise of power creates knowledge and knowledge produces effects of power perpetually. For a selection of Foucault's writings and interviews on the theme see Foucault 1980.

Critical approaches on the other. As we saw in the above discussions, the first corresponds to the Deficit model of Merriman (2004a) and Educational and Public Relations Models of Holtorf (2007) and the latter two to Multiple Perspectives Model of Merriman (2004a) and Democratic Model of Holtorf (2007). The division, Matsuda (2016) enumerates, existed at different levels. While the Educational and Public Archaeology approaches are more practice oriented, the Pluralist and Critical Approaches are more theory-oriented. More significantly, the difference among the approaches is in the way public is characterized.

The educational and public relations approaches regard the public as the object of intervention; in other words, the public are to be educated, informed, and interested. In contrast, the pluralist and critical approaches regard the public as a subject, which has its own agency and interacts with the past according to its beliefs, interests, and agendas (ibid., 3-4).

Matsuda (2016) suggests that the developments in the recent years call for a reconsideration of this division. The pluralist and critical approaches, grouped together for being more post-processual and theoretical, seem to be drifting apart. The pluralist approach is now grouped with the educational and public relations model, and the critical approach stands alone. This is a change in consonance with the advancement of economic neo-liberalism to which archaeological practice across the world has been responding. The logic of the free market and exchange value for social activities has meant that archaeology is expected to be 'accountable' in a financial/market sense. Consequently archaeology is under the pressure to demonstrate public benefits and to maintain good relations with stakeholders for social and financial support. In this context, says Matsuda, the pluralist approach can merge well with the educational and public relations approaches, to have a nuanced understanding and optimized relations with the diverse groups of people that the discipline interacts with in the changed context. That is, insights gained from the pluralist approach would further the educational and public relations approaches. The critical approach, which "aims to reveal and critique the power structure underpinning the discourse and practice of archaeology, with its ultimate aim being to make the modern world more just and equitable through Archaeology," (ibid., 6) cannot be docile to the neo-liberal logic like the other three approaches. Rather, it would have to challenge "the very idea of making archaeology subject to market economy" (ibid.).

Selvakumar's work (2006) discussed earlier also attributes agency to the public and recognises that the public can interfere with, and influence archaeological practice in multiple ways. He points to the need to consider the public as heterogeneous and holding "distinct, often overlapping, identities dictated by factors such as language, region, nation, sub-region, religion, class, tourism, ethnicity, caste, majority community, minority community and so on" (ibid., 419). There is also the recognition that the archaeologist himself/ herself is bound by these identities. Through his case studies and survey he identifies the Kerala public as a distinct category capable of proactive intervention in heritage/ archaeology issues. While he identifies this response as heterogeneous where different identities like religion or community or the locality play out, the agency that they show is understood as a feature that is particular to the Kerala public as distinct from the rest of the nation. The long history of social reform movements and factors such as high literacy levels and the reach of the mass media give substance to this agency.

How to Deal with Alternative Archaeologies? Two Key Debates in Public Archaeology

One fundamental difference among the models/approaches discussed above lies in their characterization of the public. On the one hand we have approaches that consider the public as a deficient category whose role in archaeological practice/interpretation would have to be passive. The archaeologist as a repository of authoritative knowledge needs to make critical interventions to transform public attitudes to make them conducive to archaeological practice. In such approaches, the public becomes an object of intervention. The other set of approaches tends to view the "public as a subject" (Matsuda 2016, 4) with its own agency, approaches and agendas for engaging with the past. This approach is closely associated with the post-processual/interpretative turn in archaeology, whereby archaeological interpretations are present day constructs, and hence need not be singular. Both these approaches have the potential to be excessively polemical. The first can tend towards absolute dismissal of the role of the public in archaeological knowledge production, whereas the second can approximate uncritical celebration of all alternative interpretations. Negotiation of these two positions will be an underlying concern throughout this thesis and in my

approach to the cases under discussion. This seemingly unbridgeable divide has also led to two important academic debates in the 2000s.

Debate between Francis P. McManamon and Cornelius Holtorf

The first of the debates was between McManamon, whose work in educational archaeology we have discussed above (1991) and Cornelius Holtorf, advocate of the Democratic Approach to public (2007). I have made a reference to the debate in an earlier section of this chapter. The forum for the debate was the first volume of the journal *Public Archaeology*. McManamon (2000a), in his article titled ‘Archaeological messages and messengers’ called for more proactive participation of archaeologists in public education and outreach. While in his earlier article, he (McManamon 1991) acknowledges the diversity in public approaches to archaeology, here he goes further to acknowledge the benefits that such alternate views might have for the archaeologist. However, he does not go beyond this acknowledgment to explore the implications of the statement. Rather he focuses on making a clear distinction between desirable and non- desirable attitudes. He is highly critical about the “contemporary mistreatment of archaeological sites and the distortion of archaeological interpretation by looters, misdirected hobbyists, some developers and different kinds of charlatans” (McManamon 2000a, 5). Essentially, desirable public attitudes are non- material and not driven by commercial/ financial interests. An ideal public should be one that “abhorred site destruction and supported *scientific*¹² archaeological activities and preservation” (ibid., 14). Thus McManamon’s view of the public approximates the deficit models. While he acknowledges plurality, his approach to it is in essence patronizing.

In the third issue of the same volume of *Public Archaeology*, Holtorf (2000) gives a short, but highly critical response to McManamon (2000a) and other works that share a similar perspective. He questions the ‘prescriptive’ language they use, for assuming this to be the voice of fellow archaeologists and for the way they understand fellow citizenry. Such language, he says, “frightens him” (Holtorf 2000, 214). Holtorf questions many of the assumptions that McManamon makes in his article and points out that “ideologically sound declarations that proclaim definitive ‘answers’ and aim for discursive closure are not helpful” (ibid.). Similarly he draws attention to the

¹² Emphasis mine

arbitrary way in which these works differentiate real science from pseudo science. What he proposes is a change in attitude, whereby past is to be recognized as a construct of the present and different approaches to the past, both of archaeologists and non-archaeologists, are to be understood as determined by different contemporary discourses and contexts. There is a social value attached to the professions that the archaeologist engages in. For him this in itself is the contribution that the archaeologist can make. He terms efforts at transforming attitudes as proposed by McManamon (2000a) and others as pointless “crusades” (Holtorf 2000, 215). In lieu he calls for an active encouragement of non-professional engagement with the past. While Holtorf’s argument seems to suggest absolute relativism, he attempts to make a distinction from this by suggesting that what he proposes is critical understanding and dialogue in place of dismissive polemics.

McManamon (2000b) felt that Holtorf’s criticisms stemmed from a misinterpretation of his views. In his reply to Holtorf, McManamon, once again elaborates the points he made in the first article (2000a). He concurs with Holtorf on the existence multiple perspectives and multiple publics in relation to archaeology, and agrees that indeed some of these perspectives can be complementary to archaeological practice. However, he asserts that alternative perspectives can be harmful, such as commercial use of archaeological artefacts and active opposition to “scientific approaches to the investigation of archaeological sites”, for instance, on the part of some aboriginal groups. Responding to Holtorf, thus, McManamon (2000b) essentially adheres to his earlier views by upholding proactive intervention in place of uncritical celebration of all approaches to archaeology.

Debate between Cornelius Holtorf, and Garret G. Fagan and Kennet L. Feder

Holtorf (2005) reiterates his early positions regarding alternative views on the past and on archaeology held by the public in a 2005 volume (*Debates in World Archaeology*) of the *World Archaeology* journal. In the article he strongly criticizes the viewpoint of some professional archaeologists, who dismiss alternate viewpoints on archaeology, that often communicates better with different sets of audience, and operate within different discourses, terming them as 'fringe', 'cult', 'fantastic' or 'pseudo-archaeology' (ibid, 544). He refers back to his misgivings about

McManamon's (2000a, 2000b) earlier views. He also raises harsh criticisms against the May/June 2003 issue of the magazine *Archaeology* which was a special issue on *Seductions of Pseudo Archaeology*. His criticism were directed specifically on the views put forth in the issue by Garret G. Fagan (2003) and on the rating of TV programmes of archaeology as 'Best' and 'Worst'. "(T)his is an example of opinionated and patronizing popular science writing", accuses Holtorf, "that is damaging archaeology's constituency in society. Readers are addressed by dismissive rhetoric and seemingly arbitrary value judgements reflecting personal preferences" (2005, 545). Holtorf places his concerns within the larger debate on the status of scientific knowledge. Superiority ascribed to knowledge that emerges through scientific procedures that are valid at a current point of time remains a deeply debated issue. While this question has not been resolved in any sense, this state of being unresolved itself is a pointer to the fragility of such claims to superiority. He suggests that, the professional archaeologists who claim current scientific theories of the past to be of greater validity to the public are possibly unaware of such wider epistemological debates happening within other disciplines and resort sometimes to "ideological fundamentalism and verbal violence" (ibid., 547). Holtorf points out that, more often, alternative archaeologies are similar to professional archaeology both in their concerns and methodology, as well as motifs (such as those of treasure hunt) they share. Perhaps, his strongest contention in the article is that the significance of archaeology may lie more in the process of engaging with material remains than in the specific insights gained about the past. Given these factors, he emphasizes the need for archaeologists to appreciate and constructively engage with popular interpretations of the past.

Two of the people at whom Holtorf's criticisms were directed, Garret G. Fagan and Kenneth R. Feder (2006), responded to him in the fourth issue of the next volume of *World Archaeology*. Much like Holtorf, the authors worded their criticism in strong terms often resorting to sarcasm and reductive parallels. They argue that most of the accusations that Holtorf has raised against the authors and those who hold a view similar to them regarding alternative archaeologies are 'straw men'. They are in agreement with Holtorf that people adhere to different versions of the past and concede that reasons for such differences are themselves a critical subject of academic enquiry. However they disagree with the latter's position that the significance of archaeology is in the *way* we engage with material pasts and not in the past itself.

While it is essential to be reflexive on the methodology used, the accuracy of the conclusions drawn about the past should be a valid concern for an archaeologist. Even though Holtorf admits that all accounts of the past might not be equally valid or legitimate, his yardsticks for determining legitimacy are faulty, the authors argue. While they do not directly refer to Habermas, Fagan and Feder seem to be suggesting that Holtorf assumes the existence of an ideal public sphere in the Habermasian sense¹³, where contesting views of the past can be negotiated through open and civil discourse. At the same time there is an almost total dismissal on his part “of evidence (or lack of it), logic or even superficial plausibility in these assessments” (ibid., 720). Rather he is concerned only with the consequences and implications of the competing versions of the past. Holtorf is accused of being parochial and presentist in taking this view and thereby reducing archaeology completely to politics. The use of the term alternative archaeology is also criticized by the authors. They point out that while the term has inclusive overtones, some of the alternate interpretations of archaeology are not innocuous expressions but are deliberately anti-science, anti reason and are at times hyper-nationalistic and racist. For them a better term to refer to such views would be pseudo-archaeology. Holtorf, it should be noted, fails to make any such distinctions between the different alternative views and the focus of the authors here is solely on those views such as the above which they consider problematic. Critical dialogue, as Holtorf assumes, is impossible in such cases as “(y)ou cannot reason with unreason” (ibid., 721). Holtorf’s emphasis on implications and consequences, as well as local sensitivities, is problematic in so far as it assigns secondary importance to archaeological validity and legitimacy. The authors believe that adherence to rational archaeology and rigorous application of sceptical enquiry can alternatively help to resolve problems caused by political abuse of archaeology. Their problem is not with alternative views of the past per se, but of pseudo archaeology assuming scientific legitimacy in order to convince the public, without adhering to methodological or scientific rigour in archaeology. While it is important to understand the ways in which past is processed in contemporary societies Fagan and Feder point out that “Holtorf’s contemporary focus leads him to the view, which we dispute, that the main business of archaeology is not finding out about a real past but in respectfully examining multiple pasts constructed in the present.” (ibid., 726). Their central argument is that

¹³ See footnote 9

there is no methodological comparison between real and pseudo archaeologies and they have to be hence recognised as two separate realms. And this difference is not accorded by professional status or credentials. The difference between the two lies in *method*.

I discussed the two debates at great length because they further qualify the divide between the models of Public Archaeology discussed in the previous section. While Holtorf seem to adhere to a decidedly relativist position, McManamon, Fagan and Feder appear to be more on the side of Deficit/Public Education models. While the debates, especially the second one, are polemic both in terms of opinions and rhetoric employed, they offer certain interesting insights. One of the reasons why the positions appear irreconcilable appears to be the differential focus of the authors, on practice and theory. It is possible that this difference in approach comes from the regional differences in public archaeology approaches pointed out by Ascherson (2006) discussed earlier. While Holtorf is a Europe-based archaeologist, all three of his opponents have their works based in the US. While Holtorf focuses more on the theoretical aspects of Public archaeology, the others appear to be finding ways to negotiate with the public in the practice of archaeology. This is not to suggest a correspondence between deficit based approaches and archaeological practice, or between more critical approaches and theory. However, it is more difficult to negotiate with alternate approaches on field, than engage with them as a theoretical concern. One of the very few examples where this has been attempted is the Neolithic site of Çatalhöyük in Turkey¹⁴, where the excavators attempt to follow a reflexive methodology for the excavations themselves, and not solely at the level of interpretation (Hodder 1997). They identify four issues in this regard, of which “(t)he fourth¹⁵ involves being *multivocal*, plural, open or transparent so that a diversity of people can participate in the discourse of the archaeological process” (ibid., 694). Elsewhere Ian Hodder (2008), Director of the project, adopts the phrase ‘deeper multivocality’ to characterize the reflexive methodology that he proposes. This implies changing both practices and contexts in archaeology in order that disadvantaged groups are heard and responded to. Towards this end certain measures

¹⁴ For details of the research project see “Çatalhöyük Research Project” nd.

¹⁵ The other being *reflexivity* about the effects of archaeology in the public domain, awareness of the *contextuality or relationality* of interpretation and *interactivity* with regard to communication

were adopted at the site. One was the active presence of an anthropologist on field, who, interacted with the different team members in a way that ensured, among other things, a greater awareness of alternative interpretations as she was able to point out parallels and comparisons among the multiple interpretations made on field. A second strategy was to provide information like drawings and diary entries online so that the process of generating information can be better understood by others outside the team. Another was the use of hypertext and non-linear multimedia structure of data for “some de-centring of the author and some ‘writerliness’ of texts” (Hodder, 1997, 698). It should be noted that while these strategies allow space for alternative interpretations and recognize their role in the construction of archaeological knowledge, the effort here is not for an uncritical celebration of alternative interpretations as Holtorf’s theoretical position might suggest (which is a near impossibility in archaeological practice).

Archaeology and its Public(s)

It emerges from the above discussion that the understanding of what the public means for archaeology has evolved over the years. The understanding differs from situation to situation, and based on the theoretical approach to the public as a category. In the early years of Public Archaeology, with the sub-discipline recognising its engagement with the public as a matter of academic concern, there was also the realization that it would not be possible to talk of the public as a homogenous singular entity. One of the primary divisions made was between the public as officialdom and the public as people. The former usually refers to the state and its institutions that have an important say in archaeological practice in almost all parts of the world. This is especially true for countries like India where archaeology is a highly state controlled practice, the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) being the sole licensing body for archaeological explorations and excavations across the country. Public funds finance most of the work in archaeology. The nation state is not the only level at which institutions that work in the area of archaeological heritage, operate. In the third chapter of his work titled ‘Institutions of Heritage’ Carman (2002) lists¹⁶ out a spectrum of such organisations operating at different levels, namely

¹⁶ Carman (2002)’s list is highly skewed in favor of the West, even though he has included a few examples of organizations from the non- western contexts.

international/global, national and regional/local. However, a more useful distinction would be between the institutionalized and non-institutionalized public in cases where the state is not the sole agency that controls archaeological practice. This holds well for the US or other parts of the world where rescue/contractual archaeology has a major role. In the Indian context also this distinction would be more valid. Apart from the ASI, there are university departments which have engaged in archaeological activities over a long period and have their own institutionalized means and methods of practicing the discipline. The ASI, in recent years, has also been engaging with many non-governmental organisations in the field of heritage like the Aga Khan Trust and the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH) for management and conservation activities. Similarly in the contexts of the new globalizing discourses around heritage we have institutionalized interests coming into close association with archaeology through supra-national bodies like the UNESCO or through different players involved in tourism as an industry. However, institutionalised and non-institutionalised interests are not strictly separate categories. Institutions often serve as vehicles of opinion of particular sections of the public. It may also happen that in the process of the voicing of opinions new institutional forms are constituted. Selvakumar (2006) for instance, discusses the case of the excavation of a sailboat at Kadakkarappali near Thaikkal in Alappuzha district in central Kerala. In the process of voicing their dissent to the proposal to move the boat from its original context, the villagers formed an association called the History and Heritage Protection Council with a formal structure in order to effectively voice their demands in an organised manner and thereby to increase their bargaining power.

While discussing the public-archaeology relationship apart from the institutionalised/non institutionalised dichotomy, one sees that it is difficult to think of the public as a singular category. There are specific categories of the public that emerge in specific situations. In the above discussion we saw that one way in which archaeologists address this issue is to divide the public into sub- categories (Fagan 1977, McMannamon 1991). However such mechanical compartmentalization of the public would not be effective, because at a given time people might claim multiple identities of class, caste, ethnicity, or region as well as affiliation to multiple institutionalized forms. These multiple identities may sometimes overlap or could also be in a position of conflict. Hence, the public needs to be always understood in the plural as public(s).

The public(s) do not constitute water tight static categories, but are dynamic and ever evolving in their relation to the multiple identities or institutional forms as well as in their relation to the archaeological past that they encounter. Hence, rather than proposing models of universal applicability, a more effective way to characterize the public in relation archaeology would be to adopt a situation based approach that this study seeks to follow.

A major difference among the studies discussed above lies in their characterization of the public. The extent to which agency is attributed to the public determines the interaction between the archaeologist and the public in a situation of practice like public education. It is also central to our understanding of what a legitimate research question in Public Archaeology should be. The models derived from science studies that Merriman (2004b), Holtorf (2007), and Okamura and Matsuda (2011) use are useful in marking these differences in approach towards the public. Approaches that recognise the agency of the public, concede that the ‘non- archaeological’ public “will re-appropriate, re-interpret and re-negotiate meanings of archaeological resources to their own personal agendas” (Merriman 2004b, 7) and also actively “seek to identify and acknowledge various interpretations of archaeological materials made by different social groups and individuals in various contexts of contemporary society” (Okamura and Matsuda 2011, 6). Both these positions recognise multiplicity in the possible interpretations of archaeological material, and the latter actively seeks to engage with these interpretations. While the present study does not seek to force a single Public Archaeology frame to fit onto manifold contexts, it largely follows the latter position *vis-a-vis* the archaeology-public interface.

In 2016, I had the opportunity to engage with a mixed audience of post-graduate students and research scholars of the Central University of Gujarat, Gandhinagar. They were drawn from diverse social science, humanities and science disciplines. I talked to them about my ongoing research, and about aspects of Public Archaeology directly related to my concerns. None of the students had archaeology background. One of the questions raised at the end of my talk was about the appropriateness of the use of the term Public Archaeology to talk about cases that I was discussing. “All archaeology is public in any case”, the questioner pointed out. The same question appears as the title of Reuben Grima’s (2016) recent article ‘But Isn’t All Archaeology ‘Public’ Archaeology?’ The article discusses the author’s uneasiness

with the tendency to regard Public Archaeology as a (sub)discipline and to define its disciplinary boundaries. Consigning the complex issue of the engagement of archaeology with the public to a sub group runs the risk of absolving the wider archaeological community of their responsibilities. This is part of the dominant modes of thinking whereby the archaeological community seeks to disassociate itself from the public completely (the ivory tower model) or to consider the public as a deficient category (deficit model). As opposed to this Grima underlines the need to perceive all archaeological activity as public in nature. Broad sweeping definitions like the one proposed by Schadla-Hall (1999) that we discussed earlier need to be defended. This represents, for Grima, a shift in thinking whereby,

archaeologists are positioned as members of, rather than distinct and apart from, the wider community. The encounter with the past and the archaeological resources that surround us are no longer the monopoly of the formally trained archaeological specialist. On the contrary, the process of engaging with and making sense of that past takes place across a wide spectrum of human conditions and experiences, often beyond the ken of the trained archaeologist...In this model, public archaeology happens, or has the potential to happen, across the interface wherever this encounter with the past and with archaeology takes place, or has the potential to take place" (Grima 2016, 6).

Notably, the position is different from the mere cognizance of multivocality and the relevance of multiple perspectives. It implies "an all encompassing critique of the discipline itself (Grima 2016, 8). Understanding the public-archaeology interface thus is an epistemological enquiry into the ways in which archaeological knowledge is produced and disseminated.

1.2.a. Archaeology and the Nation/Region

One of the key challenges that Okamura and Matsuda (2011) identify in relation to developing a global perspective in Public Archaeology are regional differences. These, in turn, point to differences in theoretical underpinnings and the economic and socio-political conditions under which the archaeologists work, and the history of the development of archaeology as a discipline in each nation/region. We have seen that the early works in Public Archaeology came primarily from an Anglophone context. Apart from the occasional recognition of the differences between indigenous perception of archaeology and mainstream interpretations (see for example

McManamon 1991), the multiplicity of public attitudes to archaeology was largely subsumed within the over-arching frame of CRM where the archaeologist was seen to be functioning for the larger public interest and to garner public support for such activities. In this understanding, public support is confined to certain realms of activity and not to others like the defining of research questions or interpretation. One of the factors that opened up the definitions of Public Archaeology is the recognition that the models that are derived from the Anglophone contexts may not be universally applicable. Ascherson (2000) notes, that archaeology gradually became less Eurocentric during the post-1960s. This for him is one of the factors that directly influenced the broadening of the scope of Public Archaeology. Matsuda and Okamura (2011, 14) note that “(t)he varying socio-political conditions under which archaeology operates in each country/area are likely to contribute to the formation of distinctive forms of Public Archaeology in each setting.” National/regional differences have come to be articulated as Public Archaeology concerns only in recent years. However there is a much earlier understanding within the discipline that the national/regional context influences archaeological practice, and that archaeology feeds into national/regional imaginations in multiple ways. Most of these discussions were centred on the relationship that archaeology as a modern discipline has with the nation, national/ territorial identity and political developments within particular nation states. There have also been studies that considered regional frames other than the nation; for instance, Scandinavia (Klindt-Jensen 1975) or south of Rio Grande (Lorenzo 1981) or West Africa (Nzewunwa 1994). There have been other studies that define a regional tradition on the basis of shared experiences of colonialism or imperialism. I use the broad terms nation/region to consider all these studies together. The use of these terms is not limited to the idea of territory as a physical entity alone. A stretched definition of Public Archaeology would address many of these concerns like the relationship between nationalism and archaeology or territorial claims for the past. But as an area of special focus in this study, the works that deal with the relationship between archaeology and nation/region merit a separate discussion.

As early as 1922, Childe, in ‘The Present State of Archaeological Studies in Central Europe,’ recognized the effects that the political climate has had on the material conditions of archaeological practice in the post first world war period. He discussed how the direct damages of the war, the post-war instability, and economic crunches

have adversely, yet differently, affected archaeological research as well as museum practices in the different nation states of Central Europe. He also took note of particularly nationalistic practices like changing the labels of the collections at the National Museum at Prague in Czech for its crippling effect on the visiting student. Admittedly, the concern here is not with the effects on the archaeological practice itself but on the conditions external to it affecting it in a material sense.

The relationship between archaeology and the regional context of its practice became a theoretical concern only in the 1980's, as part of the initiation of discussions that looked at the socio-political context of archaeological work. One of the themes that falls within this purview to receive early attention was the relation between archaeology and nationalism. Kohl and Fawcett (1995b) examined the reasons for the absence of these concerns prior to the period. They observed that in the traditional culture-historical approaches, the relationship between archaeology and nationalism was "so pervasive and taken for granted that its study seemed superfluous" (ibid, 14). However in the years before World War II, it was the recognition of the strengthening of the relationship between archaeology and nationalism, as observed in Kossina's works¹⁷ that led Childe to move away from the approach and to argue for archaeologists as scientists basing their "judgements on the facts unbiased by personal feeling" (Childe 1951, 10). In his work, Childe (1944, 19) calls for "rigorous means" and inference from "concrete data" in the study of migrations and diffusions. He also suggests that the more relevant question for the archaeologist was what a given society or culture did rather than where it came from, in order for it to become more scientific and rigorous.

The processual archaeologists of the 1960s and 70s like David Clarke, Patty Jo Watson and Lewis Binford also saw 'science'- which they defined in terms of logical positivist theories of explanation and hypothesis testing- as the way to rid archaeological interpretations of personal influences haunting the culture-historical approaches" (Kohl and Fawcett 1995b, 15). While they acknowledged such

¹⁷Gustaf Kossina (1858-1931) who taught at the University of Berlin was interested in the original German homeland, the roots of the German language and its ancient vocabulary as well as the material culture of ancient Germans (Murray 2001, "Review of Mannus by Gustaf Kossina." 1910). His work was relied upon in Nazi Germany to further its racist and fascist policies (Kohl and Fawcett 1995a, Trigger 1984)

subjective influences, they were not preoccupied with the broader context and hence were uncritical of the political implications of their own works.

Archaeology, Nation, Region: A Review of Selected Literature

While the theoretical preoccupation with archaeology as a contingent practice strengthened only in the 1980's, works that were specifically concerned with the relationship between archaeology and particular regional formations were not completely absent in the 1960s and 70s. *Signs and Wonders upon Pharaoh: A History of American Egyptology* by J.A. Wilson, an Egyptologist from the US, which came out in 1964 is an example. The work is a narrative account that focuses on the US interest in Egyptology covering the period from the beginning of Western interest in Egyptian antiquities up to 1936, when Egypt gained independence. The period is divided into six phases and for each phase Wilson details the general political and other developments in Egypt, and the developments in Egyptology with reference to trends in archaeology elsewhere in West Asia and the US. The narrative is rich in detail with anecdotes, biographical accounts, and narrative episodes. Apart from occasional statements, Wilson does not attempt to theorize or make general statements on the relationship between the context that he details and the practice of archaeology. However, he considers the detailed treatment of the political atmosphere of Egypt and the general scholarly atmosphere of the period to be necessary for the purpose of the book which would describe "the intellectual setting that controlled and directed their (the US Egyptologists') interest" (Wilson 1964, ix). Wilson's work has also informed later case studies (for example, see Wood 1998) that take a more theoretical approach to the link between nationalism and the ancient past

The two issues of the thirteenth volume of *World Archaeology* dedicated to 'Regional Traditions of Archaeological Research', published 1981 and 1982 are among the early works that brought together case studies from different regions into a single framework of discussion. In their editorial essay for the volume Bruce Trigger and Ian Glover (1981, 133) noted that while the differential development of archaeology in various countries and regions of the world

partly reflect variations in the nature of the archaeological record and in the resources available for archaeological research. More fundamentally, however, they seem to reflect differing national or ethnic loyalties, adherence to alternative political

philosophies, or cultural traditions, and sometimes the crucial influence in specific regions of eminent scholars.

What, for them, distinguished one regional tradition from another were the questions that the archaeologist asked and the answers that they were predisposed to look for. This view was reiterated three years later in Trigger's (1984) seminal essay on the subject titled 'Alternative Archaeologies: Nationalist, Colonialist, Imperialist'. Trigger and Glover (1981) also noted that it was not just regionalist ideologies that seek legitimatising in archaeology, but, internationally oriented ideologies do so too. The collection of essays in the volume covers a vast geographic span. The editors observe that, from the papers in the volume, it becomes evident that political and class differences alone are inadequate to cover the diversity of factors that have influenced the development of archaeology in different parts of the world. Even as they highlight the regional variations, the authors are wary of overestimations or the isolation of regional traditions. They point out that there has been a vast amount of intellectual exchange from the early years of the development of the discipline.

Some of the essays in these issues examine the development of archaeological traditions within particular nation states, like Chang's (1981) chronological account of the development of archaeology in China, the case of French archaeology discussed by Audouze and Leroi- Gourhan (1981) or Waterbolk's (1981) essay on the 'Delta Archaeology' of Netherlands. However, region does not always equal nation in many of the essays. It need not always be the political boundaries of a particular nation state that define a particular tradition of archaeology. For instance, Trigger (1981) notes considerable similarity between middle class influence on the development of archaeology in the US and the UK. (Trigger 1981). Other essays in the volume talk about a larger territorial entity as a frame and compare the traditions within (Lorenzo 1981) or draw examples from within particular nations to mark the broad trends for the entire region (Moberg 1981). The question that emerges is whether it is possible to isolate the modern nation from other regional influences on archaeological practice. Or is it more meaningful to see archaeology, as being determined by multiple and often over-lapping regional identities?

Trigger's 1984 essay was an extension of the discussions initiated in the above volume and an effort to categorize the multiplicities of the different regional traditions in

archaeology. He suggested that “in various forms and combinations, nationalism, social evolutionism and the interests of the middle class have proved to be significant variables in the development of various traditions of archaeological research” (1984, 356-7). The work was hugely inspired by Wallerstein's world-systems perspective. Wallerstein (1976) discounted the validity of the politico cultural unit - nation, state or people - as the principal location for social action and the basic unit of analysis in the social sciences.¹⁸ Following him, Trigger has suggested that the nature of archaeological research is shaped by much more than “local idiosyncrasies and historical accidents” (1984, 355) as had been assumed by the processualists. Rather, it “is shaped to a significant degree by the roles that particular nation states play,” not as isolated units, but, “economically, politically, and culturally, as interdependent parts of the modern world-system” (ibid, 356). Trigger thus identified three broad types of classification of archaeological traditions, *viz*, nationalist, colonialist and imperialist. Nationalist archaeology, for him, had the primary function of boosting up the pride and morale of national or ethnic groups, primarily in terms of their integration to the national identity. Colonial archaeological traditions are those that developed in European colonies where native populations had been overwhelmed or replaced by the Europeans, or where the latter had been a politically and economically dominant group for a considerably long period of time. By imperialist archaeology, he refers to the practices associated with a certain number of states that exert or have exerted political dominance over large areas of the world like the UK, the Soviet Union and the USA. Trigger points out that his classification refers to ideal types and the distinctions blur as one examines individual cases, where the characteristics overlap or transition from one to the other happens. Specific factors like fund, resources and the capacities of individual archaeologists are also seen to cause differences among the traditions. Even so, categorization as the above adheres to a primarily economic world systems view.

Kohl (1998, 226) criticized Trigger's typology as being “too sharply divided”. This position takes into consideration how states expand and interact with other states. Certain kinds of archaeology, he points out, can be at once imperialist, colonialist and

¹⁸Wallerstein's argument is that it is rather the world systems that need to be studied in order to locate data “within the process of social structures the world has seen over historical time (Wallerstein 1976, 352). For an overview of the world system's perspective, see Wallerstein 1974, 3-15; 1976.

nationalist in nature. Even so, Kohl also attempts to identify broad types within the non-European traditions in his discussion of archaeology and the creation of identity in immigrant and post-colonial nation states. It is necessary to further problematize Trigger's categorization when it comes to individual cases. For instance, in countries like India archaeological practice, as well as its institutional structures, has colonial origins. The transition of the nation from colony to post colony, might not mean an automatic or complete transformation of the subject matter or dissolution of the organisational structure. Similarly what a conceptual category might signify can also transform over time. Bernhardsson (2005, 9), for instance, talked of a fluid and what he called 'paradigmatic' nationalism that is "predicated on sometimes vague and ever-shifting ideas of cultural paradigms". He examined the formulation of Iraq as a modern nation during the years 1900-1940, to suggest that Iraqi nationalism has sought paradigms from a variety of historical periods depending upon varying political circumstances. He considered the consequent shifts in the official emphasis in archaeology as deliberately structured. Similarly, the partition and formation of the independent Indian state in 1947 could be considered as a moment of flux, when borders were fluid and territorial imaginations were reconfigured. Chadha (2007)¹⁹ for instance, notes shifts in the disciplinary priorities of the ASI along with organisational restructuring in the post-partition phase. The loss of Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa to Pakistan prompted large scale excavations of Indus Valley Civilization sites in the western states of India in the 1950s. Employing these concepts - nationalism, colonialism or imperialism- as conceptual categories of analysis rather than as typologies would be a more effective methodology to understand a regional tradition as part of the world system.

Wallerstein's (1974) formulation on the role of the social scientist is also significant here. For Wallerstein the social scientist works within the framework of his (or her) commitments. Hence objectivity for the social scientist "is honesty within this framework" (ibid, 9)²⁰. However he does not discount the role of the social scientist to

¹⁹The work will be considered in detail later in this chapter.

²⁰Wallerstein does not discount objectivity *in toto*. He sees it as a function of the whole social system.

"Objectivity is the vector of a distribution of social investment in such (research) activity such that it is performed by persons rooted in all the major groups of the world-system in a balanced fashion"(Wallerstein 1974, 10). For him, Objectivity of this kind is presently non-existent yet

be a passive one. The social scientist works within a frame of his (or her) commitments. The knowledge attained through the exposition of the nature and evolution of the modern world system becomes a power within this frame to further its objectives. Both the works discussed above (Trigger and Glover 1981, Trigger 1984) share this assumption that archaeology would never be able to completely separate itself from the interests of different groups. They consider the use of archaeology to serve these interests as valid to an extent. What distinguishes “legitimate archaeology” (Trigger and Glover 1981, 136) from what is unacceptable is the scientificity of its practice, that is, the use of “relevant data to test... validity” (ibid.). The objective knowledge of humanity for them is thus possible only by explicating the behaviour of archaeologists as researchers working within their socio-political contexts, that is, “at the level of world systems” (Trigger 1984, 369).

Fowler (1987) was concerned with ways in which the past and by extension archaeology was directly made to serve nationalist interest by the state. Through three case studies, he looked at the ideological and chauvinistic manipulation of the past and legitimization of authority through the past by rulers of nation states and bureaucrats, the use of archaeological sites, artefacts and theories for this purpose and how such uses of the past related to the intellectual and socio-political contexts of archaeological practice. The author employs three different case studies to illustrate the ways in which past is used for ‘official’ state purposes by rulers and bureaucrats or ‘unofficially’ by citizens, partisans/patriots. Here, past is the symbolic resource that is put to use and the focus is on its “generation, control and allocation” (ibid. 230) for the purposes stated above. Notably, while Fowler’s focus is on archaeology, he does not distinguish its use from similar employment of the past in a broader sense. He discusses three cases- Mexico, Great Britain and China- in detail. He has argued that the use of the past serves the purpose to convince the people that those who rule do so legitimately, by establishing genealogical links or other lines of authority that connect them directly to sources that would accord them symbolic power and legitimacy. Past may also be put to more diffuse and propagandist use by nationalist partisans to advance claims of their people’s superiority. There are also uses of the past for the nation state’s policies, actions and ideologies. He points out that it becomes increasingly clear that the “archaeological study of the past does not take place

attainable.

in an intellectual or socio-political vacuum... the contexts in which archaeology is practiced may structure or influence how the past is interpreted is becoming a matter of critical concern” (ibid, 240). He attributes this understanding to the new tendencies in the discipline that force one to think beyond the traditional culture-historical approaches. These include the influence of processual, Marxist and post-processual theory, as well as conditions that urged the development of the CRM approach in archaeology, and rescue archaeology initiatives.

An edited collection of essays, *Nationalism, Politics, and the Practice of Archaeology* that specifically focused on the theme of nationalist abuse of archaeology and the problems that emerge within different regional traditions appeared in 1995 (Kohl and Fawcett 1995a). The volume dealt exclusively with European and East Asian archaeology, a focus determined by the available essays. The understanding of the volume is that the relationship between nationalist politics and archaeology is universal and that nationalist archaeology as a general phenomenon can be found embedded in almost all regional traditions. This relationship may either be a direct manipulation of archaeology by nationalist politics or the state or a covert and subtle one. The editorial essay to the volume (Kohl and Fawcett 1995b), theoretically follows Benedict Anderson’s formulation of nations as imagined communities²¹. The authors understand the function of the archaeologist as provider (or conscious supplier) of raw materials to feed this imagination. They also distinguish archaeological material from other categories like ethnographic and linguistic data and textual pointers to the past. They argue that the inherent ambiguity of the archaeological material makes the archaeologist particularly susceptible to political subversion. They distinguish how one may, in such situations, define what an acceptable archaeological interpretation is. Their contention is that there are certain evidentiary standards that the archaeologists across regional traditions have to adhere to. The authors take a stance against post-processual relativism to contend that archaeologists “as empirical scientists... can distance themselves from objectively

²¹ Benedict Anderson in his seminal work (1983, 6) defines the nation as “an imagined political community- and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign”. He calls it ‘imagined’ because the members of the nation would not all know each other but imagines the existence of a communion amongst themselves. It is imagined as limited owing to the existence of a boundary however elastic and as sovereign because sovereignty is the measure and emblem of being free.

non-verifiable myths” (Kohl and Fawcett 1995b, 8). The legitimacy of an interpretation also depends upon whether the archaeologist willingly abandons such standards of practice in order to make an interpretation favourable to the state. This position of the authors echoes the ethical position in Public Archaeology discussed earlier in this chapter (Ascherson 2000; Merriman 2004b; Schadla-Hall 2004). While they agree that the legitimate position is case-specific they also provide generalised guidelines for the same. The first is that the national past of a group is not to be made at the expense of another and the second is to accord equal respect to all cultural traditions. It is in underlining the importance of a subjective ethical stance that the approach of the authors departs from the positivist position, that it is possible to have a legitimate nationalist archaeology.

A second edited volume of essays (Kohl, Kozelsky and Ben-Yehuda eds. 2007a) conceived as a sequel to the volume discussed above (Kohl and Fawcett 1995a) was published in 2007. The larger theoretical frame of the work remained the same as that of the first one. The editors maintained the position that adherence to certain disciplinary standards was necessary in legitimate archaeological practice. The significance of this more recent work was that it included case studies from a wider geographic spread including South Asia, South East Asia, and West Asia. The work takes cognizance of the theoretical insights from the studies of the period between the publication of the two volumes as well as of the transformations that nationalism itself underwent during the intervening years. In their introductory essay (Kohl, Kozelsky and Ben-Yehuda 2007b), the editors use the idea of ‘new nationalism’ to mark the Soviet disintegration and the replacement of internationalism by ethnically driven new nationalistic imagination in the post-Soviet phase. The phrase is also used to connote the changed theoretical understanding of nationalism which takes into account unofficial nationalisms, imagined communities, subaltern perspectives and questions on identity in addition to official nationalisms. The editors point out that the expansion of the geographical scope of the volume compel the volume to move beyond the direct role of the state in archaeology which had been the focus of most of the essays in the first volume (Kohl and Fawcett 1995a). Subtler perspectives are brought in by looking at subaltern and religious influences. Subaltern here refers to the nationalistic use of archaeology for liberationist agenda by imperial subjects or the newly emergent post-Soviet national identities. It should be noted that while the

editors acknowledge the existence of these diverse subaltern archaeologies they do not automatically assume them to be legitimate. Another important acknowledgement is that of the role of religion in identity formation including national identity. Nation states are understood as modern constructs and the western conceptualisation of modernity often assumes nations to be secular constructs. Consideration of cases from a wider and non-western geographical span allows the editors to rethink this position and consider the role of archaeology in what they term 'religious nationalism'. The political abuse of archaeology by Hindutva nationalism in India is considered under this heading. They also use the concept of civil religion to refer to cases where states have theoretically separated themselves from religion. In such instances, the authors argue, archaeology can serve in its status as a secular discipline not only to legitimize nationalism but also to make it appear sacred.

Nation would be a pervasive category in any study that seeks to locate archaeology as a contingent practice. The nation state, in its colonial and non-colonial forms, is the primary location within which archaeological traditions form and develop. Some studies understand this relationship as one where the nation puts overt periodic demands based on the political circumstances to which archaeology as a discipline responds. Bernhardsson's work (2005) for instance, while giving an excellent narrative that is rich in detail of the links between archaeological practice and the political developments in Iraq, largely follows this approach, when he identifies distinct phases of political influence as deliberately shaping the archaeological concerns in Iraq. Fowler's study discussed above (1987) had problematized this assumption to an extent. He had pointed out that the influence of nationalist ideologies on archaeology could be overt or covert. The latter implies unquestioned acceptance of ideological values that are reflected in the archaeologists' culture and their own use of the past. His position was however not a relativist one and he had underlined the quest for the 'real' past as the legitimate *albeit* difficult goal for the archaeologist. For him, making the implicit socio-political and ideological influences of nationalism upon archaeology explicit furthered this cause. It is but a logical extension of the early concerns with typology and analytical procedures. The focus in the post 1960s is on explication of methods, formulation of hypothesis and building up of argument in so far as they feed into the same goal.

Hamilakis (2007) is also critical of the view that nationalism is solely a state-sponsored abusive, distorting force. Unlike Fowler (1987), Hamilakis however does not seek to address the issue through the legitimate pursuit for the 'real past'. His work titled *The Nation and its Ruins: Antiquity, Archaeology and National Imagination in Greece*, uses multi-sited ethnography as a tool to understand the associations among classical antiquity, antiquities, archaeology and national imagination in Greece. He suggests that the "topological dream of the nation [is also produced] through the deployment of antiquities" (Hamilakis 2007, vii). That is, archaeology and antiquities serve to endow the national imagination and memory with materiality. For him the objective archaeological record does not exist as such. "(I)t is archaeology that produces *the entity we call the archaeological record*²² out of these material fragments of the past" (ibid., 14) and what exists as real are past material traces. Hamilakis draws a parallel to this phenomenon by suggesting that in a similar manner it is nationalism that creates nations. The relation is not an accidental one for him because archaeology developed in Europe at the time of the emergence of nation states which needed to justify their existence through the past.

The study of the link between archaeology and nationalism, therefore is not a study of the abuse of the first by the second, but of the development of a device of modernity (archaeology as an autonomous discipline) to serve the needs of the most powerful ideology of that modernity (nationalism) (Hamilakis 2007, 14).

While there has been an overwhelming preoccupation with nation, nationalism and political developments with particular nation states in the works that seek to locate archaeology in relation to the socio-political milieu of its practice, some studies have moved away from this focus. These take note of the emergence of ideologies and tendencies other than the nationalist in recent years and predict their strengthening in the future. Such studies imply that one would have to think beyond nationalist archaeologies.

Towards the end of their essay, Kohl and Fawcett (1995b) suggest that while national identities seem to be solidifying at the time of their writing, in the future it is possible that identities other than the national would be in need of archaeological construction. They point to the emerging European identity as a meta-national identity of this kind. While their paradigm of thinking is framed by that of identities, it is evident that these

²²Emphasis in the original

identity consolidations or diffusions would also correspond to regional/territorial imaginations transcending or different from the nation. Silberman (1995) in the same volume (Kohl and Fawcett 1995a) discusses tourism as one such instance. He suggests that the demands of mass touristic consumption often require the creation of archaeological attractions out of archaeological sites. This could affect the archaeological narratives of the nation that are in place. He discusses the possibility of counter-narratives to nationalist traditions through the emergent identity assertions. Silberman's argument is insightful in suggesting that political and ideological associations of archaeology should not be understood as limited to nationalism alone. But he falls into the reductive trap of suggesting broad typologies as Trigger (1984) does. He adds 'Touristic Archaeology' and 'Archaeology of Protest' as two new categories to Trigger's typology (Nationalist, Colonialist and Imperialist Archaeologies) and suggests that new categories chronologically follow and in some sense replace earlier categories. But, this is a generalisation that would not apply to specific contexts as we will see in this discussion.

Some scholars assume that in the emergent context of globalization, the nation state has lost its importance as the primary category influencing archaeological practice. In their introductory essay (Baram and Rowan 2004b) to an edited volume (Baram and Rowan 2004a) on heritage marketing titled 'Archaeology after Nationalism: Globalization and the Consumption of the Past', Uzi Baram and Yorke Rowan notes that globalization has weakened the nation state and subsumed nationalism so that the latter is not the only or most important political category impinging upon archaeology. The discussion focuses on commercial uses of heritage sites in the context of heritage tourism and the authors (2004b, 6) note that "marketing of heritage takes the unique and universalizes it as a commodity." Thus what were once considered unique is now placed within a global comparative context. Gil-Manuel Hernández i Martí (2006, 96) has argued that "(w)e are ... witnessing a historical process of a dialectical nature, which transports heritage from origins which are local or related to the nation state towards clearly global dimensions, from which the local dimensions are reconfigured." Whether the nation state has lost its importance as a determinant category in the production of the past, is a question that is debated. In a discussion on the globalization of archaeology and heritage, Arjun Appadurai (2001), for instance notes that while the nation state is in a crisis in the contemporary period,

what is happening is a widening of sovereignty. Thus with the strengthening of the processes of globalization, “corporations, grass-roots interest groups and the like have become more powerful, (and) the nation-state is no longer the only player with large-scale claims to sovereignty” (ibid, 36) and by extension to the past. These concerns will be taken up further in the course of the discussion.

A Review of Selected Works from India

This section looks at a few studies from India that are relevant to the larger problematic addressed in this study. These are discussed together as they all deal with archaeological practice in India. The relationship between archaeology and nation/region is not always the central or the only concern in these studies. However some of the issues raised are relevant to our discussion on archaeology and the nation/region.

In the 1982 *World Archaeology* volume on regional traditions in archaeological research discussed above, Dilip Chakrabarti (1982) wrote on the development of archaeology in the Indian subcontinent. Chakrabarti's is a descriptive chronological account that details the major events, individual contributions, and institutional development of archaeology in the subcontinent. He makes occasional forays to note the tendencies, primarily intellectual, that affect a particular development. For instance, he observes that the foundation of the Asiatic Society²³ was in line with the scientific spirit of the late eighteenth century Britain. He identifies this through three major factors. The first was the change of the role of the British from that of the trader to that of the territorial ruler. This demanded a systematic investigation of the ruled territory. The second was the turn in western philosophical thinking towards the orient for origins of culture and religion and the third was the growth in the period of many philosophic and literary societies in Britain. He also notes that the contributions of Mortimer Wheeler²⁴ prepared archaeology of the subcontinent in its transition towards modernity in the post- partition period. Wheeler's contribution as listed by him include the application of scientific aids, introduction of planning and stratigraphy in archaeology, training of Indian students and spreading of

²³ The Asiatic Society was founded in 1754 in Calcutta with the aim to study the history, antiquities, literature, arts, and sciences of Asia.

²⁴ REM Wheeler was the Director General of the ASI from 1944-48.

archaeological research from the dominion of the ASI to university departments. For the post-independence period also Chakrabarti makes certain important observations. The greater focus in Pakistan on proto history is seen to be in tandem with the need for the new nation to find deep roots. Similarly he notes how the study of prehistory in post-independence India suffered as it did not accord with the nationalistic spirit of the time, and how the interpretative frame that viewed Indian history as a continuous process of migration and smooth integration affected the focus and interpretation of archaeological material. Archaeology in India is also seen to be dominated by a 'descriptive-historical' approach rooted in Indian historical studies and this he considers has been detrimental to 'modern scientific' practices in archaeology. The discussion, however does not take these observations forward into a closer analysis of their relation to the socio-political transformations within the sub-continent. The role of such factors appears to be under-acknowledged in the analysis. For instance, Chakrabarti does not see the formation of the independent Indian state in itself as a major break for archaeology from its colonial precedence. For him, the importance of the period lies in the partition of the territory into India and Pakistan. But, partition is not seen as significant, except that the division of the subcontinent into different nationalities led to an automatic territorial parcelling of the archaeological sites. The differences in the practices among these nations are attributed to the nature of distribution of the sites in these territories "than to anything fundamental" (ibid., 338). Chakrabarti's views can be compared to that of those like Chadha (2007) who as we will discuss below relates the skewed emphasis on the study of Indus Valley sites in the post-independent period in India to the parcelling of sites following partition.

Sumathi Ramaswamy (2001, 106) looks at the appropriation of the "archaeological phenomenon called the 'Indus Valley civilization...by colonial and post-colonial India's intellectuals into the narrative contracts of various nationalist projects". The essay focuses on the processes by which, the academic ascription of the Indus Valley civilization as pre-Aryan or non-Aryan or Dravidian facilitates a range of academic and popular/political discussions within the existent colonial and emergent nationalist narrative. Ramaswamy is specifically concerned with the Tamil aspirations for antiquity and legitimacy and contestations to this. The Indus Valley civilization is seen by her as constituted mutually by the popular and disciplinary knowledge that incorporated it into the ongoing debates on racial history in India. Ramaswamy

focuses her argument on the Tamil claim to the authorship of Indus Valley Civilization from the time of its first notice. This is a claim that has been voiced at the popular level and in parliamentary debates, offering an interesting case for public-archaeology interaction. It is significant that Ramaswamy distinguishes archaeology from other means of generating meanings about the past. She thereby highlights the specific significance of the discipline in the nationalist/identity projects discussed above. For her, the archaeological material provides “a certain degree of certitude through their sheer materiality and through their tangible connectedness with the past, through what may be characterized as a metaphysics of contemporaneous presence” (ibid., 44). Thus the tangibility and materiality of the archaeological material marks their significance to the nationalist imaginations in a different way from other forms of indications of the past like texts. The culture-historical approach that was and is still often used in Indian archaeology permits the material remains to form part of the discourses around race. This allows trajectories to be drawn from pre-historic to modern inhabitants of the nation state, thereby constituting the material remains as remnants of the nation in the past.

Shereen Ratnagar (2007) discusses the Aryan Homeland Debate²⁵ in detail to understand how the Aryan identity came to be “inscribed in the construction of ancient Indian civilization” (ibid, 349). Ratnagar follows Anderson, Gellner and Hobsbawm²⁶ to suggest that nations construct themselves in the modern period, and the past including archaeological past plays an important role in this construction. This is not a process where the archaeologist is a passive observer. “Archaeologists as

²⁵ This refers to the contesting opinions on the original homeland of the Aryans. Ratnagar discusses how the problematic construct of Aryans, formulated during the colonial rule, subsequently became part of philological, archaeological and anthropological studies and also became part of ideological assertions like nationalism. She is more concerned about the more contemporary use to which the question is appropriated, that is, to strengthen Hindu Right wing ideologies.

²⁶ Benedict Anderson’s position on nations as imagined communities is discussed in footnote 21. Ernest Gellner (1983) marked nationalism as contingent upon the transition from agrarian to industrial society. It is nationalism that engenders nation using selective use and transformation of pre-existing, historically acquired cultural wealth. Hobsbawm (1990)’s views on nation largely agree with those of Gellner. His major criticism to Gellner is that, the latter viewed modernization and hence nation as effected from above and undervalued the importance of the view of ordinary people.

members of society are influenced by social movements of their own time” (ibid, 350). Ratnagar discusses in detail the process by which *Aryan*-ness came to be equated to Indian-ness as a result of particular tendencies within the Indological and the nationalist scholarship. There are notable differences in the way the issue is addressed and the arguments put forward in both these scholarships. Ratnagar’s focus is different from that of Ramaswamy (2001) who is primarily occupied with the appropriation of the scholarship around the Indus Valley by Tamil/Dravidian nationalistic imaginations. Ratnagar, on the other hand, is specifically concerned with the present day reconstructions, which are different from the earlier patriotic reconstructions. There is a compulsion, often shared willingly by archaeologists of professional standing, to argue that the *Aryans* are indigenous to India. This, Ratnagar notes, should be understood in relation to the political tendencies of the time. In the atmosphere of majoritarian and exclusionary politics of the Hindutva, *Aryan* equated to Hindu, is cast as the original inhabitants of India. This leads to Muslims and the other minority groups being automatically cast as aliens. There are claims by the subaltern groups to the Indus Valley civilization, whereby they become the autochthonous population. It is in this scenario that the upper-caste leaders of Hindu chauvinism, who are claimants of Aryan ancestry, refuse to accept for themselves a foreign origin. Ratnagar shows that rather than the archaeological record being appropriated from outside, archaeological knowledge is construed willingly by archaeologists to support these chauvinistic claims and puts forward her own academic position in the issue as a response to such tendencies.

Sudheshna Guha’s article (2005) is also a response to the role of archaeology in the legitimization of Hindutva politics. She is responding to the same issues that Ratnagar (2007) addresses, where the archaeology of Indus sites are used for the furthering of Hindu chauvinistic ideologies. She explores the multiple interpretations that emerged around the Indus valley sites in the course of the 20th century and in more recent times to see how these interpretations are informed by the ideological understandings and socio-political and academic contexts from which they are made. Guha’s effort is to bring out the multiplicity of these interpretations to highlight how different meanings can be attributed to the same set of evidence. The article makes significant insights into how archaeological evidence, specifically, is subject to ideological manipulations. Highlighting archaeological method as a science-based practice,

allows for claiming it as a ‘truth-making’ enterprise. This in turn permits obliterating the contingent nature of archaeological evidence. An archaeological artefact becomes evidence only through analogical reasoning. By not acknowledging this methodological characteristic of the discipline and by forging archaeological method as empirical, a particular interpretation can be established as truth. Guha suggests that ideological manipulation of archaeology occurs through such a process.

Ashish Chadha’s (2007) unpublished doctoral dissertation titled *Performing Science, Producing Nation: Archaeology and the State in Postcolonial India* is significant in many ways for this discussion. Located in the area of sociology of science, the study is an ethnographic examination of archaeology as a scientific enterprise in post-colonial India. Significantly, the thesis directly addresses the skewed focus on the west in archaeological theory building. There are studies that look at how the socio-political context of a nation or region contributes to the formation of a particular regional tradition, or studies that classify regional traditions into broad types. But the focus on Anglo-European traditions has led, Chadha points out, to the assumption that the “core archaeological practice was static and unchanging” (ibid., 268). The thesis seeks to problematize this assumption through the ethnographic study of an emblematic of archaeological practice, the ASI excavation. Like Hamilakis (2005), Chadha also understands archaeology and the nation state as products of modernity. However, he stresses the necessity to differentiate the case of a post-colony like India from the dominant discourses on modernity. He introduces the idea of marginal modernity, whereby the archaeological site is the location of the union of two such marginal configurations of modernity. The first is the post-colonial state with its colonial baggage and its struggle to emerge as a capable instrument of governmentality. The second is archaeology whose epistemological location is one of in-between-ness, between the Sciences and the Humanities. This formulation allows Chadha to move beyond broad-types like Imperialist, Colonialist and Nationalist archaeology. He suggests that,

archaeology in India, although applied as a Western practice, has evolved into a distinctive process of knowledge construction—an epistemological vestige of its colonial genealogy embedded in the structural framework of its post-colonial governmentality (Chadha 2007, 258).

The study also seeks to interrogate the assumption of ideological manipulation of archaeological data in the production of nationalist archaeology. He argues that “science and statist ideologies collapse in the practice of post-colonial archaeology (and that) post-colonial scientific archaeology is itself an ideological practice” (ibid., vi). The multi-site excavation project of the ASI called the Saraswati Heritage Project (SHP) proposed in the year 2003-04 is taken as the focus of the study. This project aimed to study the archaeological sites around a mythical river, Saraswati in the Rigveda. The SHP is chosen as a location of intersection of state, science, archaeology and nationalism. Through his ethnography of the excavation site, Chadha moves beyond the simplistic assumption of ideological abuse of archaeological data. He understands post-colonial archaeological practice in India as an extension of both the colonial project and epistemologically driven scientific practice. At the same time its epistemological trajectory is guided by the intersection of nationalism and politics. At the level of practice ASI archaeology is found to be essentially a bureaucratic enterprise with the excavation site being a mere by-product of its governmentality. The daily practice at the site is governed more by routine bureaucratic procedure than by ideology. The nationalistic and ultra-nationalistic ideologies appear at the interpretative levels. A significant aspect of Chadha’s study is its discussion of the bureaucratic mechanisms of the ASI as a state institution. Going beyond the role of archaeology in creating the national imaginary, the study goes on to examine how state/bureaucratic mechanisms work in tandem with ideological preoccupations in the constitution of archaeological knowledge in a post-colony like India.

Bishnu Priya Basak’s (2011) discussion of the works of Kalidas Datta (1895-1968), an amateur archaeologist, who helped produce a regional history of the Sunderbans region in Bengal also brings out certain aspects relevant to this discussion. Basak discusses Datta’s works in detail to see how initiatives such as his that fell outside the institutional structures of the time, like the ASI, educational institutions and societies, allowed an alternative view of archaeology (which she terms a vernacular antiquarian tradition) and brought in a different dimension to the regional history of Bengal. She locates his works against the background of growing regional identity in Bengal in the early twentieth century as an outcome of the national movement. Interestingly, being an amateur without formal training and not being part of any formal institution, allowed Datta to combine various methods and sources in his account and to give

equal weightage to material evidence and myths and legends. This would not have been possible within a more institutionalized set up of doing archaeology. However, rather than breaking completely from mainstream narratives of history and archaeology, Datta's work engaged with them by connecting the history of Sunderbans with that of Bengal. His writings as such have not received much recognition outside the locality. However, it should be noted that Datta's collection of antiquities and rare books has gone to the West Bengal state museum. Also, the author notes, Datta received recognition during his lifetime from some of the acclaimed scholars who gave value to the importance of history writing from outside the institutional frame. These latter aspects point to the ways in which alternate/ amateur scholarship interacts with more established forms of knowledge. In the present times with the 'bureaucratic centrality' of the ASI firmly in place, as Chadha (2007) notes, all explorations and excavations in the country are directly controlled by the ASI through its licensing mechanism. The possibility to undertake archaeological work outside its institutional frame, or for such work to find acceptance, is minimal at present. Datta's work hence might also need to be understood within a context of flux, where the institutional mechanisms of the ASI had been in the process of being established and the nationalistic project of history was still underway. An important line of enquiry would be to see whether the establishment of ASI in the post independent period as the authority and regulator of archaeological knowledge has in turn meant a suppression of alternative modes of archaeological enquiry.

Upinder Singh (2010) discusses the process of re-invention of Buddhism and of ancient Buddhist sites in modern India, with a demonstrative account of the case of Nagarjunakonda in Andhra Pradesh. While archaeology is not a central concern in this article, it gives relevant insights on the ways in which ancient sites are re-inscribed onto the present. Singh discusses two channels through which Buddhism has revived in modern India. The first is that of the neo- Buddhists or the Dalit conversions to Buddhism, philosophically and politically inspired by B. R. Ambedkar. The second is the Tibetan Diaspora and the revival of Tibetan Buddhism in different parts of the country. The importance of ancient sites, comes in the context of pilgrimage which, for Singh is a "meeting ground" (ibid., 200) that brings together the different strands in Buddhism today, such as the two mentioned above, and attenuate the social divisions among them. In the recent years, apart from the pilgrims, there are

other parties becoming increasingly interested in these sites. These include domestic and international tourists, pilgrim-tourists and the governments of India and other East Asian Buddhist countries. Spiritual tourism is one of the major areas where the early Buddhist sites figure. Singh examines the increased focus of the Indian state in spiritual tourism post 2000 and its identification of key tourist circuits including several Buddhist circuits. This includes public-private partnerships, tie-ups with governments of other nations and international agencies, as well as the involvement of institutions like the ASI. Singh notices how even the recently excavated sites like Bavlikonda and Thotlakonda in Andhra Pradesh form part of these circuits. There are also cases of reinvention of “extinct” (ibid, 205) Buddhist sites. The case of Amaravati in Andhra Pradesh is discussed as an example where the initiation ceremony of *Kālacakra* was held by the Tibetan Buddhists in 2006. The event had support from the central and state governments and the Central Tibetan administration. It also attracted a large audience from different parts of the world. This revival of Amaravati also included major landscape alterations with direct interventions by the ASI which altered the level of the ancient *stupa* mound. The case of Nagarjunakonda in Andhra Pradesh is discussed in some detail to suggest that the convergence of various processes that contributed to the resurgence of Buddhism in modern times is visible in the iconography that marks the landscape of the Buddhist pilgrim sites. For instance, Buddhist links are at display at the dam-site (the location of the submerged ancient remains) through displays and architectural features. At the Nagarjunakonda Island where the ASI reconstructed many of the ancient monuments from the submerged sites, there is an emphasis on Buddhism in the museum displays and the landscape is marked with Buddhist emblems, markers of neo-Buddhist significance and some monuments of a secular nature symbolic of the modern nation state. Thus, sites like Nagarjunakonda, the article argues, “(a)lthough anchored in ancient Buddhism and its sacred places...represent an entirely new conjunction of factors and forces, internal as well as international, religious as well as utterly mundane”(ibid., 212). Ancient sites are here imbued with new meanings and are recast in the process. Archaeology is one among the many mediums through which this reconfiguration of space takes place. In the case of the Buddhist sites discussed above, this process of reconfiguration allows them to occupy multiple spatial imaginations other than those of a national heritage site. In the context of this study one can revisit Silberman’s (1995) typology and the suggestion that new categories of touristic

archaeology and archaeology of protest, to some extent, replace the earlier nationalist archaeologies. Silberman, for instance, made a clear distinction between market exploitation of archaeological resources and scientific/ideological exploitations. However such distinctions might not hold as we have seen in the case of the re-invention of ancient Buddhist sites in modern India (Singh 2010). The reconstituted Buddhist landscape here is endowed with meaning jointly by market-based, spiritual, nationalistic and other trans-national ideologies and practices.

Thinking of the Relationship between Archaeology and Nation/Region

From the above review of literature it emerges that studies that seek to mark archaeology as a contingent practice understand the idea of nation/region in broadly two ways. The first relates to the identification of particular regional traditions and the marking out of their differences from each other. This line of enquiry is based on the understanding that archaeological practice is invariably shaped by its socio-political context. Sometimes a regional tradition is defined in terms of shared experience as part of interdependent parts of the world system (Trigger 1984). For a large number of studies, it is the territorial boundaries of the nation state that define a particular regional tradition. Dilip Chakrabarti's work (1982) considered earlier falls into this category. This is an expected focus as archaeology has been partially or fully a state-controlled enterprise in large parts of the globe. It is an activity that requires considerable infrastructural, legal and economic support. Hence archaeology functions in close association with the nation states and their multiple institutions. This is especially true for a country like India. Archaeology in India, we have seen, is a highly state controlled practice operating through the bureaucratic centrality of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI). The scale of initiatives by different states and university departments have increased in the post-independence period (Chakrabarti 1999), bringing in more regions into focus. But, the ASI as the apex regulatory and sole licensing body organises them as peripheral practices through its centralized control mechanisms. While the degree of direct state control varies, similar assumptions can be made about many other nation states also. Sometimes a nation state is also seen as part of a larger territorial or political grouping like Europe or the West. Certain common features are identified with national traditions of archaeology that fall within these larger categories.

While these studies understand archaeology as being constituted by the nation/region, the second line of enquiry relates to the political and ideological use of the past in general and archaeology in particular. While this is a broad and multifaceted area of enquiry, my concern is specifically with those engagements that relate ideologically or imaginatively to the idea of nation/region. The concerns of these studies overlap with those of public archaeology in many respects. Some of these works explore the relationship between the discipline and nationalist/regionalist ideologies. Some see how archaeology constitutes national/regional imaginations. Most of the studies that we have discussed above, talk about the engagement of archaeology with nationalism. As suggested above, archaeology is a discipline that functions in close relation with the nation state and its emergence as a modern discipline is closely associated with the emergence of nation states. Both are understood as mutually constitutive products of modernity (Chadha 2007; Hamilakis 2007; Kohl and Fawcett 1995b; Thomas 2004). Many of the studies that talk about the interaction between archaeology and nationalism as a political ideology draw their theoretical standpoint from the works of those like Anderson (1983), Gellner (1983) and Hobsbawm (1990). These works understand nations as imagined communities and as modern constructs. The past serves to legitimize the existence of the modern nation state and archaeology does so by endowing it with materiality. Similarly, archaeology has an important role in the creation of national identities. “Since ancient historical sources are always grossly incomplete and, more importantly, since many contemporary or aspirant nation-states altogether lack early historical records, it is obvious that archaeology will continue to play a critical and inevitable role in the forging of national consciousnesses” (Kohl and Fawcett, 1995b, 13). One major difference among these studies is how they characterize the engagement between archaeology and nationalism. Some studies think of this engagement in terms of abuse of the former by the latter (Bernhardsson 2005; Kohl and Fawcett 1995b; Kohl, Kozelsky and Ben-yehuda 2007b). There are other studies that problematize this simplistic assumption. Fowler (1987) takes cognizance of the covert presence of ideological influences in the archaeologist’s own uses of the past. Hamilakis (2007) sees archaeology itself as a device of modernity that emerged to serve the needs of nationalism. Chadha (2007) explores this relationship in far greater detail in the context of the specific post-colony India. For him post-colonial scientific archaeology is itself an ideological practice and the

intersection between archaeology and nationalism is visible in the discipline's epistemological trajectory itself.

We also saw that this imagined nation is not a static and singular category, but is shifting and dynamic with archaeology feeding into the process in different ways. For instance, we have seen in the cases that discuss the Indus Valley remains (Guha 2005; Ramswamy 2001; Ratnagar 2007) how the same archaeological objects are interpreted to legitimize different nationalist imaginations. For the Tamil/Draavidian nationalists the role of racial struggle in the demise of the Indus Valley civilization becomes central (Ramaswamy 2001). The same assumptions work against the national imagination of the Indian Nationalists and Hindu Nationalists (ibid.; Ratnagar 2007) and for different reasons. Similarly the territorial image of the nation also varies with different interpretations. Thus in the Tamil nationalist imagination, we have Lemuria, the land lost to the Indian Ocean and strands of dispersal originating from this mythical landscape and radiating north, thereby connecting Lemuria to the Indus Valley sites (Ramaswamy 2001).

While the thematic focus of the majority of the studies discussed above is nation and nationalism, we also saw that in recent years some studies have deliberately moved away from this focus. Some of these look at new identity assertions from within the nation state. We discussed works that assume that, the nation-state has been losing its significance as a political and territorial formation, in the context of the changes brought in by globalization (Appadurai 2001; Baram and Rowan 2004b). Some of these studies seek to place archaeology within the new heritage discourses and focus on the influence of trans-national agencies and global tourism in archaeological practice and imaginations. All these works point out that nation is not the only significant category to be looked at in relation to archaeology. Archaeology in its relation to these multiple discourses feeds into spatial imaginations other than that of the nation as well. Singh's (2010) discussion of the re-constituted Buddhist landscape which is endowed meaning through multiple discourses around tourism, identity, nationalism and trans-nationalism, is a highly illustrative example of the same.

The idea of region to be employed in this thesis needs further clarification. Region should not be equated with local as opposed to national. Rather than in its opposition to the nation, region would be a term that encompasses different spatial categories. It

can be an ideological or imaginative formulation. Region can be part of the multiple identities that the public assumes. Both spatial and ideological ideas are fluid and transforming. The recent discourses on heritage in the globalized context place archaeology in close relationship with the new understandings of the local, national and the global. The idea of glocalization²⁷ is increasingly used in heritage studies to “denote the intertwined processes whereby new boundaries are created between local to- global orders, and all gain strength” (Salazar 2010, 133). Thereby, the (re)shaping of global heritage is understood as occurring simultaneously with and being a part of globalizing processes. An interesting work to be considered in this regard is the volume of essays edited by Junko Habu, Clare Fawcett and John M. Matsunaga (2008a) titled *Evaluating Multiple Narratives: Beyond Nationalist, Colonialist, Imperialist Archaeologies*. The volume aims to bring together case studies from around the globe to evaluate the implications of giving alternative explanations to the past. In their introductory essay to the volume (Habu, Fawcett and Matsunaga 2008b), the editors identify two works as important for them in conceptualising the volume. The first is Trigger’s (1984) seminal essay that we discussed earlier in this chapter that distinguishes typologies within archaeological practices across the world and divide them as nationalist, colonialist and imperialist archaeologies. The second is Ian Hodder’s (1999) *The Archaeological Process: An Introduction*. The authors consider Hodder’s work as an extension of Trigger’s views on the social context of archaeology, whereby contemporary archaeological thought is contextualised within the process of globalization of the late 20th century. The volume is significant for our purpose because it draws together the two key thematic concerns of the thesis. It brings together both the idea of multivocality in archaeological interpretations and the sociopolitics of archaeology through different case studies from around the globe. The editors point out that “the advantages and limitations of the theory and method of multivocality should be discussed in relation to a variety of cultural and historical settings” (Habu, Fawcett and Matsunaga 2008b, 5). In the same volume Ian Hodder

²⁷ The term glocalization was first used in Japanese marketing methods in the 1980s and remained essentially a marketing- related term. The term came to have wider connotations in the western academia following its use by sociologist Roland Robertson. He suggested replacing the term globalization with glocalization, as the former “has involved and increasingly involves the creation and the incorporation of locality, a process which itself largely shapes, in turn, the compression of the world as a whole”(Robertson 1994, 48)

(2008, 198) points out the need to think beyond the global-local dichotomy and dialectics.

In practice we often see complex alliances between local, regional, national, and international agencies and groups...In this way, multivocality becomes cosmopolitan. I wish to use the term “cosmopolitan” to refer to the complex blending of the global and the particular in ways that do not replicate Western perspectives and which do not construct the local as a product of the global (ibid.).

I conceive the term region as an umbrella category and a broad frame to discuss all these conceptualisations together and the new understandings that would emerge in the course of this study. The aptness of the term itself will also be interrogated in the course of the discussion.

1.2. Scope and Methodology

This thesis intends to use selected case studies as sites to analyse the relationship between archaeology and the public and by extension how they relate to the nation/region. The above review of selected literature shows that both public and nation/region are important concerns in any study that seeks to problematize the notion of archaeology as a value neutral, ‘scientific’ discipline. Apart from the few studies that we have discussed²⁸ we do not have works from India that address these questions. And, in many of these works the themes are addressed only peripherally. This study seeks to directly address this dearth in scholarship.

The discussion will seek to elucidate the interrelation between the three key themes that form the main title of the thesis-archaeology, public and nation/region. The ordering of themes in the title is not random. Rather, the primary area of focus here is archaeology. It is conceived as an epistemological enquiry to understand archaeological knowledge production at its interface with the public and in its relation to multiple spatial categories like local, national and global. Public is here conceived in the plural as public(s), as heterogeneous, with people occupying fragmented and overlapping identities which need or need not be in conflict with the archaeological enterprise. Within the definition of public I include institutionalised / non –

²⁸Works that directly refer to the selected case studies are not included in this review. Some of these works will be figure as part of the case study chapters

institutionalised public. The study also proceeds from the assumption that the deficit model of sciences is inadequate to mark the public-archaeology relationship and that the public-archaeologist separation is an artificial one. However, I do not seek to bracket this enquiry as a Public Archaeology work. In this I follow Grima's (2016) position that all archaeology is essentially public in nature and bracketing Public Archaeology as a sub-discipline, has the theoretical pitfall of creating an artificial separation between the public and the archaeologist. Here the effort would be to see if it is possible to understand the interfaces of the discipline with the public by locating the archaeologist within the wider community.

An important parameter in the selection of the case studies is their location. The case studies that are analysed here are all located in India²⁹. Thus, following many of the works that we discussed above, this thesis begins with the premise that nation is an important category to understand archaeological practices and knowledge. However, the study also proceeds with the understanding that the categories of nation and region cannot be uniformly understood in relation to all the case studies selected. Both nation and region can have multiple manifestations that sometimes determine archaeological research and practice and are sometimes constituted by them. Being direct interventions on physical space, archaeology has a very local dimension to it. Another parameter in the selection of case studies is that they are all from the post 1990s. This will allow us to engage with questions related to spatial categories in the globalized context that came up in the studies that we discussed towards the end of the review (Appadurai 2001; Baram and Rowan 2004a, 2004b; Singh 2010; Hernández i Martí Martí 2006; Salazar 2010). Does the coming in of new spatial categories, like the global make the relevance of the nation state obsolete? How does archaeology engage with these multiple spatial categories? The more recent use of the conceptions of scale (Marston 2000; Brenner 2001) in human geography may be a useful tool to comprehend the multiple and co-existing categories of space. Dynamic conceptualizations of scale have allowed scholars "to investigate the contested, and continually evolving role of scale as a container, arena, scaffolding and hierarchy of socio spatial practices within contemporary capitalism" (Brenner 2001, 592). More

²⁹ The work was originally conceived as a study of cases from a wider geographic area and hence the term South Asia in the title. The context of restriction of the study to cases from India is discussed in detail in the Introduction.

than being a vertical ordering of bounded spatial units, geographical scales need to be understood, to follow Brenner, “primarily as a modality of *hierarchization* and *rehierarchization*³⁰ through which processes of socio-spatial differentiation unfold both materially and discursively”(Brenner 2001, 600). The concept of scale has been used only rarely in studies that interrogate the contextual aspects of archaeological knowledge production and practice. Habu, Fawcett and Matsunaga (2008b, 5) acknowledge that “(a)lternative interpretations may represent various political and spatial scales”, but they do not elaborate upon it. Hodder (2008) talks about scale in explaining what he calls “cosmopolitan alliances” (ibid., 198) expressed through multivocality in a globalized context of heritage and archaeology. It should be noted that Hodder does not use the term scale in a dynamic sense as Brenner (2001) does. Rather scale here signifies bounded geographical units among which alliances occur in the present times. This thesis will explore the aptness of employing a dynamic conceptualisation of scale to understand the engagement of archaeology with multiple spatial categories in the cases under discussion

In all the case studies selected, archaeological excavation is the locus of enquiry. It is possible to address many of the concerns raised here also by looking at artefacts, monuments or museum displays. However it is in the interest of this study to understand archaeology in its distinction from other means of deriving meaning about the past like history, folk lore studies or philology. This difference is addressed in some of the works discussed above (Chadha 2007; Guha 2005; Hamilakis 2007). The study assumes archaeological excavation, a key location of practice, and knowledge production in archaeology, to be a useful site to further explore these distinctions.

I have taken up three case studies in this enquiry. Notwithstanding the similarities among them that we discussed above, the case studies selected are very different from each other, both in terms of their nature and the aspects that I will focus upon in each of them. The source material employed in the study also varies from case to case. These include published archaeological reports, relevant government and other official documentation, participant observation, semi-structured interviews, media reports, other related published and unpublished material and art installations and exhibitions. Many of the works we discussed above are based on case studies and

³⁰ Emphasis in the original.

more often entail focused and detailed discussion of a single case. Except in the context of specific works, methodological issues involved in using case studies have been discussed only very rarely. Peter Gould's recent essay (2016) on method in community and public archaeology is an instance. Gould is more in favour of structuring case studies in a way that allows quantifiable comparisons. While he acknowledges the difficulty in applying a single method to a broad spectrum of concerns, he opines that case studies have to be structured in a way that allows generalization. For Gould, the absence of such structuring reduces case studies to mere anecdotes and impedes general theorization. This enquiry does not agree with Gould's view on case studies. It takes the position that methodological or structural comparability to arrive at general theorization is not a necessary precondition to a case study based enquiry. As we will see in the course of the discussion, in each of these cases the focus differs and different aspects of the same problematic are addressed. They act as examples that are simultaneously exceptional and representational in their character. The sources employed and the methods of analysis also differ consequently.

Chapter 2: ‘Order’ing Excavations: The Case of Ayodhya

2.1. Background¹

The demolition of the Babri Masjid on 6 December 1992 by Hindu *karsevaks*² was a watershed in the history of the Indian democracy. It brought into question ideals like secularism and plurality that had been claimed as the unique features defining the Indian nation’s existence as a democracy. The Ayodhya issue revolved around the history of the construction of a 16th century mosque, the Babri Masjid, in Ayodhya of district Faizabad, in the north Indian state of Uttar Pradesh. The Babri Masjid is believed to have been built by Mir Baqi at the orders of the Mughal emperor Babur. It has been a centre of communal confrontations from the 19th century as it had been alleged by some that the mosque stood on the site of a temple that existed at the birth place of the Hindu God Rama. Law suits, disputes and tensions around the Babri Masjid continued into the 20th century and into the post-independence time. On 7-8 April 1984, at a session in Delhi, the Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP) called for the removal of the mosques in Ayodhya, Mathura and Kashi, but said it would first take up the case of Ayodhya (Varma and Menon 2010). The construction of a Ram temple on the location of the mosque was one of the major political campaigns of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)³ during the general elections of 1989 and 1991. On 25 September 1990, BJP leader L.K.Advani started a *rath* yatra (literally chariot journey), travelling on a Toyota truck dressed up as a chariot from Somnatha⁴ in

¹ For a summary of the events and a thorough collation of documents related to the Ayodhya dispute, see Noorani (2003a, 2003b and 2014).

² The word *karsevak* derives from *kar* (hand) and *sevak* (servant). Here the reference is to those mobilized by the right wing Hindutva organizations towards the task of demolition of the Babri Masjid.

³ The BJP is the current ruling party in India at the centre.

⁴ Somnatha in Gujarat is the site of a Hindu temple which went through many phases of destruction and reconstruction/ renovation in the pre-independence period. It was part of the princely state of Junagarh, whose ruler wished to accede to Pakistan at the time of independence. He was forced to flee to Pakistan following a movement against him led by the Indian National Congress (INC) and the territory was annexed to India. Senior INC leader K.M. Munshi pushed forward an agenda to ‘reconstruct’ the temple in its ‘original’ form. He held the Hindu nationalist view that the raid on the temple by Mahmud of Ghazni in 1024 CE was a wrong done on the people (read Hindus) of India by the Muslims. In 1950, the ruins of the old temple at Somnatha were pulled down to build a new

Gujarat. The journey was to garner support for the demand by the Sangh Parivar⁵ to build a temple at Ayodhya. The trail of the *yatra* was marked by communal riots and Advani was arrested on 23 October 1990 in Bihar. In 1991 the BJP formed the government in the state of Uttar Pradesh. Carrying forward their demand to build a temple at the site of the Babri Masjid, the VHP and the BJP organized a rally to the mosque site on 6 December 1992. The rally of about 150,000 *kar sevaks* turned violent and the monument was razed to the ground (See Figure 2.1).

Parallel to the communal and political mobilisation around the Ayodhya issue, legal disputes for ownership had also been underway. On the night of 22/23 December 1949, Hindu idols were surreptitiously placed under the central dome of the Babri Masjid. The civil administration, in view of possible communal tensions, applied Section 145 of the Code of Criminal Procedures (CrPC) and, alongside, attached the premises.⁶ In 1950 two suits were filed by some sections of the Hindus. In one of these suits in January 1950, the trial court passed interim orders whereby the idols remained at the place where they had been installed in December 1949 and their *puja* (worship) by the Hindus continued. The interim order was confirmed by the High Court in April 1955. Thus, in effect, the Muslims did not have access to the Masjid from 1949. On 1 February 1986, the District Judge ordered the opening of the lock placed on a grill leading to the sanctum-sanctorum of the shrine inside the Masjid and permitted *puja* by Hindu devotees. Suits were filed by the Nirmohi Akhara⁷ and the Sunni Central Wakf Board⁸, respectively in 1959 and 1961 claiming title to the

one. The removal an old structure to be replaced by a new one met with some criticisms from the archaeology and history circles. It was the ASI that conducted excavations at the site for the foundations of the 'original' structure. This idea of excavating for the original structure is very relevant to this case study, as we will see in the course of this chapter. For a discussion on the contested history of the Somnatha see Thapar 2005. See Van der veer 1992 for a discussion on the link between Somnatha and Ayodhya in Hindu Nationalism.

⁵ The *Sangh Parivar* refers to a 'family' (*parivar*=family) of Hindu Right Wing Organisations. Apart from the BJP and the VHP, the *Parivar* includes a number of organizations working at different levels. These include the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the Bajrang Dal and the Akhil Bharatiya Vidhyarthi Parishad (ABVP) among others.

⁶ Section 145 of the CrPC refers to the procedure that the Executive Magistrate can resolve to where a dispute regarding land or water is likely to cause a breach of peace.

⁷ A religious denomination of a group called the Ramanandi sect of Bairagis

⁸ A Waqf Board is a statutory body established under the Waqf Act of 1954. A *waqf* is a religious

structure. In 1987, in view of their importance, the cases were transferred from the Civil Court of Faizabad to the Special Full Bench of the Lucknow Bench of the Allahabad High Court following an application for the same by the state of Uttar Pradesh. In 1989 Deoki Nandan Agarwal filed a suit as the 'next friend' of the deities (Rama and Ram Janma Bhoomi). On 14 August 1989, the High Court ordered maintenance of status quo with respect to the structure. All the suits mentioned above were transferred to the Allahabad High Court and were ordered to be heard together. Consequently there were five suits to be heard. The first of these, O.O.S⁹.No.1/1989 (hereafter Suit 1), was one of the two suits filed in 1950. It was filed by Gopal Singh Visharad (a member of the Hindu Mahasabha) seeking entitlement for worship of and for offering prayers without any interruption to the deity of Lord Rama installed at Ram Janam Bhumi and restraining the defendants¹⁰ from interfering with this. O.O.S.No.2 referred to a suit filed by Paramhans Ramchandra Dass, which was subsequently withdrawn because it was similar in content to Suit 1. O.O.S.No.3/1989 (Suit 3) referred to the suit filed by the Nirmohi Akhara in 1961 seeking a decree that the charge of the 'temple Ram Janmabhoomi'¹¹ be handed over to the plaintiff through its *Mahant*¹². The O.O.S. No.4/1989 (Suit 4) referred to the suit filed by the Sunni Central Board of Waqfs, U.P. in 1961. The plaintiffs sought a declaration that a particular area demarcated in the map attached to the plaint is a public mosque by the name Babri Masjid and that the adjoining areas similarly demarcated in the map is a public Muslim graveyard. The O.O.S No.5/1989 (Suit 5) was filed on behalf of the deity, Bhagwan Sri Rama Virajman also called Bhagwan Sri Ram Lala Virajman, and Sri Ram Janma Bhoomi, through the 'next friend' Sri Deoki Nandan Agrawal seeking that the entire premises of the Ram Janma Bhoomi be declared as belonging to the deities and that the defendants be restrained from interfering with the construction of

endowment under Islam and the Waqf boards are responsible for their management and maintenance. The Sunni Waqf board oversees Sunni Islamic properties endowed for religious/charitable purposes.

⁹ O.O.S. refers to Other Original Suit

¹⁰ Eleven defendants are listed including five Muslim residents of Ayodhya, four government officials, the Sunni Waqf Board, Uttar Pradesh and Nirmohi Akhara, Ayodhya

¹¹ The Nirmohi Akhara held that the Babri Masjid was never a mosque and had always been a temple marking the birthplace of Rama.

¹² A word that denotes the head or leader of certain religious sects

a temple at the Ram Janma Bhoomi, if necessary by demolishing the structures existing therein. This suit is interesting as it was argued that Bhagwan Sri Ram Lala Virajman, the Ram Janma Bhoomi and other deities and places of worship there are judicial persons.¹³ Deoki Nandan Agrawal, who made the plaint on behalf of the above plaintiffs was doing so by virtue of his being a Vaishnava Hindu and hence their ‘next friend’ of the deities. Suit 4 became the leading suit in the case.

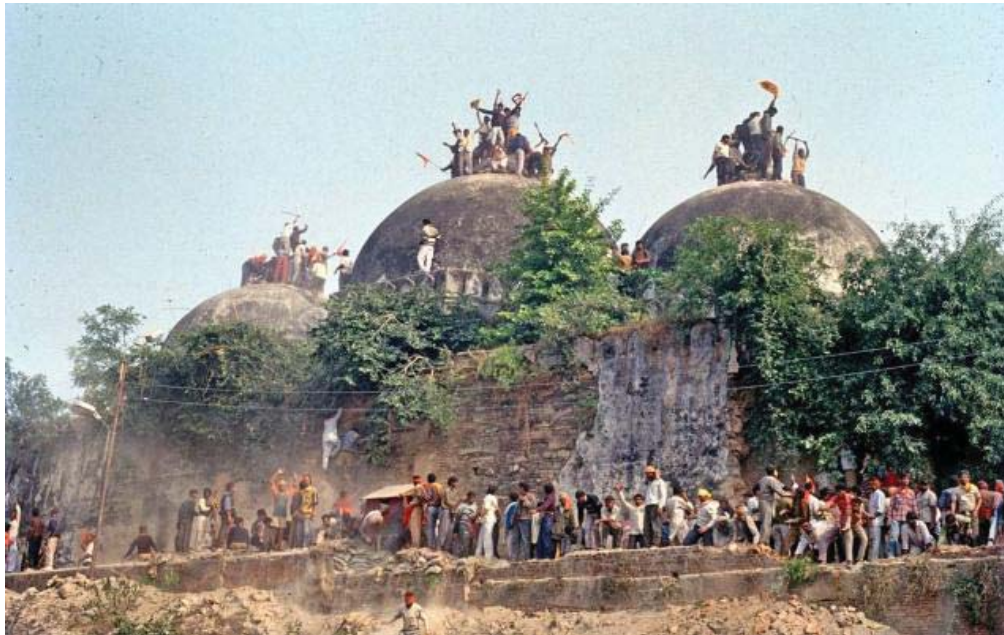


Figure 2.1. The demolition of the Babri Masjid by Hindu *karsevaks* on 6 December 1992 (Courtesy: Noorani 2013)

2.1.a. Archaeology of Ayodhya: Up to 2003

Ayodhya has been in archaeological attention from the late 19th century CE. The site is mentioned in the report for the year 1862-63 submitted by Alexander Cunningham (1866), Archaeological Surveyor to the Government of India. Cunningham’s effort was to identify the places described in the works of the Chinese pilgrims Fa-Hian and Huen Tsang. Primarily on the basis of Buddhist texts in addition to the two travelogues, Cunningham argues that Ajudhya or Saketa is the same as Fa-Hian’s Sha-chi and Huen Tsang’s Visâkhâ. These are the observations that he makes on Ayodhya.

¹³ For a discussion on this aspect see Arunima 2010.

- The Brahmanical temples of Ayodhya are considered very holy and are all of a modern date without architectural pretensions.
- Most of them occupy ancient sites “that were destroyed by the Musalamans” (ibid., 243).
- There is a *Janam Asthân* or the temple marking the birthplace of Rama.
- Three archaeological mounds are to be found to the south of the city.

While he does mention the temple at the *Janam Asthân*, there is no mention of the Babri Masjid or of the said temple being destroyed to erect the mosque. If the tale of destruction had been an established one he was likely to have mentioned it as he has done in the discussion on Mathura in the same report. Here, Cunningham only makes the generic statement of ancient Brahmanic sites being destroyed by Muslims.

A.K.Narain of the Benaras Hindu University (BHU) excavated Ayodhya to determine the cultural sequence of the site in the sixties. There is a brief note on the excavations in the *Indian Archaeology-A Review (IAR)* 1968-69 (1973)¹⁴. There, the site is reported to have yielded three cultural phases, of which the third follows a period of desertion. The note mentions finds from the earliest level like the Northern Black Polished Ware (NBPW), coarse gray ware and red wares alongside other artefacts and two ‘Ayodhya coins’. The report does not provide any further details and there is no mention of the chronology of the cultural sequence.

B.B. Lal, along with K.V. Soundararajan of the ASI, excavated at Ayodhya in 1975 and 76 as part of a project called the *Archaeology of the Ramayana Sites*. They laid trenches at the ‘Ram Janma Bhoomi’ mound, an open area to the west of Hanumangarhi and at the ‘Sita-ki- Rasoi’. In the *IAR* 1976-77 (1980) the first occupation of the site is assigned to the 7th century BCE based on comparative dating. The report says that occupational phases continue up to *circa* 3rd century CE. After the early historic level there is a break in occupation and the site was again occupied around the 11th century CE. Of this period it is said that, “(s)everal later medieval brick-and-kankar lime-floors have been met with, *but the entire late period was devoid of any special interest* (my emphasis)” (ibid., 53). There are five photographs with the report; the first is the photograph of the trench at the ‘Ram-Janma Bhoomi’

¹⁴ *IAR* is the official publication of the ASI where the details of archaeological work undertaken across the country are reported.

area; the next three are of a terracotta sealing, a terracotta figurine and Rouletted ware sherds respectively. The final photograph is of a ring well attributed to later part of the NBPW period. In continuation of the work done, a second season of excavations was conducted during 1979-80 (*IAR* 1979-80 (1983)). The excavations were aimed to establish whether the site had been occupied prior to the NBPW levels. The early date of occupation was confirmed as 7th century BCE that had been suggested in the previous year of excavations. While the previous season's report talks about a break in occupation following the early historic period, the second report says that the occupation continued from the NBPW phase through Sunga, Kushana and Gupta periods up to medieval times. None of the reports mentions the destruction of a temple for Rama in the area for the construction of a mosque. The reports are stylistically in line with the usual reporting in *IAR*, stating factual and descriptive information and assumptions on dating based on comparative analyses. While the excavations had been conducted as part of the project, *Archaeology of the Ramayana Sites*, the reports do not discuss the epic or make identifying inferences.

Being a dispute centred on an event that occurred more than 400 years ago, history and archaeology figured in a major way in the Ayodhya issue.¹⁵ Parties who supported the temple theory and those against it cited historical and archaeological sources for giving credence to their argument, both in the public and in the court. Archaeology was placed at “the heart of the political confrontation”¹⁶ by archaeologist B.B. Lal. He held key positions of authority as the Director General of the ASI from 1968-72 and as the Director of the Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla from 1977-84. In the October 1990 issue of a monthly called *Manthan*, B.B.Lal published an article (1990 [2003]) on his previous excavations at Ayodhya. In this article Lal talked about finds that he had failed to mention in the *IAR* reports. He mentioned a trench to the south of the Babri Masjid that he contended had a series of brick built pillar bases. Lal also held that some of the pillars in the Babri Masjid might have come from this preceding structure. Following the demolition of the

¹⁵ See Noorani 2003a, 18-172 for an edited collection of instances where history and archaeology came into the debate

¹⁶ From the title of an article by Shereen Ratnagar (2004)

mosque in 1992, claims were made that indications of the existence of a temple were found on the land surrounding the Babri Masjid during the land levelling operations in June-July 1992 and further 'evidence' in the form of a cache of architectural features and stone sculptures had come up from below the mosque strata at the time of the destruction of the mosque. These, along with Lal's previous revelations (ibid.) of having recovered pillar bases in his excavations at Ayodhya, were put together and publicized as evidence for the existence of a temple that had been destroyed for the construction of the Masjid. In this context, a tract, *Ayodhya: Archaeology after Demolition* by D. Mandal, came out in 1993, the year after the demolition of the Babri Masjid. A revised edition of the same was published in 2003 (Mandal 2003). The main body of the tract is the re-examination of the material that informed the above claims. Mandal tries to give an alternative to the temple theory through a "technical investigation for evidence" (ibid., x) and he writes as "an orthodox field archaeologist, nothing more" (ibid., 3). Thus, his was a strong counter-argument grounded on strict disciplinary guidelines against the temple theory. I have referred to Mandal's tract here, because it assumed immense significance in the legal dispute in a few years.

On 1 August 2002, the special bench of the Allahabad High Court that was looking into the civil suits ordered archaeological excavations by the ASI at Ayodhya. It invited suggestions from the parties of the suits in this regard. Taking these suggestions into consideration another order was issued on 5 March 2003. The excavations by the ASI commenced on 12 March 2003 and the ASI submitted its report on 22 August 2003. The report was integral to judicial decision making in some of the key issues framed by the court in relation to the Ayodhya case. On 30 September 2010, the High Court ordered to divide the property in dispute among the three parties- the Muslims, the Hindus and the Nirmohi Akhara and the area below the central dome of the Babri Masjid was directed to be given to the Hindu parties, a decision towards which the conclusions drawn in the report played an instrumental determining role.

2.2. Scope of the Chapter

The Ayodhya issue has been one of the most contentious matters in the history of the modern Indian nation. It has had deeply affecting social and political implications. At the time of the writing of this thesis, the title suit in the Supreme Court of India is awaiting decision. The VHP has started piling up building material at Ayodhya for the construction of a Ram temple on the site of the demolished mosque. It had announced earlier in 2017 that it would finish the task by the end of the year (Khan 2017). Different facets of the issue have been discussed in the academia, media, public forums, and in the parliament over the years.

Owing to its multi-stranded character it is difficult and sometimes reductive to isolate a single aspect of the problematic. Here, I attempt precisely that. The discussion is restricted essentially to the 2003 judgment of the Allahabad High Court. It is not in the interest of this chapter to re-visit the archaeological evidences *per se*. This important concern has been addressed in the works of D. Mandal and Shereen Ratnagar (2007) and Supriya Varma and Jaya Menon (2010). Both these works responded to the judicially ordained excavations by the ASI at Ayodhya, (re)examining the evidence, pointing out inconsistencies and suggesting alternative explanations. The interest of this study lies in the coming together of archaeology and law. Public archaeology studies, especially Cultural Resources Management (CRM) approaches understand the relation of archaeology with law primarily in the context of defining legislations that limit or facilitate archaeological practice. They also seek to understand the legal constraints to archaeological practice within particular contexts. The Ayodhya case is unique because the demand for knowledge production comes from the side of the judiciary, which archaeology caters to.¹⁷ The formulation of the research question itself thus happens within the judicial and not the disciplinary framework. The Ayodhya case is relevant to the concerns raised in this thesis in a number of ways. It falls within the nationalistic and bureaucratic tradition of ASI archaeology. It is also an exceptional site of enquiry where law and archaeology come together through the association of two state institutions- the ASI and the High Court

¹⁷ The implications of archaeology entering into the legal discourse have been discussed briefly by Ganesh, Hazari and Ratnagar (2003) in the context of the High Court order to conduct excavations at Ayodhya.

of Allahabad. The judiciary is here an institutionalized channel for negotiating a public and political dispute. Unlike an ordinary civil case, the Ayodhya case also sees the coming together of political, fundamentalist, religious and civil society interests. The judgment lies at the tail end of a long-standing issue where archaeology has periodically come into the fray. An important concern for the chapter is how evidence in archaeology is translated into legal parlance to be reconstituted as legal evidence in a civil dispute. It seeks to mark out this process as one where professional archaeologists assume roles that are outside strict professional definitions and come into interaction with specific categories of public(s) defined through the judicial process.

2.3. A Brief Discussion of the Documents Considered

This case study is almost entirely based on the analysis of select documents that are discussed below.

2.3.a. The Orders

On 1 August 2002, the Special Full Bench¹⁸ of the Allahabad High Court hearing on Ayodhya matters suggested that the ASI excavate the site. It gave the parties two weeks time to give their suggestions before passing the final orders in this regard. In the meantime, the ASI was asked to get the site surveyed using Ground-Penetrating Radar (GPR) or Geo-Radiology. On 23 October 2002, the court rejected the objections raised by the parties challenging the power of the court to *suo moto* order the excavations. The GPR survey was entrusted to a private firm called the Tojo Vikas International Pvt. Ltd., which submitted its report on 17 February 2003. On 5 March 2003, after taking into account the suggestions and objections raised by the parties and the results of the GPR survey, the Bench ordered excavations at the site by the ASI. The following discussion considers the above three court orders. Henceforth the order of 1 August 2002 will be referred to as Order 1¹⁹, the order rejecting the objections raised by the parties as Order 2²⁰ and the one issued on 5 March 2003 as

¹⁸ Justices Sudhir Narain, S. Rafat Alam and Bhanwar Singh

¹⁹ Reproduced in Annexure 3 of Justice Dharam Veer Sharma's judgment (Sharma Annexure 3, 1-4)

²⁰ Relevant extracts are reproduced in Sudhir Agarwal's judgment (Agarwal, Volume 1, 198-207)

Order 3²¹. Apart from these three orders, the judgment refers to several interim orders passed by the court during the course of the excavations.

2.3.b. The Report of the Archaeological Survey of India

The ASI submitted its two volume report on 25 August 2003 to the High Court. The first volume (Manjhi and Mani 2003; hereafter the Report) (the text) is divided into ten chapters and the second volume consists of the plates. Parts of the report are also reproduced in the judgments of the three judges.

2.3.c. The Judgment of the Allahabad High Court

The most important document studied here is the judgment made on 30 September 2010 by the special full bench of the Allahabad High Court hearing on Ayodhya matters. The three member bench was constituted by Justices Sighbat Ulla Khan, Sudhir Agarwal and Dharam Veer Sharma. The judgment related to the four suits that we discussed above *viz.*, Suit Nos. 1, 3, 4 and 5. On 6 January 1964, the Civil Judge of Faizabad had consolidated the suits (excluding Suit 5 which was a later suit) and made Suit 4 the leading one. On 10 July 1989, the suits were transferred to be heard by the full Bench of the Allahabad High Court. Together the judgments of the three judges run into several thousand pages and annexures. They allow us to trace the progress of the legal suit and the excavations. Alongside archaeology, the three judges also discuss other types of material including religious texts, primary and secondary historical sources and oral statements of experts from various fields and reach their separate inferences on the basis of these. While the logic and assumptions that govern each of these judgments can be understood fully only if they are taken in their entirety, the discussion will focus primarily on the treatment of archaeology.

The lengthiest judgment of the three is that of Justice Sudhir Agarwal which runs into 5213 pages in 21 volumes. It also has the most extensive treatment of archaeology. The events leading to the excavations and their course are discussed in detail in his judgment. There is also a detailed treatment of the statements of expert witnesses from both sides of the dispute including archaeologists. He talks at length about the legal justification for the excavations and the details of the objections that were raised during the course of and following the excavations. Justice Dharam Veer Sharma's

²¹ Reproduced in Annexure 3 of Justice Dharam Veer Sharma's judgment (Sharma, Annexure 3, 5-15)

judgment, which runs to 1355 pages (in seven volumes) and annexures, discusses each of the suits separately. The leading suit, Suit 4 gets the most extensive treatment. The decision to order the excavations and the archaeological evidences are discussed by him also at some length, though not in as detailed a manner as by Sudhir Agarwal. Justice S.U. Khan's is the shortest of three judgments, being only 285 pages (a single volume) in length. The judgment is available in its entirety in the official website of the Allahabad High Court ("Decision of Hon'ble Special Full Bench" n.d.). Where direct references are made from the judgment, I will use in-text references in the following format: Last name of the judge, Volume Number/Name, page no. Where incidents that occurred during the course of the excavations are narrated, the details of the same are from the judgements unless otherwise indicated.

2.4. Why Excavate? Judicial Expectations of Archaeology

The examination of the documents discussed above shows that the judiciary had certain specific expectations concerning the results of the excavations and generalized assumptions regarding archaeology. Before going to those, the judicial provisions which allow the court to *suo moto* order the excavations are discussed.

Order XVI Rule 14 of the Code of Civil Procedure (CPC): By this provision the court can summon any person, who need not be a party to the suit, to give evidence or to produce any document in that person's position. "It is to find out the truth which is integral part of justice" (Agarwal, Volume 1, 202).

Order XVII Rule 18 of the CPC: This refers to the power of the court to inspect any property or thing regarding which any question might arise.

Section 75 of the CPC: This section allows the court to issue commissions for a number of purposes. For the Ayodhya case, provision *e* of the section is relevant. It allows appointment of a commission to hold scientific, technical or expert investigation.

Order XXVI Rule 10A of the CPC: This gives detailed provisions regarding issuing commissions, Thereby, where any question arising in a suit involves any *scientific investigation* (emphasis mine) which cannot, in the opinion of the Court, be conveniently conducted before the Court, the Court may, if it thinks it necessary or expedient in the interests of justice so to do, issue a commission to such person as it thinks fit, directing him to inquire into such question and report thereon to the court.

Section 45 of the Indian Evidence Act (IEA or the Evidence Act): Opinions of experts.-When the Court has to form an opinion upon a point of foreign law, or of science, or art, or as to identity of handwriting (or finger impressions), the opinions upon that point of persons specially skilled in such foreign law, science or art (or in questions as to identity of handwriting) (or finger impressions) are relevant facts. Such persons are called experts.

The first two rules of the CPC listed above are more general in nature. For the purpose of the discussion, the last three are especially significant. Two aspects need to be noted here. Firstly the provisions talk about situations that are outside the realm of expertise of the court. In such cases the court can make an assessment of expertise and appoint those (person or a commission) whom it considers to be expert in the field to conduct such an enquiry. Here the role of the court primarily is to decide who an expert is. Secondly, the words *scientific investigation* mentioned in Order XXVI Rule 10A are of special significance as it qualifies the nature of the commission appointed as *scientific*.

The basic issue in all the suits was identified in Order 1 as “whether there was a Hindu temple or any Hindu religious structure existed (sic.) and the alleged Babri Masjid was constructed after demolishing such temple at the site in question” (Sharma, Annexure 3, 1). It is pointed out in Order 1 that if the foundation of a temple structure existed in the site, archaeological excavations could prove the same. The order posits that archaeological “science” can help to solve this question. It talks about the development that the field has achieved in the modern age that allows for “great accuracy” (Sharma, Annexure 3, 2) especially in matters like the one in question i.e., proving the existence of a past construction. Order 2 points out that archaeological evidence has been used by the plaintiffs of Suit 5 to support the

demolition theory and counter arguments were presented by the plaintiffs of Suit 4. For the court, these evidences are not adequately relevant for the issue, as they have not been gained through excavations on the disputed site, *i.e.*, on the exact spot of land where the mosque was located. The reasons cited to *suo moto* exercise the court's power to order the excavations, as justified through the legal provisions mentioned above, are two-fold. First is to remove any suspicion or doubt regarding the facts of the case and the second is to "find out the truth" (Agarwal, Volume 1, 205) regarding the contentious issues raised by the parties who themselves have relied upon archaeological evidence. The court considers it necessary to proactively push for the excavations, taking into cognizance the possibility that none of the parties might demand the same. The GPR survey had been ordered as a first step towards excavations, even at a stage when evidences of all the parties had not closed. The survey had pointed to the existence of certain anomalies below ground. Order 3, which was made after the GPR survey, examined the conclusions made by the survey to further justify the need to excavate.

Justice Sharma, begins his discussion of the issues in the leading suit, Suit 4, by making reference to archaeology and reiterating the expectations in the orders that "the assistance of Archaeological Science" (Sharma, Suit 4, Volume 1, 28) was sought specifically to resolve the issue of ascertaining the previous existence and demolition of a temple below the Babri Masjid. He elaborates the legal provisions for issuing commissions and states that "the Commission is going to held (sic.) in extracting the truth" (Sharma, Suit 4, Voume.1, 32). On archaeology, he makes the following observation.

It is not a matter of dispute now that in the modern age Archaeological Science has achieved the great accuracy. Thus with the assistance of Archaeological Science, one can answer up to the considerable degree of certainty about various past activities of people for which material evidence is available. It was believed that sufficient Archaeological material is available regarding the temple/mosque issue (Sharma, Suit 4, Volume 1, 28-29).

Agarwal shares similar views on archaeology and underlines it as providing "scientific factual data for reconstructing ancient historical material culture... As it is a scientific discipline, it uses scientific methods in its working" (Agarwal, Volume 17, 4175).

There are certain shared assumptions that come out clearly through the legal provisions cited, the wordings employed in the orders and the judgments of Agarwal and Sharma. Firstly, archaeology is expected to provide a definitive solution to the specific questions of whether or not a temple existed at the site of the Babri Masjid and whether or not it had been demolished to build the mosque. Secondly, this expectation stems from a reductive positivist notion regarding archaeology as an exact science that is capable of providing such definitive solutions or ‘truths’. Further analysis of the documents helps to elaborate upon these aspects.

In Order 1, the court refers to the first edition of the critical work by D. Mandal, *Ayodhya: Archaeology after Demolition*, to support its assumption that archaeology can help arrive at a solution to the issue of existence/ demolition of temple at the site. Paradoxically, Mandal (2003), in his work, has challenged the use of archaeology to validate the demolition theory. He has addressed the question by using standard archaeological procedure to re-examine the evidences. But, he is uncritical about the use of archaeology as a tool in the issue and sees archaeological evidence as a separate entity that can be analysed in its own right, detached from its contextual engagements. The court selectively employs this position of Mandal to strengthen its assumption that truth claims can be arrived at by adherence to accepted procedural conventions in archaeology. The responses of the court to the objections raised against the GPR survey are similarly illuminating. Order 2 dismisses the contention that the results of the GPR survey might not be accurate. This is on the grounds that the procedure is scientific in nature and also that the contention cannot be made prior to obtaining the results. Similarly in Order 3, the court refuses to cross examine the surveyors and does not give any justification for this beyond plainly stating the technical and procedural details of the GPR survey. The implication here is that by virtue of it being a *technical* aid (that can give guidance to the archaeologist) the GPR survey in itself is devoid of any personal bias of the surveyors. While the reference here is not directly to archaeology, the position is reflective of the judiciary’s views on procedures which it considers scientific and technical.

The direct implication of holding such notions is undervaluing the role of interpretation in archaeology. From an archaeological point of view, there is a distinction between the data that is collated during the excavations and the

conclusions that are drawn on their basis, both with regard to individual artefacts and in general. A possible interpretation is open to contestation. In accepting the report as a whole as evidence, the judgment does not seem to take cognizance of this distinction. This comes out very well in the words of Sharma and Agarwal, who have accepted the report in its entirety as a piece of substantive evidence. Both the judges discuss in detail the legal provisions under Section 45 of the IEA and precedence in matters related to the same to justify their position. As we saw, the legal provisions discussed above pertain to expert opinion in general and not specifically to archaeology. In their discussion also, the judges fail to grasp such distinctions. The only criterion for Sharma in deciding whether or not the report is acceptable is the integrity of the expert. The legal construction of expert and expertise will be dealt with in more detail in a later section. Suffice to say that, if the expert had unquestionable integrity, the conclusions drawn from the report would also be held to be unquestionable, notwithstanding the contextual factors of their production. Differentiation between archaeological material and interpretations is acknowledged by the two judges only on rare occasions where the objections raised by the plaintiffs against the report are discussed to be rejected. This, in part, is also predicated by the nature of judicial decision making as opposed to scientific/academic enquiry as we will see later in this discussion.

The only dissenting judgement, of S.U.Khan, interestingly, does not consider the nature of archaeological evidence or its significance to the judgment at any length. While it is the central body of evidence for the other two judges, for Khan, archaeology is not a truth-making device as it seems to be for his colleagues. In comparison to the other two judges, he spends very little time discussing archaeology. Moreover, he categorically states that history or archaeology is not absolutely essential to decide the civil suit at hand. The following discussion will periodically refer to Khan's judgment in comparison with that of the other two judges. While his reference to archaeology is minimal, his perspective often tends to differ from that of Agarwal and Sharma and offers interesting lines of departure.

2.5. Mediated Archaeology: A Discussion on the Judicial Interventions in the Ayodhya Excavations

The judges (with the exception of Justice S.U.Khan), we saw, held that an independent archaeological enquiry that adheres to the established methods and practices of the discipline would be able to resolve the issue at hand with considerable degree of accuracy. The understanding here is that the enquiry that the expert conducts is independent of external influences. However, from when it first ordered the excavations till when the ASI submitted its report the judiciary intervened in the process in a number of ways, with the aim of ensuring a ‘free and fair’ enquiry. By doing so it inadvertently went against its own notion of independent archaeological practice as will emerge from the following discussion.

A number of decisions in the Ayodhya excavations, starting from the formulation of the research question had been judicially ordained. Thereby, the court periodically bypassed the authority of the team leader or the other members of the excavation team in matters that in other excavations would come under their purview. In the same vein there was also a close judicial monitoring of the excavations. Sometimes these resulted in conflicts of interest between the judiciary and the ASI. The first instance of such conflicts of interest comes out overtly at a very early stage, when the ASI expressed its reluctance to get the GPR survey done. It did not think that any agency in the country was competent enough to do the work (Agarwal, Volume1, 207). It was against this assessment that the High Court ordered, M/s Tojo Vikas International Pvt. Ltd., to conduct the survey. If one examines the projects undertaken by the firm, the company does not have any specialized expertise in the field of archaeology and the explorations at Ayodhya appear to be the only one of the kind that the company has undertaken in India. As per the company website, Tojo Vikas International (Pvt.) Ltd. offers specialized services like GPR survey for general contractors, governments and their agencies for water resources (hydropower, irrigation and multipurpose projects), other civil engineering projects, ports and harbours, mining, and oil gas exploration. (“Tojo-Vikas International” n.d.). The order for excavations on 5 March 2003 (Order 3) was made after taking into account the conclusions drawn from the said GPR survey. While the ASI was of the opinion that there was no body in India that has the necessary expertise to do the survey, the excavations themselves relied on a very major way on the report of the survey, especially with regard to where the trenches

were to be laid. This reliance is clear from the brief report submitted to the court by B.R.Mani, the leader of the ASI team on 23 March 2003 (Agarwal, Volume 1, 219-227).

The judicial interventions with the excavation process occur at two levels. The first level was external to the excavations themselves. Order 1 maintained that videography of the excavations were to be done. While it is not an uncommon procedure, it is not compulsorily practiced in all excavations. Here the purpose of videography is that of meta-documentation to allow procedural control. There were clear restrictions and instructions on who can have access to the excavations and to what extent. This came out very clearly in the directives on who should conduct the excavations, an aspect that will be discussed in detail in a later section. There was to be a court appointed observer, a provision that operated on the same logic of meta-documentation through videography. There were very clear directions on who can or cannot enter the sites. In Order 3, it was stated that each of the parties can have one nominee, including an archaeologist who can observe the excavations. A gag order was placed on the media on 28 August 2002.²² The gag order effectively prevented any opinion or information regarding the excavations reaching the public domain through media. It also deemed public expression of opinions by parties concerned in the case, their counsels or any other person regarding the matter as contempt of court, thereby legally curtailing public discourse on the matter.

The second level of interventions interfered directly with the conduct of the excavations. The first occurrence of this happened at the very initial stage. The ASI team of 14 archaeologists and 80 labourers carried out the survey of the site and trenches were laid out on 11 March 2003. But this was not done in the presence of the parties involved in the suit and the court directed that the ASI conduct the survey again. If one examines the progress of the excavations from when it was ordered to the final submission of the report, numerous such instances come up, which can be, for the convenience of discussion, placed under different heads.

²² Extracts from the order are quoted in Agarwal, Volume 1, 195-196

2.5.a. The Question of Time

Through Order 3, the court gives directives about the overall duration of the excavations. It gives directions on the time that could be taken to start the excavation process and how long the submission of the report should take after the excavations. For both, the time initially allotted as per the order was a short duration of seven days each. This temporally constrained the planning required prior to any excavation to a considerable level with a direct import on questions like where best to lay out the trenches. More importantly, it considerably restricted the time available to reach conclusions based on the finds. In usual practice, closer analysis of archaeological finds require considerable time after the excavations as each class of artefacts and other evidences need to be studied closely and by specialists. If one looks at the report of the excavations, the conclusions drawn with regard to the research question posed by the court is seen to have relied heavily on individual artefacts, a meticulous study of which, time constraints as the above would directly affect. The ASI has its own guidelines that define the time limit for submission of excavation reports after fieldwork. *The [Draft] National Policy on Archaeological Exploration and Excavation*, drafted by the Central Advisory Board of the ASI (CABA) and submitted for approval to the Director General of the ASI on 23 December 2009 (CABA 2009), requires that a detailed report of any excavation should be submitted to the ASI within six months of the termination of the excavation. While there are no restrictions on submitting the report earlier, this indicates that as per the understanding of the ASI, report generation will require about six months time after the excavations.

One finds the ASI to be in negotiation with the court time and again for more time to be allotted for the excavations. On 7 March 2003, the ASI submitted another application requesting two months of additional time for excavations and 15 days further for preparing the report, indicating that it was struggling to meet the deadlines imposed by the court. However the court refused to grant the amount of time that the ASI sought for. In its order dated 10 April 2003, the court considered the request and decided to grant only five weeks more for the excavations. It said that “The excavation work should be done expeditiously... It may engaged (sic.) additional staff, superintending/Assistant Archaeologists/labourers for the purpose” (as quoted in Agarwal, Volume 1, 241). Thus the priority of the court here was to have the results on a fast track. For this it overrode the estimation made by the expert (the ASI) on the

matter. Similarly, the court makes its own assumption regarding the nature of archaeological work when it assumes that requirements of time can be compensated by induction of more labour power. The time that the ASI requested for was not often granted and the court periodically underlined the importance of expedient excavations. Sometimes its tone was accusatory. The following excerpt from the order passed on 22 May 2003 is illustrative in this regard.

In our last order on 2nd May 2003 we had directed that the excavation be completed by 15th June 2003 and the report be submitted in the first week of July 2003 but number of trenches completed are (sic.) *only seven*.²³ It is expected that incomplete trenches and other trenches which require excavation be completed at an early date (quoted in Agarwal, Volume1, 250).

In the case of the daily schedule of excavations also, the ASI was to follow directives given by the court. The directions given on 11 March 2003, categorically mentioned that the excavation work should begin at 10am (Agarwal, Volume 1, 213). The ASI requested a change in the schedule of excavations, through Civil Misc. Application No. 21 (O) 2003, so that it could be extended from 9am to 6pm and obtained a favourable order regarding the same on 26 March 2003. The ASI can be seen to be struggling with the restrictions and being in negotiation with the court on different occasions for favourable directives.

2.5.b. Location and Extent

In Order 3 the court specifies the area where the excavations are to be conducted. The dominant practice in an archaeological excavation is for the archaeologists to survey the larger area and decide on where to lay the trenches as per the indications of the survey and other logistical or practical concerns. In the case of Ayodhya, informed assumptions made about the past landscape did not determine the boundaries of excavation. The limits of where the excavations were to be conducted were specified considering the boundaries of the land that had come under legal contestation. In its order dated 23 October 2002, the court dismissed the objections to the GPR survey raised by the parties. There it was pointed out that, the archaeological evidence used by plaintiffs of Suits 4 and 5 were not exactly from the disputed area. It went on to underline the need to survey and excavate precisely this area in order to ascertain the

²³ Emphasis mine

issue of temple demolition. That is, it was the present political/religious landscape and boundaries defined by contemporary civil tenets of ownership that defined the archaeological site in the Ayodhya excavations.

The court directly barred GPR survey and excavations on the “area where the idol of Shri Ram Lala is existing and approximately 10 feet around” so that the processes do not “affect the worship of Shri Ram Lala and thus, status quo as regards His Puja and worshippers’ right of Darshan shall be maintained” (Order 3, Sharma, Annexure 3,13). We saw that the idols of Ram were kept under the central dome of the mosque surreptitiously for the first time during the night of 22/23 December 1949. The court order, in effect, prohibited excavations under a central area of the demolished mosque. The right of the Hindu ‘public’ for worship took precedence here over the possible need of the archaeologist for access to that particular portion of the land. This also brings out one of the many contradictions in the position of the court regarding the excavations. While on the one hand it stressed on the importance to limit the excavations within the disputed area, on the other certain present claims over the land takes precedence over the integrity of archaeological evidence generated from there.

Applications were made to the court by the parties seeking to limit the depth up to which the excavations were to be done and to prevent excavations at areas where cement floors were found. The court refused to intervene in these matters. The directions given on 26 March 2003 categorically stated that it is for the ASI to decide on excavating the areas with cement floors on the basis of the GPR survey report and taking into account the principles that govern excavations. On the question of depth, the order dated 22 May 2003 maintained that “(I)t is for the Archaeologists to determine in regard to the depth” (quoted in Agarwal, Volume 1, 247). The tone of these statements implies that the court deemed the expert (the ASI archaeologists) as the best authority to decide on such issues. It is interesting to contrast these statements with the earlier instances where the court proactively limited the extent and location of excavations. There is no recognition on part of the court of the contradiction inherent in the former instances where it bypassed the authority of the archaeologists in the same kind of decisions. The issue of authority and decision making will be examined more closely in a separate section.

2.5.c. How to do archaeology? Procedural Interventions

We saw from the above discussion, how decisions on routine matters related to the excavations at Ayodhya were to be channelized through the judiciary to ensure an accountable enquiry. Apart from the questions of time and extent that we discussed, such interventions extended to several other aspects of the excavations. In this section, I will mention a few instances of the same. The directions given on 11 March 2003 required the ASI team to provide a list of equipment to be used in the excavations. Directions were given to keep the finds sealed and under lock and key. In response to certain grievances raised by the plaintiffs of Suit 4 through application CMA No. 19 of 2003, the court gave specific instructions to the ASI regarding recording of the finds in the directives issued on 26 March 2003. The ASI was asked to maintain the register of finds with the depth and layer noted (as per its interpretation) and to obtain signatures of all the parties on the register. It was directed that the finds be sealed and stored in the presence of the parties, with signatures attesting their presence. Similar instructions were given for the maintenance of the daily register as well. The court periodically gave directives on such matters as the conduct of the excavations and collection, recording, documentation and interpretation of finds. We saw that the excavations were closely monitored through observers and meta-documentation. In addition, the ASI was also required to submit progress reports once in every two weeks, with information on the number of trenches excavated, the depth up to which the excavation was done and the items found in the trenches. In this directive, the priority of the court is visible. Its primary focus was on the amount of work completed, rather than on information on stratification or interpretations that an archaeological report might contain.

These few instances reveal the judiciary as a constant and everyday presence at the Ayodhya excavations, both in a physical sense in the guise of observers and in a non-physical sense through its many directives that regulated the conduct of the archaeology team on site.

2.6. Conducting Judicially Ordained Excavations

From the above discussion it emerges that the Ayodhya excavations were mediated by the judiciary at all levels. The judiciary interfered with the ‘why’, ‘where’, ‘how’ and

‘who’ of the excavation process, bypassing the authority of the ASI in decision making. We also saw instances where this led to tensions between the ASI officials and the court. I will now discuss if any of these aspects finds expression in the report of the ASI. Prior to going into the final report submitted by the ASI, it should be noted that in compliance with the court orders, the ASI was required to give brief reports of the progress of the work periodically during the course of the excavations. In India, in usual practice, interim reports of a season’s work are required to be submitted to the ASI or are reported in publications like the *IAR*. Submission of progress reports as the above was a highly unusual practice necessitated by the judicial monitoring of the excavations. Extracts from the said reports reproduced in the judgment demonstrated a departure from the usual conduct and practice of excavations by the ASI. For instance, the report dated 23 March 2013, submitted to the court by the team leader characterized the excavations as one of a “very special nature” (quoted in Agarwal , Volume 1, 219) which was planned in a way that “the work could be taken up and completed as per the directions of the court”(Agarwal, Volume 1, 219-20). The report shows that the ASI had to depart from some of its usual methodological practices in different ways to meet the specific demands of the court ordered excavations. For instance its usual method of layout of trenches was replaced by another “to avoid any confusion and for better understanding of even laymen...” (Agarwal, Volume 1, 220). Thus there was a compulsion, to make the methodology convincing not just to the professional archaeologists, but to the wider public. This indicates a conscious awareness on the part of the ASI that it was functioning under atypical conditions of monitoring and scrutiny. There were also efforts to convince the court of the out of the ordinary measures taken to meet the temporal constraints imposed upon the excavations and of the need to have time outside the ordained limits to conduct certain investigations. Statements and applications given as part of this progress report also indicated that for routine decisions taken during excavations, like clearing of the land, observing holidays, extending the work schedule etc., prior approval of the court had to be sought. The time lag for court (dis)approval for these activities should also be considered as a factor prevailing through the excavations.

The final report of the excavations is in two volumes. The first volume (the text) (Mani and Manjhi 2003) is divided into ten chapters (including an introduction and a

conclusion). The second volume includes the plates. The text runs into 272 pages. It more or less follows the structure of reports published by the ASI. The only indication that the excavations depart in any way from the usual conditions of excavation is in the introduction. A good portion of this short introduction is assigned to the unusual circumstances that led to the excavations. There is a separate section titled 'Constraints' (ibid., 9-11) where the report describes how these circumstances posed difficulties to the work. First mention is of the time constraint, where it is stated that the ASI, excavated 90 trenches in 5 months and submitted a report of the same in 15 days after the completion of the excavations. "This is an unprecedented event in the history of one forty two years of the existence of the survey" (ibid., 9), says the report. The narration goes on to describe the difficulties posed by working under close media and public scrutiny, the legal restrictions to make public clarification of the position of the ASI, the presence of observers and nominees of the parties at the site and the procedures imposed to ensure transparency. The report admits that owing to some of these factors, the time that was dedicated to post excavation work had been hugely curtailed. There is a detailed description of the difficulties posed by having to work under extreme weather conditions. "Much difficulty was felt for the stratigraphical observations, particularly for determining the layers" (ibid., 10) says the report. Paradoxically, the five page conclusion of the report does not carry any mention of how these conditions might have affected the conclusions. The assumption seems to be that the conditions cited had been extraneous to the conclusions derived at or could be overcome by working "vigorously with full devotion and spirit" (ibid.). The only shortcoming to which the report concedes is inadvertent typing errors.

This failure to acknowledge the special conditions that determined the nature of excavations and evidence in Ayodhya need to be understood in relation to a particular self image of the ASI and the notions that it holds about archaeology. On 8 June 2003, in response to some complaints raised by the plaintiffs regarding the procedures followed at the excavations, B.R.Mani, who was in charge of the excavations underlined accuracy and scientific approach as hallmarks of ASI's explorations and excavations (Aggarwal, Volume 16, 3764). The response indicates that the ASI seems to share with the judiciary similar assumptions regarding the nature of archaeology and of expertise. This couples with disdain towards alternate interpretations and approaches. To take an instance, on 15 June 2003, the plaintiffs of Suit 4 in a

complaint demanded that the ASI should resume the practice of placing section labels with stratum numbers, so as to make observations by the external parties conducive. The ASI team leader at the time gave his views on the matter through the observer, which is quoted in the judgment. “Any trained excavator and archaeologist does not require the layer labels for study the strata and he can study the stratigraphy on the basis of his own knowledge. It is strange that the experts nominated by the party are finding it “almost impossible”, “to check and observe the strata”” (Agarwal, Volume 16, 3786). In his ethnographic fieldwork on the epistemological practices in archaeology in the post colony, Ashish Chadha (2007) has explored many of these assumptions that inform and determine ASI archaeology. He observes that large scale archaeological excavations are regarded by the ASI archaeologists as a defining practice in the role of the ASI as a statist organization and that the ASI considers itself as the only or most capable institution for performing this function owing to its particular historic and bureaucratic role. From his observations it also emerges that the ASI has a rigid adherence to both its methodological conventions largely emerging from the Wheelarian practices of the colonial era,²⁴ and equally to its bureaucratic practices. Thereby, as Chadha argues, “ASI archaeology assumes that this craft of scientific practice, if applied arbitrarily, is methodologically robust enough to produce impartial knowledge” (ibid., 264). Thus, even as it acknowledges the unusual conditions in which Ayodhya excavations were conducted, the ASI is not able to mark these conditions as determining archaeological practice and by extension the evidence/knowledge produced at the site. The absence of indications in the report of the mediated nature of the excavations at Ayodhya has to be understood not as a conscious omission. Rather it emerges from the ASI’s positivist notions regarding archaeological practice and its claim to superior knowledge and authority deriving from its location as a statist bureaucratic/scientific institution.

2.7. Institutional Traditions of Knowledge Production: Contextualizing the role of the ASI in the Ayodhya excavations

The above sections took up different examples from the Ayodhya excavations, to demonstrate the pervasiveness of judicial presence in the conduct of the excavations. We also saw that while the ASI is conscious of these interventions, it does not deem

²⁴ I will discuss these in the following sections.

these to merit mention in the report in a major way. The discussion marked this as the result of certain assumptions shared both by the judiciary and the ASI team regarding archaeology. The notion that archaeology is an ‘objective science’ in the positivist sense of the terms is held by both the institutions. Law views it in the same manner as other matters in which it seeks expert opinion, like handwriting analysis or medical inference. The ASI, we saw in this instance, sees the knowledge that it produces as independent of external factors. Such factors are seen at best as structural inconveniences, with no import upon knowledge production. In order to understand this perception it is necessary to locate the ASI in its role as a state institution with an important function in the production of a nationalist past.

The ASI is one of the largest bureaucratic organisations of its kind. Established in 1861, the organisation served the primary task of colonial surveys of collating and recoding information about the colonized. In the post colonial times, the ASI assumed a regulatory function in archaeological knowledge production and in the management and protection of material remains across the country. The ASI has self consciously embraced this institutional role as the guardian of the national past as can be seen from the following excerpt from its official website.

The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), under the Ministry of Culture, is the premier organization for the archaeological researches and protection of the cultural heritage of the nation. Maintenance of ancient monuments and archaeological sites and remains of national importance is the prime concern of the ASI. Besides it regulate (sic.) all archaeological activities in the country (Archaeological Survey of India n.d.).

One of the implications of embodying this particular role has been that the ASI has remained more or less rigid in terms of adhering to its conventions and practices from the colonial times till date. Let us take the case of archaeological excavations as they are of special significance to our discussion. During the formative years of the discipline of archaeology, when archaeological excavations were intrinsically linked with antiquarian concerns, the primary focus of excavations was to recover topographic plans of structures and spectacular/exotic objects. This is especially true for colonies like India where the discipline had its origins in colonial antiquarian interests. From the late 19th century the importance of stratigraphy - the vertical

arrangement of layers - and the context of artefacts came to be increasingly recognised. At present, in many parts of the world, the principles of stratigraphy as expounded in Edward C. Harris's classic work *Principles of Archaeological Stratigraphy* (Harris 1989)²⁵ form the basis of retrieving and recording archaeological data through excavations. In his work, Harris proposed laws that govern archaeological stratification and formulated a method for recording stratigraphic sequence and stratigraphic relations of a site. This involves micro level documentation whereby natural and man-made features, strata and vertical and horizontal feature interfaces are numbered. The stratigraphic relationships of each of these numbered units are identified and recorded. Attention to detail in excavation and recording in this manner is fundamentally determined by the fact that an archaeological excavation is essentially a process of destruction of record. Once the site is excavated, the only information that remains is in the form of the notes and reports generated by the excavator. Any further interpretation on the area excavated would depend on what has already been recorded. In India, stratigraphic excavation based on the principles laid out by Harris is not the predominant method followed. The ASI is the single largest institution that directly conducts most of the large scale and well advertised excavations in the country. Its field methods²⁶ and other practices are largely those that it has been following from the colonial times relying heavily on the methods used by R.E.M. Wheeler. Wheeler was the director of the survey during the brief but important period from 1944-48. This was the period of transition of the institution to its post colonial phase. Ashish Chadha (2002, 2007) has examined the tremendous influence that Wheeler has had on the post-colonial history of the ASI. Large scale horizontal excavations, are a hallmark of the ASI, as the institution typically has much more funds at its disposal than other bodies that conduct excavations like university departments. The practice of dividing the large areas of the landscape into grids, separating them with baulks and assigning Cartesian co-ordinates to them are practices that the ASI has acquired and continued from Wheeler. Within the squares of the grid that are excavated, vertical stratigraphy is marked through layers of soil

²⁵ The first edition of the book was published in 1979.

²⁶ The locus method based on Harris's principles of stratigraphy was employed in two recent excavations by the ASI at Ropar and Karanpura. The excavations were directed by V.N. Prabhakar, Superintendent Archaeologist at the ASI

deposition. However, horizontal display of large scale structures is an important preoccupation of the ASI.

To place one mode as dominant and to compare it with particular practices, like that of the ASI, would be a reductive exercise, that discounts an important premise of this study that archaeology is determined by the context of its practice. I gave the description, only to highlight the institutional and field practices of the ASI in their uniqueness. Chadha (2007, 132), in his significant ethnographic study of the ASI excavation site notes that “(m)ethodologically, the (Wheelerian) grid epitomized the scientific practice through which archaeological excavation was conducted by the ASI and symbolically it represented the disciplined nature of archaeological act conducted by the colonial statist regime”. The work cites conversations with ASI archaeologists and instances that refer back to the legacy acquired from Wheeler, and underlines the self-assumed role of the ASI as the only institution capable of producing ‘scientific’ and ‘perfect’ knowledge about the past. Chadha also examines aspects like spatial formation of archaeological sites and epistemological formation of the excavation site. To take an example, he demonstrates how the organisation of the excavation camp itself replicates the organizational hierarchy within the institution, an almost military like structuring that allows for bureaucratic control and authority to percolate into the excavation process. Wheeler’s interventions led to the transformation of the ASI into a body that produced authoritative knowledge, through a combination of scientific methods and military procedures.²⁷

Like most institutions of colonial governance, the change that occurred in the ASI after the transference of power in 1947 was merely symbolic, devoid of any change in the ideological structure of the system, its reach, and its power to inscribe a scientific and an ‘objective past’ on the people of India (Chadha 2002, 397).

While the means through which this ideological and institutional structure has been maintained in the ASI can be an interesting discussion in itself, my purpose here has been to underline two aspects: 1) The authority that the ASI derives through its location as a bureaucratic state organisation and its self acknowledged role as the guardian of the national material past and 2) the tendency of the organization to resist

²⁷ REM Wheeler served as an officer in the British army during both the World Wars. He was relieved of his office as Brigadier in 1943 to take up his appointment as the Director General of the Archaeological Survey of India.

change- both structural and epistemological- by falling back on its institutional standing and legacy.

Given this tendency, the trajectory that archaeological scholarship has taken in India can have significance on archaeological knowledge production at Ayodhya. Tapati Guha-Thakurta (1997, 19) notes that the archaeological controversy at Ayodhya “echoes with themes and approaches that have always obsessed the archaeologist in India”. One of the themes that she identifies as having relevance to the Babri Masjid issue is that of authenticity and origin. What she means is that unearthing a precise moment of origin grants authenticity to a structure. This leads to an automatic privileging of early structures over medieval or modern ones. There was a prevalent tendency within colonial and nationalist history projects to define ancient as loosely Hindu and medieval as Islamic.²⁸ The perception of authenticity as origin would mean that the true history of a monument or place can only be revealed by stripping away its medieval (read Islamic) layers to expose the original (read Hindu) history. A second theme that she discusses is the archaeologist’s “fascination with the histories hidden in the monument, with the stories stones could tell” (ibid., 22). This is evident in a much criticized statement that B.B. Lal (2001, 123) made on 10 February 1991 at the Annual Conference of Museums of Asia that the way to know about the reality of the existence of the temple was to dig under the Babri Masjid. Lal also held that the parties in the legal dispute would shy away from the excavations only if they were afraid to face the *truth*. In a later essay he went so far as to say that:

It is well known that the mosque had no architectural pretensions whatsoever. It must have been for this very reason that no Director General of the Archaeological Survey of India, right from the days of Sir John Marshall, ever thought of including it in the list of ‘protected monuments (ibid., 126).

In the essay Lal makes a clear distinction between what falls within the purview of the archaeologist and what falls outside of it. He asserts that questions of communal hurt of the Muslims resulting from the destruction of the mosque are not for the consideration of the archaeologist. Rather the realm of the archaeologist solely lies in gauging the archaeological ‘merit’ of a monument. From the above statement it is evident that for Lal the archaeological remains, that were below the mosque, were evidently of more value than the structure itself, in line with Thakurta’s observations

²⁸ For a discussion on these issues in Indian historiography see Thapar 1978.

about the preoccupation in Indian archaeology with histories that are ‘hidden’. The above statement by Lal regarding the lack of ‘architectural pretensions’ of the Masjid is suggestive of another tendency in Indian archaeology to privilege the spectacular. Finally I would draw attention to the contradiction, in his position that political/communal concerns fall outside the realm of the archaeologist. Lal chose to publish his interpretations about the alleged pillar basis, which turned out to have immense political implications, in a journal with Hindu right wing leanings (Lal 1990 [2003]). The publication came out at a time when the political turmoil around the Ayodhya issue was at its peak, years after the short reports of the excavations were published in the *IAR* (*IAR* 1976-77, 79-80), the official publication of the ASI.

This might be a good juncture to bring another related event that occurred in 1994 at the third World Archaeology Congress (WAC)²⁹ in New Delhi into discussion. The foundation of the WAC was in recognition of the historical and social role as well as the political context of archaeological practice. The second anniversary of the demolition of the Babri Masjid coincided with the conference.³⁰ A group of Indian archaeologists took a position against condemning the act of destruction of the mosque, both at the inter-congress meeting of the WAC at Mombassa and at the actual conference venue. A session on the role of archaeology in the destruction of the mosque was proposed by Nandini Rao. However as per the demand of the local organizing committee, any discussion on the issue in the conference was banned. Towards that end political pressure was also reported to have been exerted (Layton and Thomas 2001, 4). B.B.Lal was the president of the conference. One of the members of the local organizing committee was S.P.Gupta, a well-known archaeologist who was the director of the Allahabad Museum. Gupta was a member of the extreme Hindu right wing organization, Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) (Organiser 2007). It was also reported that historian Irfan Habib was manhandled by

²⁹ The WAC is a non-profit organization established in 1986, which “seeks to promote interest in the past in all countries, to encourage the development of regionally-based histories and to foster international academic interaction” (“About WAC” nd). The WAC organises international congresses once in every four years.

³⁰ For a detailed account of the events leading up to the conference, happenings at the time of the conference and their outcomes, see Butler et.al. 2005, Layton and Thomas 2001 and Rao 1995. For a news report of the events at the WAC, see Friese 1994

Gupta when he attempted to talk about the issue in the pre-conference meeting of the WAC council (Friese 1994). The effort to pass a resolution at the plenary session condemning the destruction of the mosque was also thwarted through similar means. Criticism towards these occurrences at the WAC 3, led to the organization of a WAC inter-congress at Croatia from 3-7 May 1998 on the theme *Destruction and Conservation of Cultural Property*.³¹ This conference put to vote and adopted a resolution denouncing the influence of chauvinistic claims in the profession of archaeology. It condemned the demolition of the Babri Masjid and criticized the failure to prevent the event and resolved that the WAC would give attention to instances of malicious destruction of archaeological heritage. The *Frontline* reported that, at the event, B.B.Lal, S.P.Gupta and the former director of the Indian Council for Historical Research (ICHR), B.R. Grover walked out when the resolution was put to vote. “They had made a futile effort to contest the relevance of the resolution”, the report says, “but finding themselves outnumbered, chose to vote with their feet against it” (Muralidharan 1998). The events at the WAC do not have any direct implications upon the legal dispute. I brought them into discussion to further underline the political nature of archaeology at Ayodhya. One also sees that archaeologists in India, including the ASI archaeologists, have taken pro-active political positions in the Ayodhya issue, in spite of the positivist approach to archaeology that the institution advocates.

An important aspect of ASI archaeology which is of significance here are the studies from the early days that sought to attest textual sources through archaeological evidences. The earliest examples are the surveys by Alexander Cunningham in the 19th century to identify the sites mentioned in the travel accounts of the Chinese pilgrim Hiuen Tsang (Bhan 1997; Chakrabarti 1982; Imam 1963). A central concern of the major archaeological works undertaken by B.B.Lal was to ascertain the historicity of the two epics- the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* (Lal 1973, 1975). As part of his projects Lal did surveys and excavations of places which now have names that find mention in the epics or those sites which local traditions associate with the epics (Lal 1973). Another related aspect is the trend to connect archaeological

³¹ Selected papers from the conference are compiled together in Layton, Stone and Thomas. 2001. The volume has three papers on the Ayodhya issue by B. B. Lal (2001), R.S Sharma (2001) and Nandini Rao and C.R. Reddy (Rao and Reddy 2001)

cultures to textual traditions. In this case the Painted Gray Ware (PGW) culture came to indicate the *Mahabharata* tradition (Bhan 1977). Such correlations can lead to highly reductive assumptions. For instance, in the recent excavations at Puran Qila in Delhi, the Superintendent Archaeologist is reported to have said that “the (PGW) wares were not found in stratified deposit (in the previous excavation at the mound). If they were found in stratified deposit, we could support that there were traces of the Mahabharat period” (Tankha 2014). Dubbed as the excavations to find Indraprastha, the capital city of the Pandavas (epic heroes of the *Mahabharata*), we see here assumptions as the above being conveyed to the public through media reports. The previous excavations at Ayodhya that we mentioned at the beginning of this discussion (*IAR* 1976-77, *IAR* 1979-80) were part of the project *Archaeology of the Ramayana Sites* which was initiated in 1975. In Suraj Bhan’s words, what distinguished Lal’s efforts was that “his primary goal was to use archaeological evidence from his excavation for substantiating the historicity of the Tradition” (Bhan 1997), a goal which Lal also lays claim to (Lal 1973, 1975, 2001). This is a trend that has continued in Indian archaeology. The Saraswati Heritage Project (SHP)³², initiated in 2002, with the aim to identify the archaeological sites on the banks of the mythical river, Saraswati, mentioned in the Rigveda, is an example. In a more recent instance, the ASI is reported to have allowed excavations at Barnava in Baghpat district of Uttar Pradesh at a site which is believed to be the ‘Lakshagriha’ (literally house of lac) mentioned in the Mahabharata (Rai 2017)³³

This rather lengthy detour on certain features of the institutional character of the ASI and its traditions of knowledge production was to emphasize certain aspects. The first is the self perception of the institution as a guardian of the national past. The second is the prevalent and unchanging understanding of archaeology as a ‘scientific’ discipline

³²For details of the SHP, see Chadha 2007

³³*The Times of India* reported the retired ASI superintending archaeologist, (excavation) KK Sharma as saying, "Lakshagriha plays a significant part in the Mahabharata. The Kauravas had built the palace out of lac and planned to burn the Pandavas alive, but the brothers escaped through a tunnel. The structure was located in what is now Baghpat, at the site called Barnawa. In fact, Barnawa is the twisted name of Varnavrat, one of the five villages that the Pandavas had demanded from the Kauravas to settle in after their exile" (Rai 2017). Also see, “Archaeologists to Excavate Site” 2017.

that can produce authentic knowledge. The third is the perceived link between authenticity and time depth. The discussion has also drawn to attention the political positions regarding the demolition of the Babri Masjid that Indian archaeologists, including the ASI archaeologists have taken. Finally, it has highlighted the tendency in ASI archaeology to search for archaeological evidence to authenticate mythical/epical traditions. Chadha (2007), in his ethnographic work, has cited conversations and instances that demonstrate that the ASI archaeologists perceive themselves as proud claimants to archaeological traditions espoused by tall figures, such as Wheeler or his descendants in the ASI. I do not suggest that these tendencies are all pervasive. We already saw that in some of the recent excavations the ASI archaeologists are using methods that are different from the Wheelerian method of excavation³⁴. Bhan has noted how archaeologists like A. Ghosh had reservations regarding the authentication of textual traditions through archaeological artefacts (Bhan 1977). However, Ayodhya excavations happened in extraordinary conditions, where the ASI was under constant judicial and public scrutiny. The pressures of the same have been acknowledged in the report itself (Mani and Manjhi 2003). Such demands require the institution to justify its expertise and positions constantly. A way to do this is by referring back to institutional inheritances, as I will elaborate in the next section.

2.8. Judicial Construction of the Archaeologist as Expert

At the beginning of the chapter, I discussed the legal provisions that the High Court of Allahabad cites, in directing the ASI to retrieve evidence regarding the prior existence of the temple through excavations. Rule 10A of the CPC allows for the appointment of a commission to conduct a scientific investigation, which cannot be conducted before the court, but which it considers necessary. The report of the commissioner, along with the evidence enclosed therewith, is considered as evidence in the suit. Section 45 of the IEA holds that the opinion of a person who has special skill in the relevant field (foreign law, science or art or matters such as fingerprint or handwriting) can be considered as a relevant fact. Such a skilled person is an expert. The terms of the above provisions are sufficiently broad to accommodate a variety of experts. There are no specific guidelines to define an expert. Justice Sharma discusses

³⁴ See footnote 26

the issue of expertise at some length (Sharma, O.O.S 4, Volume 1), going into the submissions made by various lawyers, especially in favour of the ASI report. In this discussion, further qualification is given to the expert witness. This is also in broad terms. An expert witness should thus be a person who has devoted time and study to a special branch of learning. The person should be skilled in matters on which opinion is sought. The difference between the expert witness and an ordinary witness is that only the former is allowed to give opinion in the court. Another important factor which the submissions by the parties have stressed is whether or not bias or mala fide on part of the experts can be proved.

Archaeologists figured in the Ayodhya dispute in two capacities. First, as part of the ASI team, ordered by the court to find evidence regarding the question of existence of a temple below the Masjid, and of its demolition, and secondly, as expert witnesses produced by different parties. Eight archaeologists gave evidence for the plaintiffs of Suit 4, the Sunni Waqf board. The plaintiffs of Suit 5 (the suit filed on behalf of deities Bhagwan Sri Rama Lala Virajman and Sri Ram Janma Bhoomi) produced five archaeologists as expert witnesses. One archaeologist each appeared as expert witnesses for defendant no 20 of Suit 4 (Madan Mohan Gupta, Convener of the Akhil Bhartiya Sri Ram Janam Bhoomi Punarudhar Samiti) and defendant 6/1 in Suit 3 (Haji Mehboob). Apart from expert witnesses in archaeology, the parties also produced expert witnesses from the fields of history, epigraphy and religious matters.

From the discussion so far it emerges that the excavations at Ayodhya had been judicially mediated at multiple levels, affecting the functions that the archaeologist was expected to perform even on an everyday basis. I will, now, examine the role of the archaeologist as expert in a legal dispute. I will try to expose the factors that figured in defining the role of the archaeologist as expert. The focus of the discussion will be on the ASI team that conducted the excavations. The case of the experts produced by the parties will also be peripherally addressed, primarily for the purpose of comparison.

2.8.a. Institutional Legitimacy of the ASI

(W)e have no doubt in our mind that ASI, as a premier institution of this country, is responsible for the preservation, maintenance and discovery of ancient monuments and sites, as well as archaeological survey and excavation. *They are experts of*

expert.³⁵ No archaeologist in this country can undertake an archaeological expedition at a historical site of importance without permission or licence from ASI. The status enjoined to ASI which we have already referred, empowers it to control all these activities (Agarwal, Volume 17, 4128).

Justice Sudhir Agarwal makes the above statement while rejecting the various objections that had been raised against the ASI. This statement highlights an aspect that closely relates to what we discussed above as the judicial expectations regarding archaeology. The positivist notions regarding archaeology leads to undervaluing the role of interpretation. I will consider this aspect in detail in a separate section. There is a consistent stress in the judgment that the report is data-based and scientific. Within the positivist frame, such a report could lead to a ‘wrong’ conclusion only by intention or a lack of expertise. Thus the authority of such a report can be challenged only if intentional bias on the part of the expert can be proved. This closely ties in with the question of how law understands expertise. The judgments of both Sharma and Agarwal underline that bias or lack of expertise cannot be proved against the ASI excavators. As reflected in the above statement, this attribution is derived primarily by virtue of the ASI being a statist institution which has played a pivotal role in organizing and controlling knowledge production related to the material past of the nation. For instance, rather than going into the specifics of the objections raised by the plaintiffs, Sharma discusses the nature and scale of the work undertaken by the ASI in a generic manner as justifications to reject the objections. Agarwal on the other hand gives a very direct correlation between the credibility of the report and the institutional nature of the ASI. “The origin, status, reputation and other credentials of ASI would be a relevant factor for considering credibility and reliability of the report” (Agarwal, Volume 16, 3807), says his judgment. He goes on to narrate at length the history of the organization, especially its colonial history, with information taken directly from the official website of the ASI. The conclusion that he reaches from this narration is that, “(b)y all means ASI therefore, represents the Government of India being a Department there of and in law, can be presumed to be an expert body of the Government on the subject” (Agarwal, Volume 16, 3816). The primary factor that determines expertise in this case is the functioning of the ASI as a statist bureaucratic

³⁵ Emphasis mine

organization from the colonial times. Consideration of the specific objections raised against the excavations becomes secondary to this overarching assessment.

This tendency to draw validation for expertise from institutional stature is not confined to the judges alone. One sees that the ASI itself falls back on this rhetoric in answering the objections levelled against it by the expert witnesses for the plaintiffs of Suit 4. A detailed complaint was filed by the plaintiffs on 7 June 2003, with reference to the procedures followed by the ASI. These complaints raised specific concerns about the procedures followed in particular trenches in exposing brickbats and structural remains and in the collection and recording of artefacts. The comments obtained by the court observer from the superintendent archaeologist at the site and co-author of the report, B.R. Mani are reproduced in the judgment. While responding to the objections in a generalized manner, without going into the details, Mani draws attention to the institutional stature of the ASI in a manner similar to what is discussed above. He says, “A.S.I. being the premier institution of archaeology in the country has always been famous for accuracy and scientific approach in exploration and excavation work.” (quoted in Agarwal, Volume 16, 3764). This being the case he alleges that the complaints were a calculated effort to demoralize the team. Statement of a similar nature was also given by R. Nagaswami, who gave his statement as expert witness in archaeology for plaintiffs of Suit 5 and in support of the ASI team.

That Archaeological Survey of India which is more than one hundred years old and has produced the most outstanding stalwarts in the field of Archaeology is known throughout the world for its excellence in all spheres of Archaeological work especially in the field of excavation its work has been extremely accurate and scientifically praiseworthy (quoted in Agarwal, Volume 4, 844).

The credibility of the ASI as an institution has not been questioned by the plaintiffs also at any stage. Their objections have more to do with specific practices at the site which were found to be objectionable or biased. The statement of Prof. R.C. Takran, who appeared as an expert witness (archaeology) for the Sunni Waqf Board is an example. Takran criticizes the report using very strong words like “lacking in integrity” (as quoted in Agarwal, Volume 4, 813) and “jaundiced view” (as quoted in Agarwal, Volume 4, 815). He also brings to attention how the conclusions drawn in the report conflict with those made by B.R. Mani, one of the directors of the

excavations, on other occasions. However he is careful not to portray these as institutional flaws.

What all well-wishers of Indian Archaeology have to consider is how, with a Report of the calibre we have examined, there can be any credibility left in the Archaeological Survey of India, an organization that has had such a distinguished past. But now the good repute of the Archaeological Survey of India has also suffered an irremediable blow (as quoted in Agarwal, Volume 4, 815).

Here the institutional stature of the ASI is invoked to point out how the Ayodhya excavations have failed to meet the standards expected of the institution. Similar observations are made by some of the other witnesses also.

The assessment that the judges make about expertise of the expert witnesses produced by the parties offers an interesting point of comparison. When it comes to the expert witnesses produced by the Sunni Waqf Board, the absence of institutional affiliation with the ASI is a factor that prejudices the opinion of the court against them. None of the expert archaeologists produced by the Sunni Waqf Board was associated with the ASI. Dr. Sita Ram Roy used to be the director of the Department of Archaeology in Bihar. The other seven had or used to have affiliations with university departments. “They (the officers of the ASI team) have a better experience of excavation than (sic.) the witnesses produced by the plaintiff (in Suit 4)”, notes Sharma. “It may further be necessary to refer that Prof. Suraj Bhan, P.W.-16 alone has an idea of excavation and rest of the witnesses...have absolutely no idea for excavation. *They were never associated with Archaeological Survey of India*³⁶” (Sharma, O.O.S.4, 99). Evidently, affiliation with a university department is not perceived to be at par with affiliation with the ASI in evaluating expertise. This is amply demonstrated in Justice Sharma’s exposition rejecting the objections levelled by the expert witnesses for the Sunni Waqf Board against the ASI report. He narrates the regulatory and bureaucratic functions performed by the ASI. One of the factors that he repeatedly cites in order to underline the expertise of the ASI and the unbiased nature of the team is the statutory status of the institution. “At the cost of repetition I may further refer that archaeological excavation under the law has been entrusted by the Parliament to A.S.I., which is the expert body and functions under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, 1958” (Sharma, O.O.S. Volume1, 99), says

³⁶ Emphasis mine

Sharma. The power that the ASI holds to control archaeological activities in the country is stated by Agarwal also (Agarwal, Volume 17, 4128) as a basis for the legitimacy of its excavation report. The positive bias of the judges towards the ASI is evident in the intolerance they show towards criticisms levelled against the institution. Agarwal accuses the criticism of bias and preconceived notions raised against the ASI, on behalf of the plaintiffs of Suit 4, to be part of a “predetermined plan and scheme” and as showing “irresponsible attitude” (Agarwal, Volume 17, 4128). The following excerpt reflects many of the issues raised above.

In our view, the conclusion drawn by the ASI in the project accomplished within an extra-ordinary brief period and with such an excellence (sic.) precision and perfection deserve *commendation and appreciation instead of condemnation*.³⁷ It normally happens when an expert body tender an opinion, the party, who finds such opinion adverse to its interest, feels otherwise and try to rid of such opinion by taking recourse to all such measures as permissible but in the present case we hoped a better response particularly when the expert body involved is a *pioneer and premier archaeological body of this country having International repute*³⁸ (Agarwal, Volume18, 4306).

The credibility of the expert witnesses who supported the ASI report is strengthened by their association with the ASI. Among those experts, Arun Kumar Sharma, Rakesh Dutta Tiwari and Jayanti Prasad Srivastava were retired officers of the ASI. Justice Agarwal took note of this factor. He did not deem it necessary to examine their statements in detail as these are in agreement with the ASI report. Justice Sharma also took note of the corroboration that the ASI report got from these archaeologists. The statement of R Nagaswami was particularly mentioned by him because he has had “wide experience” (Sharma, Suit 4, Volume1, 98) and “had associated with the ASI” (Sharma, Suit 4, Volume1, 98). There are five annexures with his judgment. Annexure no.3, which is of 350 pages, is composed of documents exclusively dealing with the excavations. Of this 187 pages are devoted to the examination in chief of Nagswami and the statements made by the three archaeologists mentioned above who had association with the ASI.³⁹ This association was not seen as making their opinion

³⁷ Emphasis mine

³⁸ Emphasis mine

³⁹ The remaining part of the annexure has orders related to the excavations, excerpts from the Report and details of objections raised on behalf of the plaintiffs of suit no.4.

biased towards the ASI in any way. This is especially relevant because, Agarwal suggested that the experts produced by the Muslim parties were “virtually hired experts” and this “reduces the trustworthiness of the experts” (Agarwal, Volume 17, 4129). The above mentioned experts who supported the report appear to be immune to such criticism and scrutiny owing to their agreement with the report and their affiliation with the ASI. The fact that there was an overwhelming and exclusive support to one side of the dispute on part of the erstwhile archaeologists of the ASI does not lead the judges to suspect the ASI of being partisan or biased either.

2.8.b. The Question of Identity of the Archaeologist

Another important factor is the specific directives on the constitution of the excavation team. Order 1 directed that the excavation team should include five ‘eminent’ archaeologists among whom two should be Muslims. The identity of the excavators thus became an important concern here. This concern with religious identity is particularly revealing in terms of the way in which the character of the excavations at Ayodhya get determined by legal framing. The leading suit, Suit 4, is a representative suit, where the plaintiffs represent the interest of the Muslims and the defendants represent the interest of the Hindus. An order to this effect was passed by the civil judge on 8 August 1962. The special bench of High Court of Allahabad also did not change this status. Thus, while it is essentially a civil dispute, for ownership of land, within the judgment itself and often in the public domain, the Ayodhya case is conceived as a dispute between the two religious communities of the nation- the Hindus and the Muslims. This comes out strikingly in the composition of the three member bench of judges among whom two are upper caste Hindus and one, S.U.Khan is a Muslim. Originally the case was brought before a different set of judges, wherein also the same composition was ensured. So is the case with the bench of the three Supreme Court judges who are to hear further on the Ayodhya case. The question of whether the parties can represent the communities as a whole is discussed at length in the judgment. Above and over this, the judgment historically places the dispute in a context of periodic strife between the two communities.

Before going into the question of the religious identity of the archaeologists, it will be interesting to discuss an instance from the judicial process to indicate the pervasive nature of this concern with religious identity. It becomes an important question for the

multiple actors involved in the arbitration process. The expert witness statement of Sushil Srivastava (Agarwal, Volumes 6-7, 1483-1513), Professor at M.S. University Baroda, who appeared as expert witness (History) for the plaintiffs of Suit 4 is one instance. The counsels for the defendants questioned the motives of the witness. In doing so, they focused on different aspects of the witness's personal life. The religion of his spouse and the names of his children were brought into question. Similarly he was questioned regarding his conversion to Islam for the purpose of marriage. The witness had to vouch for his position as an atheist in the court. Taking this line of tying religion with motive further, the counsels even drew attention to the innocuous dedication of a book Srivastava had written where in the dedication he mentions his wife (who is born a Muslim), as an inspiration for his work. While the judges did not dwell on these matters at any length, the fact that the counsels considered these aspects of the witness's personal life to be relevant to the case again suggests the larger judicial framing of the Ayodhya dispute.

The issue of representation was an important concern for the plaintiffs also. In their application, citing the reasons for the same they observed that engaging equal/proportional number of members from both communities i.e., Hindu and Muslim would inspire confidence in the public regarding the neutrality of the ASI. The ASI's conduct in this regard was felt to be biased as it gave over-representation to the Hindu community in the team, both in the case of archaeologists and that of labourers. Prior to the application submitted at the court, the plaintiffs tried and failed to bring this issue to the attention of the team leader of the excavations through a written request. To the above application, the team leader of the ASI gave a written reply on 23 March 2003, in which he stated that the engagement of the labourers was done through the district administration, and that the ASI had no role in their selection and by extension, to their religious composition. The focus in the reply was on the labourers and not on the archaeologists. This indicates that the ASI considered itself and its officers to be beyond political and identity influences, clearly falling on the dichotomy of the archaeologist as the objective scientist as opposed to the lay person who is prone to subjective prejudices and external influences. On the same issue the Court held that,

Archaeology is a Science and every Archaeologist has to perform excavation and related work in a scientific manner on the principles laid down for excavation. When

he acts as Archaeologist to prefix the word denoting his religion is not a correct description of such Scientist, e.g. a doctor may have any religious faith but he cannot be described by prefixing the word 'Muslim', 'Hindu', 'Christian' etc. It is his performance of work is relevant. It will amount to tarnishing of a Scientist, Archaeologist or any person engaged in excavation (quoted in Agarwal, Volume 11, 230).

The pronouncement reiterates and qualifies the initial assumptions of the court about archaeology. The comparison of the discipline is here to medical science, rather than to any of archaeology's allied fields of social sciences like anthropology or history. The archaeologist is here compared to a doctor. The implicit assumption is that his/her function is one of diagnosis and solution to a problem at hand. The archaeologist as a 'scientist' is assumed to be free from the influences of his/her religious identity, once again underlining the positivist assumption that archaeological material yields the same conclusion to any archaeologist if he or she strictly adheres to the methodological guidelines of excavation.

One sees here a tension between the legal framing of the dispute and given notions about archaeology. It becomes imperative for the court to reiterate that archaeology is an 'objective' science free of personal biases. Its quality as evidence lies therein. However, having conceived of the dispute as one between two religions, the court also assumes that someone from a particular religious community would necessarily serve or would not go against the interests of the community; hence the balancing act of ensuring Muslim representation (Muslims being the minority community in India) in the excavation team. This parallels with the religious composition of the judges. They, like the archaeologists, are assumed to be free of personal biases. Yet it becomes imperative to ensure Muslim representation therein. This is a contradiction that comes out clearly in the judgment. As we saw above, the court repeatedly stated that the ASI and its experts are beyond any personal/ religious bias. However, while giving his reasons for assuming that the ASI cannot be influenced by the Central Government, Justice Sharma stated that the Muslim members of the ASI team cannot be forced by the central government "to sign over the report against their wishes and against the data collected by them" (Sharma, O.O.S.4, Volume 1, 97). Thus being a Muslim automatically implied positive inclination towards the Muslim parties in the

suit. This is a position that goes against the judiciary's painstaking portrayal of the objective scientist/archaeologist to which the ASI also concurs.

While, religion is the most-well pronounced identity that is seen to matter in the question of expertise at Ayodhya, other such factors are also brought into discussion in the adjudication process. Sharma gives excerpts from the statement of D. Mandal, Expert Witness (Archaeology), appearing for the plaintiffs of Suit No.4, with an intent to illustrate "the shallowness of his knowledge in the subject" (Agarwal, Volume 15, 3647). Among the excerpts cited with this intent, interestingly, the author's affiliation with the communist party and Marxism as well as his acquaintances and academic relations with scholars who have Marxist affiliation are discussed. The political and academic affiliations of the witness become an important factor in rejecting his views as opinion relevant as a fact under Section 45 of the IEA.⁴⁰ That the court refuses to take the opinion of D.Mandal as expert opinion, is especially interesting because, as we saw in the discussion above, Mandal's opinions on the potential of excavations at the site of Babri Masjid in *Ayodhya, Archaeology after Demolition* is quoted in Order 1 as the disciplinary justification for conducting excavations at Ayodhya. Paradoxically, Mandal's expertise in archaeology and this very work are criticised by Justice Agarwal in the judgment, thereby bringing into question its own premises for ordering the excavations. It should also be noted that political affiliations of the experts do not become an issue in every case. For instance, the association S.P.Gupta (archaeologist), who appeared as expert witness for plaintiffs in Suit no.5, with the RSS is not discussed in the judgment. His political affiliation does not bring his status as an expert into question. This stand assumed by the court is similar to what we discussed in the previous section. The opinions of experts who are in agreement with the ASI report are not subject to the same level and standards of scrutiny in the judgements as that of those in disagreement with the report.

2.8.c. Authority and Decision Making

One of the important factors that come up in the instances discussed above, where the ASI is seen to negotiate with the court, is that the decisions that are usually made by the trench supervisors or the director of the excavations were to be channelled by the court. We have already discussed how this led to conflicts of interest from very early

⁴⁰ According to the IEA opinion of a third person is not a relevant fact. Among the exceptions to this is the opinion of someone whom the court considers an expert, which then is a relevant fact

on between the judiciary and the archaeologists. We also discussed in detail the multiple ways in which the excavation process was interfered with by the judiciary. Routine decisions related to the excavations, like daily schedule and storage of artefacts needed judicial approval. One of the most significant instances came on 22 May 2003. On the application, CMA No. 41(O) of 2003 filed by defendant no. 3, Suit-4, i.e., Nirmohi Akhara the bench gave certain directives. Among this was the order to remove B.R.Mani from the post of team leader. In his place, Hari Manjhi took charge as team leader. As the team leader is supposed to have the overall control and perspective on the excavation, he/she is the person who usually wields the most authority in the excavation team. The order to replace the team leader is, thus, a decision that affects excavations in their entirety. This indicates more clearly than the other instances discussed above that the effective authority of the excavations was vested with the judiciary in this case.

A clear directive demonstrating the mediation of authority is seen in the instructions given on 26 March 2003. The applicants had submitted that they had given a written request to the team leader of the excavations for a more representative labour profile which had not been met with. The court's position on the same was that,

It is made clear that the ASI team is *not authorised to pass any order on any application*⁴¹. If any of the parties wants to seek any direction of the Court, he can move an application before the OSD Ram Janam Bhumi-Babari Masjid on which the Court will issue necessary instructions (As quoted in Agarwal, Volume 1, 232).

Thus the applications had to be made to the court appointed observers. The observers were required to inquire on the matters with the team director. The reports of the observers would be forwarded to Officer on Special Duty (OSD) Ram Janm Bhumi-Babri Masjid on which the final decision would be vested on the court. Thus, *in lieu* of direct interaction, there is a chain of communication and authority through which the request had to pass. While mediations such as the above allowed the decisions to have a legal standing and to be documented, it also meant that there was a time-lag between the applications and the decisions, during which the excavations continued uninterrupted in the same conditions against which grievances had been raised. These issues become especially relevant when the grievance raised is related to a particular

⁴¹ Emphasis mine

trench, or regarding a particular procedure followed at the excavations that could have direct implications on the record and ultimately the report of the excavations.

2.9. Making Sense of Legally Constituted Knowledge

Looking at the intersection of law and science in the context of the US, Sheila Jasanoff (1995, 9) has pointed out that while both scientific and legal discourses concern themselves with establishing facts, in law it is “only adjunct to the transcendent objective of settling disputes... [and]... because the law needs closure legal fact finding is always bounded on time”. Within the frame of a legal dispute the compulsion for immediate and fail-safe solutions play a role in the way it deals with expert opinion/ evidence. Rather than considering the continuous and multi-level mediation of archaeology at Ayodhya by the judiciary as determined entirely by the discretion of the judges, it is essential to take into account the systemic factors at play here. The difference that Jasanoff points out is one of the essential factors that will allow us to take the discussion further in this vein.

At the start of the chapter, I talked about the specific expectations of the bench regarding the excavations and also its positivist conception of science, an understanding that it shares with the ASI. Despite the seeming agreement in their larger attitudes towards the discipline, we saw that the judiciary exercised its control and regulatory power over the functioning of the excavations at every level, undermining the authority of the ASI. It was also harsh in its criticism of the critics of the ASI, often questioning the integrity and credentials of the expert witnesses who levelled the criticisms. The persona of the judges is definitely an important aspect in these, as we will see in the discussion. However, the most vital factors that mattered in the court’s attitude towards archaeology and the archaeologists who functioned as experts in different capacities were its need for “closure” and its lack of awareness/acknowledgement of the role of interpretation in archaeology. Jasanoff’s (1995) views on the law’s construction of expertise is pertinent for this discussion, even though she limits her observations to the context of the US and on case laws involving expert witnesses in ‘sciences’, like DNA typing and psychiatry. In drawing parallels, my intention is not to label archaeology as ‘science’. The parallel is justified because we see that courts in both the contexts share the positivist notion of science as a rational objective enterprise. And, both the bench of judges of the Allahabad High

Court and the ASI, we saw, regard archaeology as a science in this reductive sense of the term.

Jasanoff points out that “(W)hen scientific expertise is produced in response to litigation, science’s normal process of validation can be bypassed or distorted” (ibid., 51). Archaeology, when it is made for courts is expected to give definitive answers rather than conjectures. We saw this expectation in a pronounced manner in the orders given by the bench and the judgments of Sudhir Agarwal and Dharam Veer Sharma. However, the conclusions derived in an archaeological report, both about individual artefacts or trenches and in an overall sense, are interpretations, or conjectures based on excavated material. In the grievances raised at different stages, the plaintiffs of Suit 4 pointed out that certain artefact categories like bones and glazed ware were not receiving the attention that they should from the ASI team. Thus, we see that the data that is generated or recorded at the archaeological site also is subjective. In the absence of this understanding, the court accepts the report in its entirety as relevant fact. Both Sharma and Agarwal, periodically refers to the data based nature of the report. If one examines their responses to the objections raised by the expert witnesses towards the ASI, the implications of this approach becomes clearer. We come across specific instances where the court fails to grasp the nature of archaeological evidence and interpretation. For instance Supriya Varma, expert witness (archaeology) for the plaintiffs of Suit 4, in her statement points out on one occasion that she reached certain conclusions regarding the creation of ‘pillar bases’ by observing the section, even though she was not present at the time these structures were deliberately created by the excavators. The court denigrates this observation as being “purely imaginary” and “without giving reasons” (Agarwal, Volume 16, 3779). The judge is here ignorant of the fact that it is possible to reach informed opinion about structural remains that touch the section of the trench, by observing the section. It is also interesting to note the court’s take on Shereen Ratnagar (expert witness in archaeology for the plaintiffs of Suit 4) on the basis of her introduction and afterword to the book by D. Mandal, *Ayodhya Archaeology after Demolition* (2003), which is Exhibit no.63. Ratnagar’s Introduction (ibid., 1-15) to Mandal’s work is primarily an introduction to the methods of excavation, reporting and to the nature of archaeological evidence. She suggests that the lack of knowledge on these aspects, leads to archaeological material being misunderstood and “hijack”ed (ibid., 3) both by lay persons and academics. Her

effort in the introduction is to dispel the myth that archaeological evidence can provide irrefutable proof to any theory by underlining the prospect that alternative explanations are always possible in archaeological interpretations. In the afterword to the work, she makes a few comments on the nature of the entire debate asserting that it cannot be labelled dispute on the basis of religion, but was the “appropriation of a place by reference to a religious notion” (ibid., 66). For her, the controversy was about “what constitutes evidence in archaeology” (ibid.) rather than about what has or has not been found in Ayodhya. The afterword expresses a sense of anger⁴² towards what she identifies as a gross violation of professional norms by the Indian archaeologists. Ratnagar has used hypothetical sketches in her introduction. As the purpose of the said introduction is to familiarize the lay reader with methods and interpretation in archaeology, and not specifically on Ayodhya, the use of hypothetical sketches is methodologically valid and effective. Also, she does not express her opinion in absolute positive or negative on B.B.Lal’s work in Ayodhya. Justice Agarwal considers both these factors as indicating a lack of expertise and knowledge (Agarwal, Volume 17, 4033-34). Here he shows a clear want of understanding of the role of interpretation and possibility of non-conclusive conjectures in archaeology. This position has very significant implications, as Ratnagar’s deposition and opinion were deemed as falling short of what can be considered Expert Evidence under Section 45 of the IEA, for these reasons.

Discounting the role of interpretation in archaeology comes up in a major way in both Agarwal’s and Sharma’s judgments. On several occasions, they point out that the different experts appearing for the same party do not agree upon one aspect or other. For instance D. Mandal in his affidavit regards one trench (G7) as the index trench. This is because the trench, for him, revealed the entire stratigraphic sequence in a clear way. The court points out that R.C. Takran, another expert witness (archaeology) appearing for the same parties has a different opinion. Takran regards all trenches to be of equal importance. Justice Sharma understands this as discrepancy. It is clear from the discussion of the matter that he had not understood the concept of index trench. He interchanges the term index trench for best trench,

⁴² “(S)ome Indian archaeologist have created a record of sorts: they have gone so far as to claim that an act of mob violence and the destruction of a five century old structure amount to a valid retrieval of archaeological evidence”(Ratnagar in Mandal 2003, 70)

which is essentially a qualitative adjective which does not take into account the concept of stratigraphic sequence of the site. Sharma makes a very revealing statement in discussing the objections raised by the expert witnesses (archaeology) produced by the Sunni Waqf Board. He notes that,

From the statement of the six expert witnesses produced on behalf of plaintiff (Suit-4), we find that all of them are *not unanimous*⁴³ in saying that the entire stratigraphy or periodization made by ASI is bad or incorrect or suffers with such material illegality or irregularity that the same deserves to be rejected, which would ultimately may result in rejection of the entire report itself. Their statements are also contradictory, vague, confused and based on more of conjectures (Agarwal, Volume 17, 4029).

The assumption here is that the witnesses appearing for a party would act in the interests of the party and that hence their opinions would be unanimous. The judgment does not recognize that the same archaeological record can be interpreted by different experts differently even if they might share certain larger assumptions.

The consideration of the objections to the ASI report was limited by whether the issue had been pleaded in exact terms or not. Justice Agarwal notes that there was no issue framed as to whether any Islamic structure existed at the site of the demolished structure previously (Agarwal, Volume 2, 301). On this grounds the objections raised on behalf of the plaintiffs of Suit 4, that criticized the ASI's interpretation of the structure found on excavation as Hindu were rejected. As the conclusions drawn in an excavation cannot be preconceived, interpretations can be different from the hypothesis formed prior to an excavation or the final publication of a report. The position of the judiciary that "a new stand which is not the case of the plaintiff, not pleaded is not permissible" (Agarwal, Volume 18, 4294), thus, rules out this essential character of interpretation in archaeology. We see here that legal compulsions require knowledge to be generated, organised, presented and interpreted in ways that are consistent with the overall frame of the legal dispute. The direction of the knowledge is pre-determined and oriented towards the causal connection that the dispute has proposed. Here the concern then is not to ascertain the nature of archaeological evidence, but to determine its past ownership. As this question of ownership has to be

⁴³ Emphasis mine

resolved in the present, current formulations of identity are extended back in time to define past identities. The inability of the court to grasp the nuances of archaeological interpretation and the possibilities of alternative explanations is located in such compulsions. It is contingent on the “legal system's persistent commitment to the view that a trial is an occasion for locating the truth rather than for choosing between alternative constructions of possible realities” (Jasanoff 1995, 52).

Much of archaeological interpretations are based on logical conjectures or informed speculations. Because alternative interpretations cannot be grasped within the logic of legal arbitration, courts tend to assess the validity of alternate interpretations through other tests of credibility. To cite Jasanoff again, “All the factors that go into establishing a witness's credibility-not only knowledge but also social and cultural factors such as demeanor, personality, interests, and rhetorical skills-are simultaneously open to attack when scientific testimony is subjected to the adversary process”(Jasanoff 1995, 54). In the case of expert witnesses produced by the parties, there frequently exists a judicial bias that “their views would be made to correspond with the wishes and interests of the parties who call them” (Agarwal, Volume 15, 3584).⁴⁴ Unlike such witnesses, the excavations are done by a ‘scientific commission’ ordered by the judiciary through a judicial provision. We saw that this assignment was determined by the expectations and notions of the judiciary regarding archaeology and the legitimacy attributed to the ASI as a state institution with a central role in the production and regulation of the material past of the nation. Given these notions, the adversary process to which the expert witnesses are subjected to will also be determined by similar guidelines, rather than by the disciplinary processes of validation. Thus, expert witnesses who are in agreement with the truth claims made by the ASI and with past or current association with the institution are automatically accepted. On the other hand expert witnesses who are in disagreement with the court-appointed commission are subject to a rigorous process of scrutiny and value judgment where their personal characters, political/religious identities and academic credentials are brought into scrutiny.

⁴⁴ “They do not, indeed” Agarwal goes on, “wilfully misrepresent what they think, but their judgment becomes so warped by regarding the subject in one point of view, that, when conscientiously deposed, they are incapable of expressing a candid opinion”(Agarwal, Volume 15, 3584)

A major contradiction in the judicial approach to alternative interpretations comes out, if we examine the minority judgment made by S.U.Khan. Khan took a diametrically opposite position than the other two judges, with regards to the use of archaeology or history in settling civil disputes. Examining the brief perusal of archaeology in Khan's judgment, we see that he draws a very different interpretation on the basis of the report than the other two. The concluding paragraph of the ASI report goes thus;

Viewing in totality and taking into account the archaeological evidence of a massive structure just below the structure and evidence of continuity in structural phases from the tenth century onwards upto the construction of the disputed structure along with the yield of stone and decorated bricks as well as mutilated sculpture of divine couple and carved architectural members including foliage patterns, *āmalaka*, *kapotapali* doorjamb with semi-circular pilaster, broken octagonal shaft of black schist pillar, lotus motif, circular shrine having *praṇāla* (waterchute) in the north, fifty pillar bases in association of the huge structure, are indicative of remains which are distinctive features found associated with the temples of north India (Mani and Manjhi 2003, 272).

The conclusions of the report are reproduced in the judgments of all the three judges. The report has worded the conclusion in a way that it does not seem to definitely state its opinion that the remains found were that of a temple, while implying the same. The question of destruction of the 'temple' has not been addressed. On the basis of the stratigraphy proposed and the above conclusion, Khan draws his own interpretation. He says that no temple was destroyed for the construction of the mosque. In the event of destruction, the material of the superstructure would have been removed or reused. The presence of such material underground, for him, suggests that the structure collapsed on its own. Without a natural catastrophe of high magnitude, it would require centuries for such material from the superstructure to go underground. This indicates that the specific spot was not regarded as the exact birthplace of Ram at the time of construction of the mosque. The conclusions derived by justices Agarwal and Sharma are radically different from Khan's. For Justice Sharma,

Vis-a-vis in the sequence of events, referred to above, and on the basis of the report, it can conclusively be held that the disputed structure was constructed on the site of old structure after the demolition of the same. There is sufficient evidence to this

effect that the structure was a Hindu massive religious structure (Sharma, O.O.S. 4, Volume, 104).

Agarwal reaches similar conclusions from the report as Sharma, albeit in a slightly different manner. First, he lists the conclusions he has drawn from the report. He then goes on to talk about corroborative evidence. For instance, one of the observations he makes is that as the claim of the Hindus, that a temple was demolished to build the 'disputed' structure, dates before the litigation it can be considered as reliable, trustworthy and credible.⁴⁵ Considering the observations that he has listed in conjunction with these assumptions, Agarwal concludes that the structure was a Hindu temple that had been demolished and that the mosque was constructed after.

We see here that the interpretations made by the judges who agree to the relevance of the report to the case, modifies the conclusions of the report in a way that it signifies definitive affirmation or negation. On the other hand, Khan makes a very different interpretation based on the same report. Thus the comparison of the judgments by the three judges itself points to the existence of alternative interpretations in archaeology, a factor that the judges (Sharma and Agarwal) discount while pronouncing definitive judgments on the issues raised.

2.10. Towards further Discussion: Judicial Arbitration as a Bounded Space of Interaction

Despite the positivist view of archaeology as a definitive science, shared by the institutions involved, alternative interpretations are made by multiple actors about the methodology, recording and reporting of the Ayodhya excavations. I will use this observation, to guide the discussion further towards the key concerns of this dissertation. I consider the space of judicial arbitration as a bounded space of interaction. Studies that focus on the architecture of court rooms (Haldar 1996; Mohr 1998) have discussed the trial as contained architecturally and delimited spatio-temporally.

⁴⁵ "The claim of Hindus that the disputed structure was constructed after demolishing a Hindu temple is pre-litem and not post-litem hence credible, reliable and trustworthy"(Agarwal, Volume18, 4414).

(W)hat “unfolds”, within these rooms is the dialogue of a trial. A dialogue which we might call "evidence", the presentation of exhibits and arguments, the examination and cross examination of witnesses, opinions and expert testimonies, all of which have been detached, taken from a world that supposedly or “probably” exists outside the court house and which coincide in order to form the intrigues of the trial. Evidence, which has been scraped up from the scene of a crime, or documents, which prove or disprove the existence of a contract between two contending parties, are either heard or are excluded from being heard within the walls that seal and surround the accommodated trial.” (Halder 1994, 186).

These observations that have been made about courtrooms can be extended in our case to understand judicial arbitration as a delimited space where objects, places and people that are outside acquire new lives and roles within its limits. I will briefly enumerate here the ways in which this manifest in the Ayodhya case. Within the delimited space of judicial arbitration, archaeological knowledge is constituted into expert evidence. Multiple actors are involved in this process of transformation, including the judges, the parties, the counsels and the non-expert witnesses and expert witnesses from other fields like, religion, history or epigraphy. The role that materializes most strongly from our discussion is that of the *archaeologist-as-expert*. Expertise is constituted and contested in the space of the courtroom. The borders set up by law structure the ways in which elements from outside behave within its boundaries. While being rigidly monitored from within, these boundaries are also permeable to an extent. This emerges, for instance, in the case of regulated access provided to media and other sections of the public. While legal arbitration occurs within the space of the court room, it also has to take into account other spaces which form part of the evidence and which guide the logic of arbitration. In the Ayodhya case, the site of the destroyed mosque and the land around it has strict boundaries defining it as the area under dispute. This area can be considered as a space of the kind mentioned above. Apart from being the disputed property, the space acquires multiple meanings as can be evidenced in the judgment. It can be invested with religious political and national meanings. As an archaeological site, the space is expected to reveal new meanings. Through the convergence of the two state institutions and by invoking the rhetoric of a dominant narrative of national imaginary based on religious identity, the national space comes in as a metaphor into the judgment. As aspects that relate directly to the larger focus of the thesis, I will take up

each of these concerns for detailed discussion in the final chapter, where the case studies will be re-visited.

Chapter 3: ‘Un-packing Muziris’: Archaeology and the Many Imaginations of the Past- The Case of Pattanam, Kerala

This chapter gives a descriptive account of the multiple responses and the various discourses generated around the archaeological explorations and excavations at Pattanam, in the Vadakkekara revenue village in Paravur *taluk* of Ernakulam District in central Kerala, since they first commenced in the late 1990s. The Pattanam excavations were unique both in terms of scale and methodology when compared to archaeological practice in Kerala till then. The excavations also received immense public attention and media coverage. Since the beginning of the archaeological exercises at the site, there have been discussions on the association/ identification of the site with Muziris. Muziris, the inland port that was active in the Indian Ocean and Mediterranean networks of trade from the late centuries BCE to the early centuries CE, is a well-entrenched term in Kerala history. The Pattanam- Muziris association disturbed the prevailing historiographical and popular understanding on Muziris in many ways. Following these developments, Muziris has entered the popular discourse in a major way and has acquired the nature of a brand. The Department of Tourism, Government of Kerala initiated a heritage project called the Muziris Heritage Project (MHP) in 2006 which is still in its stages of implementation. From 12 December 2012 to the March 2013, the city of Kochi in Kerala hosted an international exhibition of contemporary art. The event was called the Kochi- Muziris Biennale (KMB). Since then, subsequent editions of the KMB have been organized in Kochi every alternate year. Both the MHP and the KMB are of specific interest to this discussion.

Methodologically this case study is close to what has been understood as archaeological ethnography (Hamilakis and Anagnostopoulos 2009; Meskell 2005). In the context of her work at the Kruger National Park in South Africa, Meskell talks of archaeological ethnography as “a holistic anthropology that is improvisational and context dependent. It might encompass a mosaic of traditional forms including archaeological practise and museum or representational analysis, as well as long-term involvement, participant observation, interviewing, and archival work” (Meskell 2005, 83). Multiple source categories are used in the study. Information on the archaeological exercises at Pattanam come from a small number of published material

on the site, unpublished interim reports¹ of the excavations by the Kerala Council for Historical Research (KCHR) and my observations as part of the archaeological team working at and around the site during five seasons, in different capacities. A major methodological tool employed is semi-structured and unstructured interviews with individuals directly or indirectly connected with the Pattanam excavations, the MHP and the KMB. From the Pattanam excavation site, archaeologists, wage labourers and other associated employees were interviewed. Another category of people are the local inhabitants of Pattanam. The individuals were selected on a random basis so as to avoid over representation of people who are in active conflict or co-operation with the event and hence tend to be more informed.² The visitors to the site during the 2013 field season were also interviewed. The interviews were recorded with the prior consent of the respondents except where the respondents were uncomfortable with recording. The respondents were given a broad idea of the purpose of the interviews and details were provided when demanded.

While these interviews allow insights into a broad range of perceptions, their temporal location is a major drawback. All the interviews were done in 2013. Often, it became difficult to track the trajectories and breaks in the evolution of the ideas under discussion. The study relied on newspaper and other media archives to partially address this issue. The media coverage of the subject matter forms a major source for this study. The newspaper archives in regional language and in English that relate to the Pattanam excavations, on Muziris in general and on the MHP and the KMB were analysed. Miscellaneous sources including government/official documents, new-media resources as well as brochures and advertisement flexes have also been used. Two seasons of fieldwork have been done since the conception of the study. The first season was during April-May 2013 during the 7th field season by the KCHR at Pattanam and the second was from September to November 2013. I also made several short field visits in the subsequent years to Pattanam and the surrounding areas.

¹ I acknowledge Dr. P.J.Cherian, Director, KCHR and director of excavations for allowing me access to the unpublished interim reports of the Pattanam excavations

²Statistical sampling was not used in the study. The effort was to reach a broad span of respondents and the field situation demanded informal interaction.

The discussion is divided into nine sections. The first section gives a brief overview of the archaeological exercises at Pattanam and the second tries to locate them in the context of archaeological practice in Kerala. In the third section, the local responses that the excavations generated in the early years are discussed. Here my effort is to understand how the local population at Pattanam dealt with the presence of archaeological material before the site came to attention and how they related to the newly discovered archaeological past in the early years. The public response that the Pattanam excavations generated was not confined to the village alone. The identification of Pattanam with the Early Historic port of Muziris was central to many of these varied responses. The chapter attempts to bring out the multiplicity of these responses in the next four sections. The identification of Pattanam with Muziris disturbed the hitherto academic and popular notions on the location of Muziris. The claims and counterclaims generated around this identification at a popular level are examined in the fourth section. The section that follows addresses a slightly different sort of space that the Pattanam-Muziris debate moved into. This space of debate, which I would characterize as quasi academic, was primarily that of the literary medium of magazines and newspapers. This involved academicians, public figures, politicians and other members of the literary public. In the sixth section, the popular claims of identity that the Pattanam-Muziris identification generated and the political opposition to these claims are examined. In the years that followed the excavations, Muziris as a word and idea became extensively popular and acquired the nature of a brand. The seventh section looks at instances of this branding. Here I focus on two instances where Muziris directly enters into the global heritage discourse- the MHP and the KMB. The focus of the discussion will be to understand how Pattanam and archaeology figure in these discourses. The eighth section looks at how the Pattanam excavations, and archaeology in general, become part of the popular culture in Kerala, during this period. In the years that follow the Pattanam excavations, the relationship and attitude of the local populace towards the excavations change considerably. These can only be understood in relation to other discourses around the site and around the idea of Muziris that the chapter deals with. The final section of the case study seeks to characterize these changes.

3.1. Archaeology of Pattanam: An Overview

The village of Pattanam (See Fig 3.1) is two km north- north west of the town of North Paravur, *circa* five km south of the River Periyar and about two km east from the coast in the Periyar Delta in the Ernakulam district of Kerala. About one km south of the site is the Paravur *thodu*, a branch of the River Periyar. Thattapilly Kayal, a backwater body running parallel to the coast is about 500m west from the western boundary of the site. The archaeological mound covers an area of about one square km and the concentration of artefacts occurs in an area of about 600 mx400 m (Selvakumar et.al. 2005, 59).

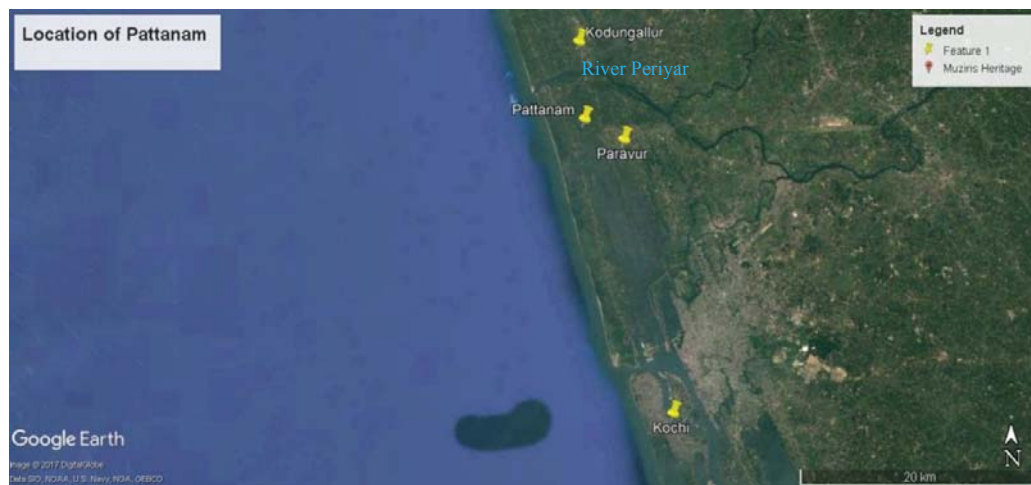


Fig 3.1: The location of Pattanam (Google Earth 2017); Modifications by the author

The site came to archaeological attention in the late nineties during the course of the geo-archaeological explorations conducted by K.P. Shajan as part of his doctoral work on the Late Quaternary sediments and sea level changes of the central Kerala coast (Shajan 1998, 2004). In his dissertation (1998) Shajan observed the incidence of Early Historic potsherds and bricks at the site and collected three glass beads, an agate bead and a piece of amphora. ‘Yemenite’ pottery and several typical Early Historic ‘Indian’ forms were identified from the site in due course (Selvakumar, Shajan and Gopi 2005). Following this in 2004, the Centre for Heritage Studies (CHS), Thripunithura, conducted trial excavations at Pattanam (ibid.; Shajan, Cherian and Selvakumar 2006). The area is at present heavily populated and subject to intense land use. Hence, it is difficult to identify the limits of the mound, and in places the height of the deposit shows variations. The trial excavations yielded for the first time

habitation evidence for the Iron Age and Early Historic phases from a stratigraphic context from Kerala (Selvakumar, Shajan and Gopi 2005). Based on the presence of amphora, Rouletted ware, West Asian ceramics, site size, architectural remains and the location of the site in relation to the Periyar Delta, the excavators contended that Pattanam was an important trade centre in the Early Historic period and had played major role in the overseas trade.

In 2006, the KCHR conducted explorations in the Kodungallur-Paravur region. And from the year 2007, the KCHR has been conducting excavations at Pattanam. The ninth season of excavations was completed in May- June 2015. The excavations by the KCHR (Shajan, Cherian and Selvakumar 2006; Cherian, Selvakumar and Shajan. 2007, 2009; Cherian et.al. 2008, 2010, 2011; Cherian 2012, 2013), have yielded further evidences for West Asian, Mediterranean, Chinese and hinterland contacts in the form of ceramics, semiprecious stone and glass beads as well as other artefacts. The excavations also yielded vast quantities of local ceramics, structural remains and building materials like bricks and roof tiles. The indications from the studies so far point to a peak activity period of the site extending from the first and second to the fourth and fifth centuries CE. There are a few indicators from the preceding Iron Age/Iron Age-Early Historic transition phases and a relative lack of artefactual evidence from the later levels. Based on the findings, the excavators suggest that “[n]atural calamities, commercial slumps or political instabilities could have dwindled the density of occupation or even led to long interludes of desertions during medieval period” (KCHR 2011, 2). A modern layer of humus has also been identified by the excavators and is dated to around the 17th to the 20th century CE.

3.2. Pattanam in the Context of Archaeology in Kerala

Archaeology as a discipline is not very well developed in Kerala. The initial archaeological efforts in the region were tied up with colonial antiquarian interests. This and much of the later archaeological studies focused on description and in a few cases excavation of the Iron Age burials³, epigraphy and numismatics and in the

³ For a detailed discussion of the colonial antiquarian studies on the Iron Age burials in Kerala, see Darsana (2006).

descriptive recording of monuments. These efforts were undertaken by the Archaeology departments of the princely states of Travancore and Cochin and the Madras Presidency in the pre-independence period. The Kerala State Department of Archaeology came into its present form consequent to the integration of the Departments of Archaeology in Cochin and Travancore in 1956. The ancient sites and monuments in the District of Malabar which were part of the former Madras Province also came under the jurisdiction of the Kerala State Department of Archaeology. The Thrissur Circle of the ASI functions within the state.

There have only been a few excavations from the region other than the studies on the megaliths. Apart from the Iron Age monuments, one of the regions that received maximum archaeological attention in Kerala was Kodungallur in Thrissur District of Central Kerala. In 1946–47, P. Anujan Achan conducted excavations at Cheraman Parambu and Thiruvanjikkulam (Achan 1948) in Kodungallur. K.V. Soundara Rajan of the Southern Circle of the ASI assisted by K. V. Raman undertook trial excavations at Cheraman Parambu in 1968 (*IAR* 1968-69 (1971),10) and excavations at various other places in and around Kodungallur 1969 (*IAR* 1969-70 (1973), 13-15)⁴. In the 1990s partial remains of a log boat was encountered by labourers at Kadakkarapalli in Chertala taluk of Alappuzha district. Following this in 2002 and 2003 excavations to expose this boat was done by the CHS, Thripunithura and the Department of Archaeology, Kerala (Nair, Selvakumar and Gopi 2004). After the commencement of the excavations at Pattanam, there have been a few other excavations in Kerala. These, apart from the excavations of megaliths include the excavation of the Portuguese-Dutch fort site of Kottapuram in Central Kerala by the State Department of Archaeology (*Muziris Vartha* 2010) and at Vizhinjam, Kollam district by the Department of Archaeology, University of Kerala (Kumar et.al. 2015).

The excavations at Pattanam stand apart from the archaeological exercises in the region till date both in terms of scale and methodology. No other archaeological site in Kerala has received the continuous attention that Pattanam has. The site and its vicinities were extensively explored during different seasons over the years. The site has undergone both horizontal and vertical excavations. In the trial excavations of 2004 two trenches of 2mx2m were excavated (Selvakumar et.al. 2005). In the course

⁴ See also Raman 1976.

of the nine seasons of excavations from 2007-2015, the KCHR laid 61 trenches covering an area of around 800 meters. The excavations follow the locus based method following the principles of stratigraphy introduced by Edward C. Harris (1989) in his *Principles of Archaeological Stratigraphy*. Pattanam is one of the earliest sites in the country to use the method. We saw in the previous chapter that the ASI has traditionally followed the layer and grid based method of excavation expounded by Wheeler in the 1940's in British India. A large a number of institutions and universities, both from India and from abroad have collaborated over the years with the excavations. National and international experts, working on different artefact categories are studying the material excavated. The site has also employed a variety of survey and sampling methods *albeit* in a preliminary manner. Such details are outside the purview of this discussion. While the team working at the site is dominated by archaeology students and professionals, in almost all the seasons a small section of the trench assistants come from other fields like engineering, theatre and arts to acquire familiarity in archaeological methods. The distinctive features of Pattanam excavations are enumerated here to indicate that, the procedural conventions that are already well placed in the ASI or the state departments of archaeology with regard to archaeological excavations have not got institutionalised in a similar manner either in the CHS or the KCHR. Pattanam explorations and excavations are the first archaeology project that the latter has undertaken. This has allowed a greater ease in bringing in innovations in methodology and flexibility in procedure. This is a distinction that the KCHR has stressed in its reports and official publications. The institutional collaborations are underlined and the essential character of the project is highlighted as multi/inter disciplinary, owing to these factors. For instance, the KCHR, in its short publication on the fifth season of excavations dubs the excavations as “Multidisciplinary Research with Cutting Edge Technological Support” (KCHR 2011, front cover). Similarly, a handbook published in relation to the seventh season of excavations defines the project as “An *International Project* (emphasis added) in Material Culture Studies” (*The Heart and Soul* 2013).

3.3. Dealing with an Archaeological Past: Responses from Pattanam- The Early Years

One day a toddy tapper climbed a coconut tree near this⁵ temple. It must have been around twelve or one during the day. At that time the God (*Bhagavan*) was ploughing the field, with his bullocks and ploughshare, near the temple pond. Those days that whole area used to be covered with fields. From above the tree, the toddy tapper sneezed once. God looked up and teased, “Does anyone tap toddy in the middle of the day?!” “Does anyone plough field in the middle of the day?!” retorted the tapper. Angered by the retort, God stopped ploughing and discarded the tools in the middle of the temple pond and concealed them. Then, coming out of the pond after a ritual bath he cursed, “May this Vadakkekara region only harvest *muth* (beads) and *muthanga* (a kind of wild grass)”. See, there is at least one person starving in this any given day. This is said to be part of the curse. And, you go to any plot of land in the village. You are bound to find at least one bead.

The story is as narrated to me by Narayanan, an eighty-eight year old resident of Pattanam. He heard it from his “father and grand-father.”⁶ When, it rains in the village beads of glass and stone in varying colours and shapes can be seen on the soil surface. Many of the villagers, especially children, have personal collections of these beads. At Pattanam there is a prolific presence of archaeological material over ground. It is also common to find structural remains and burnt bricks when the villagers dig land for agriculture and other construction purposes. Even so, the association of the material with the early maritime contacts of the region as well as an understanding of its archaeological significance was absent prior to the explorations by K.P.Shajan (1998).

The word *pattanam* has immense etymological significance. It refers to any urban context in contemporary Malayalam. It is also a term that is frequently associated with Early Historic and Medieval ports or trade centres. However, prior to the excavations, the residents of Pattanam did not make any association with an urban past. On the contrary, the place was referred to by the corrupted version of the word- *pashnam*. *Pashni* or *pattini* in Malayalam refers to a condition of starvation or hunger. “The place was known only as *pashnam*. I am 53 now. In my memory, no one was even

⁵ Pattanam Nileeswaram Temple

⁶ Personal interview with Narayanan on 1 June 2014 at Pattanam (independent translation).

ready to send a girl in marriage to this village... It was a poverty-stricken place”, says Ravindran.⁷ Ravindran was a resident of ward number XIV of Chittatukara panchayat, of the neighbouring village of Kunjithai, and he was a field hand at the excavations since 2008 and worked in the capacity of caretaker at the site until his untimely death in 2016. We see from the local lore of the beads that people incorporate the presence of archaeological material into aspects of the reality that they have to deal with like *pashni* (starvation) and to surviving sites of importance to which they associate the historical past of the region like the Pattanam Nileeswaram temple.

Another feature of these lores is that they are rarely single stranded. “Kids used to pick up beads from the *sarpakāv*”⁸. Our mother (in law), Ammukutti amma, used to scold the kids for picking them up because they might have been brought by the snakes”, reminisces Sarojini a retired school teacher.⁹ The *sarpakāv* under reference is in one of the plots of land where many of the trenches were laid. This story relates the beads to a site of more immediate significance to the inhabitants of the specific plot of land, viz., the *sarpakāv*. Incidentally, the plot under reference is known by the name *Patamatham*. And, there is another prominent lore related to this name. The plot, the locals say, was where the armies (*pata*) of Paravur *thampuran*¹⁰, the ruler of the area, used to station and hence, the name. When asked about the significance of Pattanam, when I met her in 2013 this is the first story that Shanta Rajagopal¹¹ told me. In 2004 trenches were laid on her plot of land by the CHS team.¹² The plot is to the immediate east of Patamatham plot. She had come to this area from the nearby Chittatukara

⁷ Personal interview with Ravindran on 8 May 2013 at Pattanam (independent translation).

⁸ This is a type of sacred grove, where vegetation is left undisturbed and where *sarpam* (snake) is venerated. When trenches were laid near the *sarpakāv*, the residents of Patamatam and the neighbouring houses requested the female trench assistants to refrain from working on those trenches, if they were menstruating, as it is believed that menstruating women should not frequent the vicinity of the *sarpakāv*.

⁹ Personal interview with Sarojini 8 May 2013 at Pattanam (independent translation). Sarojini used to live in Patamatam house since after her marriage to one of the sons of Ammukutti Amma. After a few years they moved to Madavana in Paravur. I met her and another daughter- in law of Ammukutti Amma, when they visited the excavation site in relation to the purchase of the plot (a joint family property) by the KCHR.

¹⁰ A generic term for a regional ruler/aristocrat.

¹¹ Personal interview with Santha Rajagopal on 23 April 2014 at Pattanam.

¹² This plot of land was purchased by the KCHR in 2013.

about 25 years back. From the conversation we had it appeared that she had not, till that time, related to its significance as a site of early maritime trade in the same way that she had related with the more established local lores of the region.

We also find instances where the excavation themselves are incorporated into a prevailing lore. Below is another incident that Narayanan narrated:

They (the excavators) placed the pegs and started to dig. When it went down to about one person's height,¹³ bricks structures resembling walls were found. There were steps leading off to different directions and they appeared to be remnants of buildings. I told sir (Director of the Excavations), that the possibility is that this structure is extending to the east. Because, that is where Paravur *thampuran* used to live. Our Paravur *thampuran*. All those lands were gifted to us Kudumbis¹⁴ by Paravur *thampuran*. Those days we were non- paid workers, like slaves. The land was given to us with complete rights of ownership and transaction.¹⁵

This is an occasion where we see the excavations easily feeding in into the existing imagination of the past of the community.

Thus, while the local inhabitants of Pattanam themselves say that they did not have any idea about the historical significance of the place prior to when it came into academic attention in the 1990s, there are other ways in which the unusual presence of archaeological material in the region had been dealt with. The material forms part of the myths and lore of the region. The coming in of academic archaeology does not do away with alternative explanations. This, as we will see in the following sections, is not due to the inability of the population to deal with academic archaeology. Rather we have at Pattanam an active and literate¹⁶ public who engage in multiple ways with the excavations. The stories exist side by side with and are also sometimes modified to incorporate the new perspectives that archaeology brings in.

From the initial years of archaeological exercises, Pattanam captured immense local attention. The local involvement in the excavations was considerable in the early

¹³ A common way to denote height and depth.

¹⁴ Kudumbi is a caste group in Kerala with Other Backward Class (OBC) status.

¹⁵ Interview with Narayanan on 1 June 2014 at Pattanam (independent translation).

¹⁶ While the level of formal education of the people are different, it is rare to find people who have not had school education in the area.

years. It was a resident of Pattanam, Vinodhan¹⁷, who first brought the site to the notice of K.P. Shajan (Selvakumar 2006). Pattanam is a thickly populated village with small resident landholdings. Hence in the early years, prior to the purchase of land by the KCHR, the trenches were laid in close vicinity to the dwellings. In a series of interviews that I conducted from the months of April to June 2013, the residents and the archaeologists who have worked at the site described the fervour and local co-operation that the early seasons of the excavations generated.

As part of the excavation team of the first season of excavation by the KCHR in the year 2007, I was a direct witness to the palpable enthusiasm of the locals. Each day of the excavation, or news of a fresh find used to drive large numbers of visitors to the site. These visitors were keen to follow the developments on the site and often gave significant inputs to the archaeologists. The inputs given regarding the type of wood used in the bollards excavated from Trench PT07V in 2007 is an instance. “In 2007, there would be at least a 100 visitors to the site each day”, remembers A. Mohammed,¹⁸ professional photographer and documentation-in-charge of Pattanam excavations for six seasons. School children from the nearby houses joined the archaeologists and field hands to assist with the sieving of excavated soil. “The KCHR people would come to where we live to pick up tile pieces etc. We used to walk around with them and help them”¹⁹ says Vasanti Pushpan, elected representative of ward no 15 of Vadakkekara panchayat. Local correspondents of Malayalam newspapers also used to regularly visit the site. The story on the excavations done during this period by the Kochi edition of *Metro Manorama*, featured with prominence the photograph of the children of the locality along with their personal collection of beads (“*Charitra’the Ivide*” 2007). Selvakumar (2006) notes that when a brick structure was revealed in the 2004 excavations it was the local people who first informed the press. The site also used to be visited by the elected representatives to the local bodies and the state. Ministers of the state M.A. Baby and S. Sharma visited the site during the 2007 season and in a formal function at the occasion selected individuals from the locality were honoured for their contribution to the

¹⁷ Currently a Non-Resident Keralite (NRK) working in the Persian Gulf.

¹⁸ Personal interview with A. Mohammed on 12 May 2013 at Pattanam (independent translation).

¹⁹ Personal interview with Vasanti Pushpan, elected member, ward no 15, Vadakkekara panchayat on 27 October 2013 at Pattanam

excavations (“*Charithranweshanathinu*” 2007). Those honoured included Mahesh, a Class IX student, for donating his personal collection of archaeological finds to the archaeologists, Narayanan,²⁰ for the insights he gave on the physiography of the region and the owners of the land where the trenches were laid.

Selvakumar (2006) talks about the public response to the excavations of the Kadakkarapalli log boat. In the Kadakkarapalli case, the public took the initiative to inform the authorities about the find, reports appeared in the media on a daily basis during the excavations and the crowd that it attracted was “difficult to manage” (ibid., 424). I witnessed comparable responses on part of the local population while working as part of a team excavating at an Iron Age rock-cut cave at Anakkara²¹ in Malappuram district in central Kerala in 2009. The site was frequented by people both from the village and outside. This included school children and the media. The local television network made and aired a documentary on the ongoing excavations. The public demanded lengthy explanations from the archaeologists. They also shared the different lores associated with the monuments prevalent in the area and aided the excavations by providing equipment and provisions. At many occasions it was necessary that at least one archaeologist dedicate him/herself entirely to cater to the public demand for information. In all the three cases, Pattanam, Kadakkarapalli and Anakkara, we see an actively engaging local public who interacts with the practice of archaeology in different ways. This is sometimes through a demand for information and time from the archaeologists. Sometimes it is through providing facilitating conditions for the archaeologist and by being part of the field practice itself.

At Pattanam, the excited atmosphere often resulted in tensions between the archaeologists and the locals. Trench PT07III where I was working as a trench assistant yielded remains of an Early Historic brick structure. The visitors overheard the archaeologists talking about a “wall” which the correspondent of a local newspaper mistook for *vaal*, which means sword in Malayalam. The next day an angry crowd demanded that they be shown the sword and crown of their king. The remains of a log boat excavated from Pattanam in the same season, similarly,

²⁰ Excerpts from my interview with Narayanan are used in this chapter

²¹ The documentation and excavations at Anakkara were done by the School of Social Sciences, Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam in two seasons during the years 2008 and 2009 under the directorship of Dr. Rajan Gurukkal.

generated a high level of excitement among the locals. When the boat was covered up and the trench was backfilled, the locals were angered that they were no longer allowed to see the boat which “belonged to their ancestors”. Similarly voices of dissent could be heard when the locals learned that the material from the excavations were to be taken away from the site to the office of the KCHR at Thiruvananthapuram. We see similar responses from the public at the Kadakkarapilly boat excavation also (Selvakumar 2006). The strong local opposition to shifting of the archaeological remains of the sail boat from its original location led to the formation of a ‘History and Heritage Council’ by the villagers which became an important pressure group in determining further archaeological and heritage activities related to the find. In these cases, the locals perceived the archaeological remains as being ‘theirs’ through ancestry. And they felt that in comparison to the archaeologists they had an equal or larger stake in the finds.

In all the three instances, the excavations turned into media spectacles. In Anakkara and Pattanam, I observed that the local media representatives were keen to have information of fresh discoveries from the site on a daily basis. Finds acquired the potential to be scoops. Selvakumar (2006) notices this to be the case in Kadakrapalli also. The newspaper reports were one of the vehicles of communication that drew fresh crowds to both Anakkara and Pattanam from increasingly farther locations as well as from the locality. We also see that, as in the case of the (mis)reported sword, media representations affected the nature of public engagement with the archaeologists. In Kerala the mass media has a very wide reach. There is a well-ingrained newspaper reading culture. And these excavations happened in the context of the media proliferation of the nineties.²² It is common to find occasional reports of accidental archaeological finds, mostly Iron Age urn burials or rock-cut caves in the local pages in the regional language newspapers of Kerala. Unlike these cases, the excavations at Pattanam were of a longer duration and scale and hence had more potential to generate 'news-worthy' information. In the case of Pattanam, the dearth of antecedents to the nature of evidence that the site generated on a daily basis, furthered its potential to be a media spectacle. In comparison to Kadakkarapalli and Anakkara,

²²Varughese (2017, 57) characterizes the “political public of Kerala” as a “newspaper reading public.”

See Jeffrey 2010a, 2010b and Varughese 2017, 52-7. for further discussion on the newspaper reading culture in Kerala, and its transformation over the years.

the over ground indications of what lies beneath the surface is less evident in Pattanam. This exaggerates the possibility of casting the excavation as something close to a 'treasure hunt'. Titles of the newspaper articles such as “‘Pattana’thin Charitrathinte Goodasmitham” (2007) ('Pattanam' wears the secretive smile of history)”, “Vismayakazhchayayi ‘kuzhichedutha’ keralacharitram ” (2007) ('Dug out' Kerala history becomes a magical spectacle) are indicative of this particular presentation.

What increases the relevance of Pattanam for the purpose this study is that the site received continuous attention over the years unlike Kadakkarapalli and Anakkara. This has allowed me to examine the directions in which public attitudes towards the site evolved over time. In the years that followed, the enthusiasm of the local population waned considerably to be replaced by feelings of disinterest and sometimes discontent. The aspects of this change in attitudes will be examined towards the end of this chapter. To make sense of the change, one needs to consider the multiple ways in which the Pattanam-Muziris equation has played out in the region.

3.4. Where lies Muziris? Locating an ancient Port in the Present

From the initial years, one of the central issues associated with the archaeology of Pattanam was its possible identification with the ancient port of Muziris. The port site of Muziris/Muciri in the Western coast of Peninsular India is believed to have been active in the Indo-Mediterranean networks of exchange from the late centuries BCE to the early centuries CE. Muziris is a well-entrenched term in Kerala history (see for example, Logan 1887 [2000]; Menon 1967; Menon 1911; Pillai 1959, 1961; Thomas 1932; Varrier 1990). The historical accounts on the region from the colonial times talk about Muziris. Most of these accounts primarily rely on two categories of textual/literary sources. The first includes Greco-Roman sources like the *Periplus Maris Erythraei* (The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea) by an anonymous first century author, *Natural History* by Pliny the Elder possibly from a later date of the same century and the accounts of the Alexandrian geographer Ptolemy from the 2nd century CE. The second category includes early Tamil anthologies and poetics. These were compiled during the early centuries of the Christian Era and the appellation Sangam literature is

popularly used to refer to them collectively. There are a few occasions where Muciri finds mention in these poems.²³

A key factor to be noted here is that a majority of the writings prior to the Pattanam excavations identify Muziris with Kodungallur (See Figure 3.1). The present day Kodungallur is a *taluk* in the south- western part of Thrissur district of central Kerala. It is also a block *panchayat* in the *taluk*. The present day town of Kodungallur lies on the National Highway - 17. The Arabian Sea is about five km to its west. It is to the North- Northwest of the confluence of the River Periyar and the Pullut Lake which runs parallel to the Arabian Sea.

3.4.a. Kodungallur as Muziris

Kodungallur is identified with Muziris/ Muciri on the basis of its later identification with Muyirikodu, mentioned in the Jewish Copper plates of the 10th century CE²⁴ and Makotai or Mahodayapuram, the headquarters of the Cera rulers of the 9th, 10th and 11th centuries CE and later of the Perumpadappu *Swaroopam*.²⁵ The region has had clear associations with the later Ceras. We still find place names here that signify its association with the Ceras like the Cheraman Juma Masjid and Cheramanparambu. The location of Kodungallur on the northern bank of River Periyar also is in rough

²³ To take an example,

In Muciri with its drums, where the ocean roars,
where the paddy traded for fish and stacked high
on the boats make boats and houses look the same
and sacks of pepper raised up beside them
make the houses look the same as the tumultuous
shore and the golden wares brought by the ships
and carried to land in the serving boats,
Kuttuvan_its king to whom toddy is no more
valuable than water, who wears a shining garland, gives our gifts
of goods from the mountains along with goods from the sea
to those who have come to him. ...” *Puranānūru* 343(Hart and Heifetz 1999, 195-196)

²⁴ For a translation and detailed discussion on the Jewish Copper plates see Narayanan (1972, 23-30)

²⁵ See Adarsh (2013) for a well studied account on the history of Kodungallur.

agreement to the description of Muziris as an inland river port given in the literary texts. Identification of Kodungallur with Muziris occurs in Kerala historiography from the early colonial writings onwards. It has, as we will see in the following discussion, been part of popular accounts on the region and a part of the public imagination.

Logan's *Malabar Manual* (1887[2000]) discusses the early maritime commercial interactions of the Malabar Coast in the section titled 'Early History from Other Sources'. In another section on the ports and shipping facilities of the region also Logan talks about Muziris. He notes that:

[Muziris] has been satisfactorily identified with *Muyiri-kodu*, alias *Kodungallur*, alias Cranganore²⁶, the capital city of the Chera empire and its site was manifestly well selected as a place of trade before the mouth of the *Periyar*...was blocked up... (ibid., 80).

Logan does not discuss the reasons for this 'satisfactory' identification. In *The Cochin State Manual*, Menon (1911, 16) notes that "Crangannur, the Mouziris of the ancients and described by Pliny as *Primum emporium Indiae*, had been a very important port for over twenty centuries". The identification of Muziris with Kodungallur is a trouble-free assumption in many other historiographic accounts (see also, Thomas 1932; Pillai 1959).

The archaeological excavations in the Kodungallur region focused on the sites and place names with historical importance in the area. The excavations by Anujan Achan (1948) in 1946-47 were at *Cheraman Parambu* and *Thiruvanjikulam*.²⁷ The excavations yielded Chinese Celadon Ware mixed with local potteries. Achan assigned the pottery types to 12th-13th centuries CE. In the 1968 trial excavations at *Cheraman Parambu* (*IAR* 1968-69) a three metre square trench was excavated up to five meters, till where sub-soil water deposit was reached. The finds included dull red pottery with a variety of shapes in jars, "stone ware" in light cream colour, with stamped designs, a few porcelain sherds from the middle and the top layers, medieval rectangular roof tiles with wedge shaped ends, glass beads and corroded iron nails.

²⁶ Cranganore/Crangannur is the anglicized name for Kodungallur.

²⁷ The Thiruvanjikulam Siva temple is located here and is traditionally associated with the Cera capital of Vanchi (Valath 2003, 29)

They assigned the finds from 13th to 16th centuries CE. This assumption was later challenged as the finds included Black and Red Ware and Chinese Celadon Ware belonging to an earlier period and were placed by K.V. Raman and Noburu Karashima between the 9th century CE and 12th century CE (as noted by Gurukkal 1999, 44). The pottery types and the roof tiles appear from the description and the published photographs to be similar to those obtained from the later levels at Pattanam. Excavations of a larger scale were conducted in the following year (*IAR* 1969-70) at places in and around Kodungallur. Except for Karupadanna, these places, viz., Kilthali,²⁸ Mathilakam²⁹, Thrikulasekharapuram³⁰ and Thiruvanchikulam, are associated with temple sites ascribed to the medieval periods. Apart from finds similar to those found in the previous season of excavations at Cheraman Parambu, from Matilakam, laterite walls, sturdy Red Ware, Chinese Celadon Ware and Chola coins were found. Similar laterite walls were present also at Thrikulasekharapuram. The finds from here sites were ascribed mostly to the 9th-10th centuries CE and to later phases (*ibid.*). The excavations in the Kodungallur region, thus, did not yield any material ascribable to the period when the port of Muziris was believed to be active. From the published records it appears that apart from the excavations at the above mentioned places, systematic surveys were not conducted in the surrounding regions.

In the absence of archaeological records from the period when the port was said to be active, the earlier assumptions on the location of Muziris that have governed the historiography of Kerala remained largely unquestioned and reiterated. Varrier (1990) notes that the decline of Roman trade in the 3rd-4th centuries CE must have had a causal effect in the decline of all the ancient towns, except for Muziris. Muziris, he says, continued to be an important centre of trade over the centuries under different names such as Muzirikode Kodumkollur and Kodungallur. “It was only that, Kodungallur of the medieval times was different from the old Muziris in form and

²⁸“The temple, according to epigraphical and architectural evidence, is ascribable to the tenth century A.D., and was one of the four famous *Talis* in the capital of the second Chera empire” (*IAR* 1968-69).

²⁹ Mathilakam is “described in the fourteenth century works as a walled town having a large temple within” (*IAR* 1969-70, 15)

³⁰ The Sri Krishna temple at Thrikulasekharapuram is associated with Kulasekhara Alvars of the 11th century CE (Adarsh 2013).

content” (Varrier 1990, 21).³¹ To take another instance, below is Menon’s (1991, 49-50) discussion of Muziris in *A Survey of Kerala History*,

Muziris has been identified by all scholars with modern Cranganore...It is referred to as *Murachipattanam* in the *Valmiki Ramayana* as Muchiri in Tamil works and as Muyirikode in the Jewish Copper Plates of Bhaskara Ravi Varman (1000AD). During the period of the Second Chera Empire (800-1102) and after it was known as Makotai, Mahodayapuram and Mahodayapattanam.

A joint article by Rajan Gurukkal and Dick Whittaker titled “In Search of Muziris” was published in the *Journal of Roman Archaeology* in 2001 (Gurukkal and Whittaker 2001). This is one of the few works published prior to the excavations at Pattanam, where the exact location of Muziris becomes a central concern. The authors closely re-examine the textual/literary references. The indications on the location of Muziris that the texts provide are examined against the physiographic peculiarities of the Kodungallur region and around in conjunction with traditional associations, place names and the like to arrive at an informed guess about the specific location of the ancient port site. They pin the location to the Kodungallur region.³² The authors are of the opinion that while it is possible to narrow down the options “only an excavation can answer the questions for certain” (ibid., 335).

V. Selvakumar, one of the principal investigators at the Pattanam excavation site since its identification by K.P.Shajan (1998), observed that while people were looking for Muziris, the focus was invariably on Kodungallur area owing to its geographical peculiarities, presence of sites of historical importance as well as the precedence set through the earlier excavations. He points out how such associations can determine the focus and direction of archaeological practices over time. He reminisces being part of the explorations in the region prior to the identification of the archaeological potential of Pattanam³³ At that time the focus was on the areas around Kodungallur.

³¹ Independent translation

³² Kodungallur, understood “as a large zone, incorporating a number of small towns of which Kodungallur itself is one, strung out along the road that runs north for several km from the Periyar parallel to the coast and the inland rivers of the river Pullut”(Gurukkal and Whittaker 2001, 335) is the location of Muziris. They however suggest that it is possible to narrow down the location to the bays beyond the junction of Periyar and Pullut rivers to the east of the present town of Kodungallur.

³³This was as part of the fieldwork towards the doctoral work of Rajan Chedambath (1997). Personal

“We used to cross this location (Pattanam). But it never struck that there is a place called Pattanam that we should check.” That is a realisation that came only later.³⁴

The Kodungallur-Muziris equation was not confined to academic historiography alone. It has been adopted in different ways to form part of more popular accounts of history. A few examples can illustrate this. The 1987-88, college magazine of the Union Christian (UC) College, Aluva³⁵, published a feature length article (UC College Magazine Committee 1988), titled *Muzirisinte Katha* (The Story of Muziris). The feature characterizes Muziris as the gateway to ancient India by virtue of its function as a prominent port. Here the names Kodungallur and Muziris are interchangeably used to tell the story of prosperity through trade till 1341 CE when the port lost its importance in a great flood that silted up the mouth of Periyar.³⁶ This is followed by the account of how, simultaneously, Kodungallur gained prominence as Mahodayapuram, the capital of the second Cheras in the 9th, 10th centuries and how the Cholas entered Kodungallur through Muziris to sow destruction in the famed ‘100 years war’. The narrative moves on to discuss how Kodungallur functioned as the cultural capital of Kerala as the first home to the Semitic religions in the early centuries of the Christian era. The tradition of Kannaki in relation to the Kodungallur Bhagavati temple comes next. The narration winds up with an account of the Bharani festival at the same temple, an event for which Kodungallur is well known for in the contemporary times. One sees that Muziris and Kodungallur are used interchangeably in the first part of the narrative. The former is presented as a gateway to the latter in other parts of the same account. And, ‘The Story of Muziris’ is also the story of Kodungallur stretching from the ancient to the contemporary times.

In the home page of the official website of Kodungallur Municipality (“Kodungallur Municipality” n.d.), Muziris is listed as one of the older names of Kodungallur alongside Shingly Pattanam, Mahodayapuram, Makotai and Cranganore. I found the narrative of Muziris as Makotai, Mahodayapuram or Kodungallur also in a low cost

interview with Dr. V. Selvakumar on 27 May 2013 at Pattanam.

³⁴ *ibid.*

³⁵ The college is located on the Aluva- Paravur route and about 20 km from Kodungallur town as the crow flies

³⁶ The narrative of the 1341 flood in Periyar and how it has captured the popular imagination in the recent years will be discussed in detail later in this chapter.

publication titled *Kuttikalkk Keralacharithram* (Kerala History for children) (Imatty 2012). The author is a retired school teacher and he narrates the history of Kerala from the ancient to the modern times in a capsule-story format. These low cost publications (paper size slightly less than the standard A5 dimensions) are almost solely intended for sale in the trains in Kerala by travelling book vendors and are sold at a price of Rs. 20 per book. They deal with topics ranging from culinary recipes to astrology and stories for children. With a deeply entrenched reading culture, it is a common practice for people in the region to read during train journeys and the books always find some clientele among the passengers.



Figure 3.2: Muziris Bakery, Thekenada, Kodungallur (Photo: Author 2013)

Apart from its presence in popular history narratives, a few instances that I encountered, during my field visit in and around Kodungallur and Pattanam, will illustrate how the Muziris-Kodungallur equation had captured the popular imagination, prior to the Pattanam excavations. At Thekenada, in Kodungallur town, there are two adjacent bakeries. One is called the Cranganore Bakery and the other, the Muziris Bakery. When I visited the area, there was a sign hanging below the latter

saying that “The bakery that functioned here (Muziris) is now functioning in the next shop (Cranganore)” (Figure 3.2). I was told that both the bakeries are owned by the same family. The Cranganore Bakery was started over 50 years ago when the anglicized name Cranganore was popular. The second bakery was started 25 years ago and the name Muziris was given to it because “the ancient name of Kodungalloor was Muziris.”^{37 38}

While going from Paravur to Kodungallur, through the National Highway - 17, about 100m before the road leading to the Pattanam excavation site that branches left from the highway, on the right hand side of the road there is a house by the name Muziris³⁹. The name is written in Malayalam (as Musaris) on a small gold plaque in black letters alongside the depiction of a ship. The house and the plaque were there when I first visited the area in 2007 as a participant in the first season of excavations by the KCHR. I was told by the locals at that time that the house was recently built. Hence, the assumption was that the naming was in relation to the excavations and the discussions around Muziris that it generated. I interviewed Sathi, the middle aged landlady of the property on 21 October 2013. The family had moved to the area from Azhikode twenty five years back and to this new house from an adjacent plot of land around the time the excavations started. She informed me, to my surprise that the excavations had nothing to do with the house name. The house was named Muziris because her husband was originally from the Kodungallur area and Kodungallur is Muziris.⁴⁰ She said that they have an affinity towards tradition, as reflected in the inclusion of traditional elements of architecture in the house. The naming of the house also followed the same attitude. The above instances illustrate that there was an almost unquestioned acceptance for the identification of Kodungallur with Muziris

³⁷ Personal interview with the staff at Cranganore bakery, Thekenada, Kodungallur, on 27 October 2013

³⁸ The middle aged ticket collector at the Azhikode boat jetty told me that there are private buses plying from Azhikode to Kodungallur with the name Muziris, for the last 20-30 years (Personal interview with the ticket collector, Azhikode Ferry on 27 October 2014). It is usual in Kerala to name private buses. These names have a wide range including proper names, family names, names of gods and saints etc.

³⁹ It is common practice in the region to give proper names to individual houses.

⁴⁰ Personal interview with Sathi, landlady, Muziris house, near Pattanam jn., Paravur on 21 October 2013.

both in the academia and in the popular understanding. As the last example shows, this understanding was not limited to Kodungallur alone. It is in this context that the excavations at Pattanam generate fresh discussions on the identification of Muziris. The following section talks about how the possibility of identifying Pattanam with Muziris came about. I will examine the local responses to the excavations in the early years with specific reference to this identification and the discourses that it generated in the public domain.

3.4.b. Pattanam as Muziris: Claiming a New Past

From the initial years of recognition of the archaeological potential of Pattanam, the possibility of its identification with Muziris was suggested. Based on the findings of the initial geoarchaeological explorations, K. P. Shajan notes that “In the light of available evidences in the form of Early Historical archaeological remains from the sites around Paravur, it can be rightly pointed out that the location of ancient Muziris might be somewhere in the south east of Periyar river to present Paravur town” (Shajan 1998, 83). Following the trial excavations at Pattanam, a well-argued article came out in Malayalam in 2006 that discussed the possibility of identifying Pattanam with Muziris titled *Pattanam Muziris Thanneyo? (Is Pattanam Muziris Itself?)* (Shajan, Cherian and Selvakumar 2006). The article put forth the identification of Pattanam with Muziris as a strong possibility. This contention was based on, apart from the nature of the artefactual evidence from Pattanam, the geo archaeological and geological studies including the aforementioned work of K.P.Shajan (1998). The article (Shajan, Cherian and Selvakumar 2006) analysed the changes in the coastline and in the course of the Periyar River alongside textual indications on the location of Muziris. The suggestion was that the course of Periyar River changed towards the north-west, and that 2000 years ago the course of the river was through the immediate south of Pattanam, corresponding to that of the present day rivulet, Paravur *thodu*. Taking these factors alongside the coastline changes in the last 2000 years into consideration, they argued that the location of present day Pattanam corresponds to the location of Muziris indicated in textual/literary sources. The authors are however cautious and suggest that the hypothesis could be confirmed only after explorations in the Northern bank of River Periyar in the Kodungallur area.

The archaeology of Pattanam generated widespread interests and popular and academic debates. The Muziris-Pattanam equation was central to a lot of these discussions. The possibility of identifying Pattanam with Muziris came into the public domain, even prior to the trial excavations by the CHS in 2004. On the 22 and 23 March 2004, the KCHR organised an exhibition of the surface collections from Pattanam and a discussion on this “evidence from the first Early Historical urban settlement in Kerala” at its office in Thiruvananthapuram. (“In Thiruvananthapuram Today” 2004). The newspaper reports that followed the event highlighted the hypothesis that Pattanam could be Muziris.⁴¹ They continued to do so in the years that followed (“Tracing an Ancient Trading Route” 2006).

One finds indications of an enthusiastic acceptance of this identification at Pattanam. In 2007, I saw a banner at the Pattanam junction put up by some locals saying “*Muzirisilekku Swagatham* (Welcome to Muziris)”. Selvakumar (2006) talks about the prior presence of a similar, possibly the same banner which came up following the newspaper reports in the regional newspapers in 2004 to the effect that Kodungallur has lost its claim to Muziris. At a local level this equation of Pattanam with Muziris has continued despite the variance in the attitudes of the local public to the excavations themselves. This is to the extent that Muziris often becomes a synonym to Pattanam.

What exactly the term can refer to, can vary according to ones point of reference. Muziris can thus be the village as a whole, for instance if one is hailing an autorickshaw from the nearest town of Paravur (about 1.5km south of Pattanam). The festival at the Sri Bhadrakali Temple of Vadakkekara, Pattanam is called the Musaris⁴² Pooram in the notices in Malayalam that are printed during the time. Here also Muziris stands for the entire village. If one enquires for Muziris at the Pattanam Junction, one will be directed to the *Padamatham* plot, now under the ownership of the KCHR where a site museum has come up. There is also the Muziris Pattanam Residents’ Association (MPRA). This was registered in 2009 under Reg no: ER

⁴¹ “The 38-year-old archaeologist has been in the limelight after he put forward a hypothesis... that Muziris, the legendary seaport of the ancient world, stood at Pattanam, a small town some 12 km south of the Periyar rivermouth” says a news report in *The Hindu* (“Hunting for Muziris” 2004). See also Govind 2004.

⁴² Transliteration of the word Muziris as used in the notices.

700/2009 (See Figure 3.3) and includes houses from the wards 14, 15, 16 and 17 of the Vadakkekara Panchayat.⁴³ The logo of the MPRA shows a land depicted with two village houses and a coconut tree bordering a water body where a ship with two masts is on sail (See Figure 3.3). In 2013, during the annual temple festival of Pattanam Nileeshwaram temple, announcements over the loudspeaker spoke of ‘the land’ as one with a rich maritime heritage going back to hundreds of years. Here, Muziris stands for ‘land’ which is more of an imaginary category and less defined through physical borders.



Figure 3.3: Signboard at the Pattanam Junction of the MPRA (Photo: Author 2013);
Inset: Front page of the rulebook of MPRA with the logo

One of the most interesting developments was the reconstitution of ward no 15 of the panchayat as the Pattanam-Muziris ward. Elected representative of the ward Vasanti Pushpan⁴⁴ informed me that previously there were only 17 wards in the panchayat.

⁴³ There are 18 wards in the panchayat

⁴⁴ Personal interview with Vasanti Pushpan, on 27 October 2013 at Pattanam. (independent translation)

From the previous election onwards this has become 18. This is because ward no 15 became a new ward constituted from parts of the previous ward numbers 2, 3, 13 and 15. “The centre of this Muziris is in our ward. All the area that is being excavated is here. Hence it is now known as Pattanam Muziris ward.”⁴⁵ This is not merely an informal appellation. “This is how the ward was divided and identified at the time of election declaration. Thus Pattanam now has three wards, viz., Pattanam, Pattanam Centre and Pattanam-Muziris.”⁴⁶ The ward has 360 households with a population of about 1000.

Muziris becomes an identity marker at an individual level also. Dileep a young field hand at the Pattanam excavations narrated an incident when he made an offering of a can of oil to the temple to facilitate a speedy marriage. On the notice that lists the offerings he gave his address is given as Dileep *Muziris* Kalathil, Pooyapalli. His official name is Dileep Kalathil. “See I work here...so I gave the name like that for the heck of it” says Dileep,⁴⁷ who is a resident of Pooyapalli, the village adjoining Pattanam. Muziris has also acquired the status of a brand over the years with enterprises adopting the name. We have for instance, on the Pattanam road which branches out from the National Highway - 17, and about 200 meters after the Pattanam Nileeswaram temple a Muziris Wood Works Shop. The discussion on ‘Brand Muziris’ cannot be limited to Pattanam alone. This will be taken up in more detail later on in the discussion

Thus we see in Pattanam, an acceptance and often conscious claim to the newly discovered past as Muziris. This claim is exercised in some cases collectively and through elected representative bodies. In other cases it is of a more individual nature. The archaeological excavations themselves might or might not be invoked in each of these cases. But 'Pattanam-as-Muziris' reconstitutes the local imagination of the region itself in different ways. As can be seen from the logo of the MPRA (see Figure 3.3), images like ocean and ships becomes conspicuous in an area where their contemporary presence is not very tangible. A particular segment of the village or a particular ward can now be differentiated from the rest by virtue of it having a

⁴⁵ *ibid.*

⁴⁶ *ibid.*

⁴⁷ Personal interview with Dileep on 9 May 2013 at pattanam (independent translation)

different past. Muziris can also refer to an imaginary idea of ‘the land’. The specific locations where the excavations or other related official activities take place acquires a special significance in the territorial imaginations of the region

3.4.c. Territorial Claims to the Past and Their Conflicts

The identification of Pattanam with Muziris disturbed the hitherto historiographic and popular understanding of its location. Hence, the new contention could not be smoothly integrated into these understandings. Adarsh (2013, 299) talks about a number of seminars that were organised by cultural and research societies and the Kodungallur municipality on the subject following news reports that equated Pattanam with Muziris. The Pattanam-Muziris equation was articulated as the lost claim of Kodungallur in many newspaper reports in the early years. “The indication (from the Pattanam excavations) is that assumptions in historiography, such as Kodungallur is Muziris, will have to be dismantled” (Evujin 2007)⁴⁸ says a feature that came out in the Sunday supplement of the *Deshabhimani* on 22 April 2007 (See also Selvakumar 2006). There was hence, in the early years, vehement opposition to the hypothesis from Kodungallur. *The Hindu* on 6 September 2006 reports, “The argument of some researchers that the ancient port town of Muzaris was at Pattanam has created a controversy in archaeology circles. It has also drawn protests from the Kodungalloor municipal authorities, who vehemently argue that Muzaris was in Kodungalloor” (“More Time Sought for” 2006).

Two incidents that I learned about during the course of my fieldwork, are narrated below to illustrate the nature of popular discontent. Mohammed reported⁴⁹ an occasion when he along with a research assistant and a visiting expert to the Pattanam went to see the Cheraman Juma Masjid⁵⁰ in Kodungallur in 2007. He remembers that the location of Muziris was a very volatile issue in Kodungallur during the time and the people of Kodungallur had formed an action council to address the issue. On learning that the visitors were associated with the Pattanam excavations they were

⁴⁸ Independent translation

⁴⁹ Personal interview with Mohammed on 12 May 2013 at Pattanam. (independent translation).

⁵⁰ The Cheraman Juma Masjid is believed to be the first mosque in India.

stopped and confronted. “Just because you find a couple of potsherds, how can you drag Muziris away to another district?”⁵¹ they asked.

P.J. Cherian, the director of the excavation, described⁵² the repercussions the issue has had at Pattanam. In a brochure for public distribution that the KCHR came out with in 2008, alongside ‘Pattanam’ the word ‘Muziris’ was given with a question mark in brackets in order to propose a tentative identification. This led to a big outrage in Kodungallur to the extent that the archaeologists were accused of planting artefacts in the soil and later digging them up. It was also said that finding a few potsherds did not signify anything and hence Pattanam cannot be identified with Muziris. Realizing that the pressure would hinder the distribution of the brochure, the KCHR was forced to rub the word Muziris off manually. This in turn led to a public outcry in Pattanam. Cherian described how a teacher from the locality, along with others, came and argued, “Do you think that we don’t know what this is that you have rubbed off. We know that what you have rubbed off is Muziris.”⁵³ We see that more than being an academic debate on the plausibility of the hypothesis, the Pattanam-Muziris debate created repercussions and disturbance at a popular level. These often get voiced through representative bodies with authority. In Kodungallur, with the proposition comes a new need to actively voice the claims to a past which the region had an automatic claim to until then. There, the new identification of Pattanam with Muziris is seen as a denial of a legitimate historical past of the region. At Pattanam, there similarly is a resistance to any attempt to deny the claims to its newly discovered and prestigious historical past.

Two things need to be noted in the first incident. First, there is a direct criticism of archaeology. “A few potsherds” do not suffice to replace a well rooted tradition and history. On the other hand, when the effort is to celebrate the new findings and the claim to Muziris, the appeal draws strength through a flowery articulation of the same material remains. The titles of newspaper reports like “Manpatrathundukalil oru Nagarathinte Ormakal” (2007) (The memories of a city in sherds of clay)⁵⁴, “What the

⁵¹ *ibid*

⁵² Personal interview with P.J. Cherian on 24 April 2013 at Pattanam

⁵³ *ibid*

⁵⁴ Independent translation

pots say” (O’Yeah 2008) and “The Tales that Potsherds Tell at Pattanam” (2010) are examples of such articulation.

Second is the insinuation of dragging away Muziris to *another district*. Pattanam is less than 10 km to the south of Kodungallur. Yet, it is perceived as having a different regional identity. There are a few possible reasons that fuel such a perception. Kodungallur and Pattanam fall within different districts. While the former is in the Thrissur district the latter is part of Ernakulam.⁵⁵ The present course of the River Periyar separates the two; while Pattanam is to the south of the river, Kodungallur is to the north. A third reason is the proximity of Pattanam to the town of Paravur (see Figure 3.1). The present settlement pattern of Kerala is one of satellite towns, separated only by a few kilometres of rural or semi-urban locations. Such locations are referred to in relation to their nearest town. Thus Pattanam is identified with Paravur than with Kodungallur though the distance that separates them is not considerable.

Selvakumar points to “sub-nationalistic or microregional feelings that are deep rooted in a few regions of India, including Kerala” (Selvakumar 2006, 437) as a reason for the public protests both in the case of Pattanam and of Kadakkrapalli and the feeling of 'loss' of heritage leading to a questioning of the authenticity of the excavation itself. There is a prolific presence in Kerala of popular histories, many in Malayalam⁵⁶ that focus on regional identities in multiple ways. These could be histories of geographic formations, say a river (James 2006) or the coast (Nair 2008), of place names (Valath 2003), the area covered by a local body like panchayat (Vijnaneeyam Samiti 2001) or a place (Jayapal 2009, Silvery 2012). The popular reactions to the excavations discussed above occur in a context where it is common for regional identities to be expressed through historical narratives. Their characterization as sub- nationalistic/ micro- regional needs further examination.

⁵⁵ Adarsh (2013) also identifies the location of the places in two districts to be “the primary and simplest reason” for the debates around Muziris. He argues the Kodungallur then experiences Pattanam as a separated place altogether.

⁵⁶ For an overview, see the bibliographic listing of local histories (“Local History”n.d.) and family histories (“Family History”n.d.) in the KCHR library collection. Also see Namboothiri and Sivadas 2009

Even though these local histories are not always authored by academic historians, we often find in them a serious engagement with archaeological and historical sources. Silvery's (2012) work on Mathilakam is an interesting instance. Mathilakam is about seven km to the north of Kodungallur. Silvery, a Public Works Department contractor by profession, has dealt with a vast variety of sources including texts, myths, place name histories as well as information from the archaeological explorations and excavations in and around the region.⁵⁷ He has also spent time with the archaeologists who worked at Mathilakam and Kodungallur in 1968. Rather than being a descriptive account, the author uses the sources to reach an informed hypothesis that the ancient Trikkanamathilakam was one of the important centres of Muziris. He argues that the evidence, especially the spread of material evidence, allows to postulate that ancient Muziris was not Kodungallur alone. "It could be inferred that this ancient culture had a spread of at least 80 km around Kodungallur" (ibid., 17)⁵⁸. I have used this example to illustrate the use of archaeology by non-professional historians as a source category in their writings that are intended for a more popular reach.⁵⁹ Archaeology is used here to substantiate and rethink the dominant discourses in academic historiography. This is similar to what we saw in the instances discussed above. In the process of engaging with a hypothesis put forward by the archaeologists, the people of Pattanam and Kodungallur are seen to question archaeological practice and its truth claims as well. The Deficit Model of Public Archaeology that I discussed in the first chapter (where the archaeologist acts as the authority disseminating knowledge from above by virtue of his/her expertise) cannot apply to contexts as this. Public opinion forces the archaeologist, as we saw in the incident of the brochure, to moderate or withhold information that he/she would otherwise choose to divulge.

The initial debates on the location of Muziris gets toned down in the years that follow. One of the major developments that facilitated this change was the launch and initial implementation of the Muziris Heritage Project (MHP). The MHP brought within its fold a vast geography incorporating both Kodungallur and Pattanam and putting forth

⁵⁷ The work was completed in 2002, and was posthumously published 2012. Hence, Silvery does not deal with the archaeological excavations at Pattanam in the work.

⁵⁸ Independent translation

⁵⁹ Silvery's work is dedicated for the use of coming generations of Kodungallur region who are interested in its history and heritage."

a new conceptualisation of Muziris. The MHP and the new discourses on Muziris that it has put forward will be discussed in detail in a separate section. Indications of the cooling down of the popular discontent are evident in the newspaper reports. The question of whether Pattanam is Muziris becomes increasingly infrequent. Even as early as 2007, some of the news reports use ‘Muziris excavations’ as a synonym to ‘Pattanam excavations’ without reference to the debates. Titles of news reports such as “Muziris Utkhananam: Kooduthal Puravasthukal Labhichu” (2007) (Muziris Excavation: More Artefacts found), “Muziris: Pattanath Randam Ghatta Utkhananan Innu Thudangum (2008) (Muziris: The Second Season of Excavations at Pattanam to Begin Today)” are examples. When posed with the question, the archaeologists came to be careful to point out to the press why the debate is a non-issue. Reports also started publishing alternative hypotheses that seek to resolve the Kodungallur-Pattanam binary. Two examples are cited below:

The entry of Pattanam into history was already complete a year ago. Then a huge debate ensued. Is this Muziris? Till then Kodungallur held that claim. There is no point in such debates. Only 10km separate Kodungallur and Pattanam. The researchers advise/suggest that it would suffice to think of a commercial culture with spread over both the banks of the Periyar (“Charitra’the Ivide Kuzhichedukkunu” 2007).⁶⁰

The latest hypothesis of the researchers is that Muziris was a huge urban space with a spread of 30 to 50 square km with Kodungallur as its centre (“Muziris Nagarikathayude” 2008).⁶¹

One also finds that Pattanam begins to be described with reference to its proximity to Kodungallur rather than Paravur (Nair 2007, “Purathanacharithrathin Kooduthal Theliv” 2008) or as a village between Paravur and Kodungallur (“Keralathinte Pauranika Videsha” 2009) suggesting new regional imaginations of territory. These are not changes that occur in a uniform manner. They do not result in a complete replacement of the earlier assumptions and ways of reporting. Rather these are broad trends that are indicative of the resolution of the conflict in the popular discourse.

⁶⁰ Independent translation

⁶¹ Independent translation

3.5. About and Beyond Muziris: The Controversies around Pattanam

Excavations

While we see the toning down of the popular debates on the location of Muziris at one level, they resurface periodically. These resurfacings do not occur in the level of the popular, in the sense that they do not create notable reactions among the local population of either Pattanam or Kodungallur. Nor do they figure prominently in the routine newspaper reports on the excavation. These happen either through organised events or they appear in periodicals, usually weeklies, with successive issues carrying full length articles in the form of arguments and responses. These are supplemented by the letters to the editor published during the course of publication of the debate. The debates are usually multi-stranded, even though the location of Muziris is one of the major strands that feed into and sometimes triggers the other strands. I will trace out two such occasions in some detail here.

A body called the Muziris Heritage Preservation Forum, held a seminar titled ‘Muziris Heritage and Pattanam Excavations: A Critical Review’ on 4 August 2011. In the inaugural address of the seminar, R. Nagaswami⁶² opined that on the basis of the available evidence it is not possible to assert that Pattanam was Muziris. His comments were published with importance in the next day's newspapers. Welcoming the efforts by the KCHR at Pattanam and accepting the significance of the site in maritime trade, Nagaswami added that a number of scholars have believed Kodungalloor to be the location of Muziris. “We have to wait for more excavations. Archaeology requires a lot of evidence. We cannot jump into conclusions. I think there is need to excavate Kodungallur region also and then compare findings” (“Archaeologist Calls for Excavations” 2011).⁶³ Around the same time, a series of articles appeared in different periodicals in Malayalam and one in the editorial page of the *Mathrubhumi* newspaper. The articles were sceptical about the excavations and accused the KCHR team for making tall claims about the potential of the site including pre-mature conclusions about the location of Muziris (Chandran 2011; Namboothiri 2011; Narayanan 2011; Shashibhooshan 2011a, 2011b). Some of the

⁶² R. Nagaswami, we saw, appeared as expert witness for the plaintiffs of Suit 5 in the Ayodhya Case in support of the ASI report.

⁶³ See also, “Muzirisine Kurich Kooduthal” 2011 and Nair 2011.

criticisms were directed against the methodology of excavations (locus-based as opposed to lot-based) and the reliability of the dating methods (Shashibhooshan 2011a). Others suggested alternative hypotheses for the location of Muziris (Chandran 2011). Almost all the essays dealt with textual sources on Muziris and with the archaeological indications, including those from Pattanam *albeit* to discount their explanatory potential. In most of the essays a major effort was to question the credibility of the KCHR as a competent authority to conduct the excavations. The KCHR was accused for misrepresentation of information (Shashibhooshan 2011b), for relying excessively on foreign expertise, ignoring local expertise and authoritative bodies like the ASI (Narayanan 2011; Shashibhooshan 2011a), hijacking the excavations from the CHS (Namboothiri 2011) and for having unholy alliances with the Left Democratic Front (LDF)⁶⁴ ministry that was in power until 2011 (Narayanan 2011, Shashibhooshan 2011a). The criticisms on the institution were mostly unwarranted. For instance, as in the case of any excavation in the country, the ASI is the licensing body in the case of Pattanam excavations also. The ASI renews the licence for excavations if it is satisfied by the report presented on a season's work. But, the KCHR is accused for having denied the ASI the opportunity to excavate, using deceit (Narayanan 2011). The criticisms also sometimes assume the form and language of slander. This is indicated by usages such "unethical intentions", (Shashibhooshan 2011a, 41), "stealth" (Namboothiri 2011) and "treason" (Narayanan 2011, 47) and through the titles of the essays like "Muziris: Ajnathayum Swarthathayum Varuthiya Vina" (Muziris: The Result that Ignorance and Selfishness Brought About) (Narayanan 2011) or "Pattanapraveshathile Kurukku Vazhikal" (The Shortcuts in Making an Entry into the city (Pattanam)) (Shashibhooshan 2011a). Both, the excavations by the KCHR and the MHP commenced during the time when the 12th elected ministry in Kerala which was under the LDF and led by the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI (M)) was in power. In the general elections of April 2011 the new ministry under the Indian National Congress (INC)-led United Democratic Front (UDF) assumed power. The essays also responded to these

⁶⁴ Kerala has two major political fronts, the Left Democratic Front with the Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M) as the largest political party and the United Democratic Front (UDF) with the Indian National Congress as the largest party of the front. The Hindu Right Wing led by the BJP does not have significant presence in the state. There is pattern whereby, the two fronts come to power alternatively in the state every five years.

developments. The LDF is accused for having vested interests in declaring Pattanam to be Muziris, in initiating the tourism project (there is no discussion of what these vested interest might be) and in having the KCHR in charge of the excavations (The KCHR was constituted during the time when the LDF was in power in the state) (Narayanan 2011, Shashibhooshan 2011a). And, the archaeologists are accused for catering to those interests (ibid.). The allocation of funds to Pattanam excavations in the state government budget is another bone of contention (Namboothiri 2011). In the situation of change in the balances of political power, the authors make a call to the new ministry to save the situation (Narayanan 2011) and for the ASI to assume the charge of excavations (Namboothiri 2011a; Narayanan 2011).

To this debate, especially to the insinuations made by Shashibhooshan (2011a) in the *Kalakaumudi*, a response came from the public figure, educationist and critic, Hridayakumari (2011) in a later issue of the same magazine. In the short response titled “Khananam Thudaratte” (Let the Excavations Continue, she quotes from the KCHR publications to point out that the KCHR is not making any conclusive statement on the location of Muziris and draws attention to the significance of the diversity represented in the artefact classes excavated at the site. She asks the critiques, why they consider a particular methodology unreliable and asks the KCHR for details of its collaborations with other institutes in order to address the accusation that it has purposefully kept many experts away. Hridayakumari’s article is a strong appeal not to make uncalled for criticisms and to support hard work and commitment to research which she feels that the KCHR is showing.

A set of responses, which are of particular interest to us, comes from the members of the KCHR team (Cherian 2011a; Krishnan 2011; Rajesh 2011; Shajan 2011). The articles react to the questions posed by the critics in different ways. They talk about how the Muziris-Pattanam equation was only being suggested as a possibility and not as a certainty and why it is a valid hypothesis (Cherian 2011a; Krishnan 2011; Rajesh 2011). It is also suggested that for the discipline it is not the identification in itself that is important, but what the site has to offer in terms of material remains. The article by Cherian (2011a) lists and details the collaborations that the project has with other institutions and individuals. Some of the articles are written in the tone of personal outrage for having been subjected to un-called for criticisms (Krishnan 2011; Rajesh 2011).

A second round of debates were initiated in December 2013 when the *Mathrubhumi* weekly published a lengthy article by historian, M.G.S. Narayanan (2013) titled “Immathiri Charitram Pusthakavum Ini Venda” (We do not Want a History or a Book of this Kind Anymore) (independent translation). The article is in the form of a lengthy book review of one of the glossy tourism booklets (*Muziris Past Perfect n.d.*) published by the Kerala State Institute for Children's Literature (KSICL)⁶⁵ on behalf of the MHP. Narayanan treats the publication as a historical text which is expected to have a certain adherence to authenticity and method in history writing. The essay devotes more than a page to the Pattanam excavations. Narayanan criticises the assertion in the brochure that the Pattanam excavations gave evidences for Muziris because the excavation reports do not indicate that “either the name Muziris-Muciri or any parts of the ships there” (Narayanan 2013, 14) were found in the excavations. He repeats his criticisms of the KCHR that he raised two years before (2011) and suggests that the government use the expertise of others, especially of the ASI, to make further enquiries on the issue.

The article triggered another long debate in the print media especially through the subsequent volumes of the *Mathrubhumi* weekly. The participants in the debate included, apart from Narayanan (2014a, 2014b), the MLA from Paravur, V.D. Satheeshan (2014) (UDF), Former *naxalite* and social activist K. Venu (2014a, 2014b, 2014c), P.J. Cherian (2014), historian Rajan Gurukkal (2014a, 2014b) as well as readers of the magazine responding through the letters to the editor. Some of the initial responses like that of Satheeshan (2014) and two letters to the editor⁶⁶ in the *Mathrubhumi Aazhchapathippu* (Vol 91, Issue 43) (Paul 2014, George 2014) takes up the questions related to the MHP that Narayanan (2013) raised in his article. But gradually the focus of the debate shifts entirely to the Pattanam excavation. Satheeshan (2014) clarifies that the archaeological excavations are but one part of the heritage project. The criticisms made by Narayanan (2013), for him are un-academic and made in the spirit of a “family feud” (Satheeshan 2014, 78). On the Pattanam-Muziris identification he notes that, “No one has reached upon any sort of conclusion that Muziris was in Paravur; but, there is enough evidence to suggest that an active

⁶⁵ The KSICL is in charge of the official publications for the MHP by Government order GO(P) NO.225/2009/TSM dated 03October 2009. Government of Kerala

⁶⁶ The section is titled ‘Vayanakkar Ezhuthunu’ (translates at ‘The Readers Write’)

port town was spread over an area without being centred on a particular locale” (ibid.).⁶⁷ The second response to the article in the subsequent issue of the weekly by K. Venu (2014a) examines the different criticisms made by Narayanan (2013). He suggests that the efforts to discount the Pattanam excavations are premeditated and coming from the need to protect a particular perspective of Kerala history as propounded by historians including Narayanan. This perspective holds that there is nothing of significance in the history of Kerala prior to *circa* 9th century CE. He also criticises the attempt to discredit the excavations on the basis of a tourism booklet as unbecoming of an academician. Venu is uneasy about the interest of the Left parties in the KCHR and the possibilities of that influencing the organisational make-up of the Council. But, he is weary of Narayanan’s characterization of the excavations and the MHP as parts and products of a left conspiracy. Venu gives his observations on the relevance of the finds from Pattanam based on site-visits and reports and considers the KCHR as capable of conducting the excavations.

Narayanan’s retort to these two articles took the clear tone of a challenge in its title, “Pattanam Muziris Alla; Aanenkil Theliyikko” (Pattanam is not Muziris; If Otherwise, Prove It) (Narayanan 2014a). It also resulted in a total shift in the focus of the debates to the excavations. Narayanan makes a stronger case in this response for Pattanam not being Muziris, restating the inadequacy of the evidence unearthed. He puts forth an alternative hypothesis that while there are no indications of a unified Kerala state or of large scale urbanisation in the period, what existed in Pattanam was a centre (emporium) for foreign merchants and manufacturers and traders of semi-precious stones. Reiterating the accusation that the KCHR is usurping the excavation license from the ASI, he further adds that the significant Left presence in the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) ministry at the centre during the time allowed for this hijacking. The accusations take a personal character through sarcastic remarks on his critics.⁶⁸ Venu’s response (2014b) to the above essay (Narayanan 2014a) is titled

⁶⁷ Independent translation

⁶⁸ “... this also gives an indication of the levels of literacy of the leaders (here Satheeshan) of the national party (here the Indian National Congress (INC)) that is heading the country...The Kerala society is indebted to Satheeshan for his honest acceptance of guilt and thus making his role in the Marxist- communist betrayal of the public clear” (Narayanan 2014a, 60).“I hope that K. Venu will dissuade from his immature adventurism when it concerns archaeology just as he left the political

“MGSinteth Nirutharavadithwam” (What MGS is Showing is Irresponsibility) where he accuses Narayanan for making false statements regarding the excavations. He finds the insinuation that the ASI is kept deliberately out of the project, contrary to logic. He reverses the accusation, without naming individuals, that there was external pressure on the ASI not to give the license to the KCHR. Venu argues that the evidence from Pattanam is adequate to indicate urbanisation. This urbanisation is also indigenous in character as indicated by the prolific presence of local artefacts. He is reproachful of Narayanan’s position that the society of the time was semi-tribal in character. “It is a shame to think that those who roam around as historians of Kerala are a scholarly group with this much disdain towards the heritage of the Malayalee society”⁶⁹ (Venu 2014a, 25). In the subsequent volume of the weekly P.J.Churian also enters into the fray. His essay (Churian 2014) is titled “Thelivund; Ini Velivaan Pratheekshikkunath” (There is Evidence; Now what is Expected is Some Sense). As the title indicates the essay is a direct response to Narayanan’s challenge about the Pattanam-Muziris equation (2013b). He discredits Narayanan’s articles as lacking the necessary restraints that a public interaction should have as demanded by decency, honesty and scientific thought. The essay is an effort to counter the criticisms raised against the author’s non-archaeology background and accusations of his making unsubstantiated claims about the site. It describes in detail the author’s association with archaeology in the course of his career. He discusses the incidents of enthusiastic responses that the excavations generated abroad as opposed to the responses in Kerala. Whether Pattanam is Muziris is an archaic question as far as present day archaeology is concerned. A site should be studied for its archaeological potential and not for its association with an ancient place name. Churian reiterates the importance of the site in terms of the quantity and diversity of finds from there. He narrates an incident at an international conference in which he participated where the identification was considered to be beyond doubt by the scholars (ibid., 24). The contention that Kerala was an uncivilised society prior to the 9th century CE results from a narrow approach. He stresses the importance of interdisciplinarity in research that is practiced in Pattanam. He marks the manner in which the Pattanam excavations

adventurism of his Naxal years” (ibid., 64) (Independent translation).

⁶⁹ Independent translation

have become part of the public culture, like in literature and art⁷⁰ as legitimate ways in which a thinking public should interact with archaeological evidence (ibid., 27). We have two letters to the editor in response to the second set of articles. The first (Gopimani 2014) argues that the whole debate is unnecessary as history and archaeology are complementing disciplines and presents a passionate case for interdisciplinarity in research thereby attesting the arguments that Cherian (2014) makes. The second letter (Harishankar 2014) criticises the positions taken by the KCHR and P.J. Cherian and raises specific criticisms on the nature of evidence, arguments made by the KCHR and practices at the Pattanam excavations. Narayanan wrote another response (2014b) of roughly the same nature as the previous one along with certain elaborations. In order to challenge the view put forth by Narayanan (2013, 2014a, 2014b), Venu, in a short response (2014c), clarified his positions once again and withdrew from the debate. Here, Venu briefly cites his communication with Wendy Morrison, who headed the team from Oxford that participated in the 2014 season of excavations at Pattanam and Gurukkal (2014a) regarding the limited role of local communities in early maritime interactions at Pattanam. He points out that this is an aspect that merits serious discussions. Venu ends the article with a clarification that his participation in the debate was “as an ordinary *Malayali* citizen who is neither a historian nor an archaeologist” (Venu 2014c, 81). The two essays by Rajan Gurukkal (2014a, 2014b) are of a different vein. The first (2014a) appeared in the *Mathrubhumi* weekly alongside Narayanan’s third article. It was titled “Vivadapriyare Vizhayathilekku Kadakkoo” (Controversy-Lovers, get into the Subject). It begins with an observation that the subject has not been academically dealt with in any of the articles that appeared so far. Gurukkal endorses the Pattanam-Muziris identification. He moves on to discuss how the extensive disturbances of the site have affected its stratigraphy and the nature of evidence that the site has yielded that far. Pattanam was an embarking-disembarking point for maritime trade, a *bazaar* and a temporary stay for foreign merchants (ibid., 28). For him, the archaeological material unearthed and the identification of Muziris represent two different levels of knowledge. The indications from the site do not bring in any fundamental changes to the current understanding about trade and the social history of ancient Kerala and the argument for urbanisation on their basis is an exaggerated one. Gurukkal’s (2014b) second

⁷⁰ These aspects will be discussed in detail later in the chapter.

article was in a different publication called the *Bhashaposhini*. This was a lengthy study based on the archaeology of Pattanam, physiographic changes and Greco-Roman sources. Gurukkal reiterates and elaborates his earlier arguments here and approaches Narayanan's arguments academically to discount the latter's claims that Pattanam is not Muziris.

I have dealt with these debates in some detail because they open up the discussion to certain important aspects from a Public Archaeology perspective. First, the space that the periodicals provide where the debate unfolds is different from those we saw in Sections 3 and 4. This is a space reserved for a reading public that is more exclusive. The debates are not routine. The magazines have a more restricted reach than newspapers. Unlike a single news item or an advertisement flex, the reader has to have an active interest in the issue in order to participate or follow the debate. On the other hand, the space is much more inclusive than that offered by the academia in a strict sense, that is, it is more public. The archaeological excavations become a subject matter in an exchange where the archaeologist has to engage with historians, public personalities, politicians as well as lay readers.⁷¹ The nature of the exchange itself is very different from say an essay in a peer-reviewed academic journal. We Archaeology is enmeshed in these discussions with other strands including, among others, the larger political atmosphere in which archaeology is practiced, personal and organisational credibility of the people involved directly or indirectly with the excavations and the context in which the excavation is located like that of the heritage project. We see that individuals who are not part of academic archaeology and history (Hridayakumari 2011; Satheeshan 2014; Venu 2014a, 2014b, 2014c) also actively engage with and interpret archaeological data and explore its explanatory potential. However, they recognise their location as different from that of the academic archaeologist or historians (Hridayakumari 2011; Venu 2014c). Even in this less academically defined space, the academician is expected to adhere to certain codes of conduct. Perceived failings in this regard are reproached as unbecoming of the academician. The implicit reproach in Gurukkal's appeal to the "Controversy lovers"

⁷¹ It should be noted that all the four letters to editor discussed in this section are from people with advanced level of higher education as indicated by epithets like "Dr." and "Prof." alongside their names. But it is not uncommon for people with lesser academic qualifications also to be part of the different issues that the periodicals under discussion deal with.

to get back into what is relevant (2014a) and the strict academic tone that he assumes in his articles (2014a, 2014b) are also indicative of this.

The responses of the archaeologist him/herself are also mediated through these multiple strands of discussion. In the articles by Cherian and the Pattanam team discussed above, unlike the objective tone of the interim reports or the publications on Pattanam in academic journals, they take the tones of self-justification, testaments of credibility and moral outrage. The discussions on the excavations themselves are sometimes side-lined to bring in other contextual aspects of practicing archaeology into the fore. These aspects, if at all they are discussed in the academia, usually are relegated to alternate compartments like that of Public Archaeology. Thus, the filters operating in a strict academic space that necessitate certain conventions and the exclusion or separation of certain kinds of discussion are less well-defined in spaces as the above. In the confines of the academia, the researcher is only allowed to draw upon certain repositories to pose an argument. For instance, the Pattanam-Muziris equation is hypothesised on the basis of the physiographic and archaeological data in these publications. But in the quasi-academic space of the periodicals Cherian (2014) is able to use an anecdotal reference of the attestation of the excavation at an international conference to strengthen the same argument. The articles sometimes draw upon the special demands of archaeological field practice, such as physical labour (Dineesh 2011). This serves to counter the unwarranted criticisms posed and to highlight the specialised nature of the discipline. The arguments also draw upon repositories unrelated to the excavations or the discipline in a more general sense. Cherian (2014) for instance, uses caste as a simile to disciplinary boundaries in his defence of interdisciplinarity and his own legitimate location in archaeology. The criticisms against the excavations are here allocated to the realm of pre-modern (like caste) as opposed to the author's location as a modern subject.

3.6. Whose Pasts are we Digging Out? Issues of Identity around the Pattanam Excavations

During the 2012 field season, a family of four from Hyderabad visited the Pattanam excavation site. It was a middle class family with two children and the parents employed in the government sector. The middle-aged man in the group went straight

to the co-director of excavations and requested, “Could you please show us the Bible that St. Thomas brought?” Taken aback, the archaeologist explained patiently that the site had not yielded material with religious association of any kind. She went on to describe the nature of the site and the artefacts and told the visitors that they were free to go and observe the excavations from the vicinity of the trenches. “But, our tour operator said this is the place where St. Thomas disembarked”. The man connected the tour operator over his mobile phone and requested the archaeologist to speak with him. She was asked by the operator to confirm his theory so that the visitors are satisfied. The archaeologist declined the request and the family after observing the excavations for a while, left, dispirited. I was witness to this incident as part of the excavation team in the 2012 season. While the maximum attention that the Pattanam excavations received was around the question of its identification with Muziris and the territorial claims and counterclaims to the past that it effected, the above incident opens up our discussions to other types of associations made with the site at a popular level. There has been a popular association of the site with Christianity. It also became an issue of political contention. Before going into the details, I will examine what allows for the association, however infrequent, of the site with Christianity.

The presence of the Semitic religions in the south-west coast of India (what roughly corresponds to present day Kerala) dates well back into the pre-colonial times and is closely associated with the maritime trade relations of the period. A tradition that is prevalent among the Syrian Christians or *Nasranis* of Kerala is that Christianity was introduced to the coast by St. Thomas, one of the twelve apostles of Jesus Christ. St. Thomas, the tradition says, arrived in Kodungallur in CE 52. He converted some Brahmin families in the region and established seven churches. (Logan 1887; Mackenzie 1901; Menon 1911; Visvanathan 1995). Some of the accounts mention the place that St. Thomas landed as Maliankara/Malankara near Kodungallur (Hosten 1931; Innes 1908; Pothen 1963).

See the following excerpt from the *Thomas Ramban Pattu*.⁷²

...The way in which the religion of the son of God came to Kerala

⁷² The *Thomas Ramban Pattu* (The song of Thomas Ramban) is a ceremonial song which is traditionally believed to have been composed by the first disciple of the Apostle St. Thomas. “In its present design it is possibly a 16th century reinterpretation.” (Visvanathan 1995, 27)

I by the grace of God, here sing that in a simple manner
St. Thomas, my namesake, the great teacher of the religion of grace
(He) in company of Avan the agent of King Cholan,
Embarked in Arabia, and arrived at Malyankara-
Know this, I shall tell you- in December of the year 50 of the Messiah.
There, by miraculous deeds, in eight days he established the religion...⁷³

We also see the reproduction of a similar narrative in the *Margamkali Pattu*.⁷⁴ On reaching the coast the Apostle, says the tradition, established seven churches on the coast before proceeding to Mylapore (Innes 1908; Logan 1887). These were at Kodungallur, Kollam, Chayal, Niranam, Kokkamangalam, Palayur and Paravur (Kottakavu) (Logan 1887; Visvanathan 1995). Below is the excerpt from the *Margamkali Pattu* that talks about the establishment of the seven churches by the Apostle.

Thus he preached and thereafter erected crosses at Quilon,⁷⁵
Niranam, Kokkamangalam, Kottakayal,⁷⁶ the hilly place called Chayal
At Palur then at Cranganore, the King's seat- these seven (places).

(Hosten 1931, 524)

The St. Thomas myth is a “living tradition” (Visvanathan 1995, 27) that is reproduced at the level of popular belief continuing into the present times. The tradition forms

⁷³ This is a 1926 translation of the *Thomas Ramban Pattu* by T.K. Joseph as reproduced by Hosten (1931, 520).

⁷⁴ *Margam kali* is a form of dance performed in group by the Syrian Christians of Kerala. The *Margamkali Pattu* is the song to which *margam kali* is performed. It “describes the introduction of the *marga*, or the Christian path or way of worship in Kerala.” (Visvanathan 1995, 27). Here the 1926 translation of *margamkali pattu* by T.K. Joseph is used. The arrival of St. Thomas is described thus: “...and hearing of the Kerala (Malabar) country,/ went thither along with his great fame/ reached Maliyavunkara with a village close by and resided there./ He (Apostle Thomas) preached religion to the chief men of the village...” (Hosten 1931, 524)

⁷⁵ Anglicized name for Kollam

⁷⁶ Kottakavu (Paravur)

part of the *kudumbacharitrans* (family histories) of different Christian families in Kerala who associate their past with the account. This is either through a general invocation of the tradition as part of the history of the Syrian Christians of Kerala (Alexander 1991; Jacob 2011; Kulathakkal Kudumbayoga Committee 1974; Tharu and Zacariah 1995) or through a claim to more direct links. The history of the Puthenparambil family begins with these words: “This work is the history of Puthenparambil family, a branch of Pakalomattom family which was one among the Brahmin families of,... ,who were brought into Christian faith directly by Apostle St. Thomas”⁷⁷ (Kudumbacharitra Committee 2000). The story is also evoked as part of tradition stories of different churches.⁷⁸

Thus, Kodungallur is of immense significance to the tradition accounts and beliefs of the Syrian Christians of Kerala as the location where St. Thomas landed in Kerala and established one of his seven churches. A later significance is also attached to Kodungallur. This is associated with the legend of the arrival of a Syrian merchant, Thomas of Cana there, in the 4th century CE along with a colony of 400 Christians who were welcomed by the ruler, Cheraman Perumal to settle in the land. They were granted a set of 72 privileges (Joseph 1931; Innes 1908; Logan 1887). One of the seven churches to be established by St. Thomas is believed to be in Kodungallur. At Azhikode, five km to the east of Kodungallur, there is a Catholic shrine called the Marthoma Smrithitarangam. It is an important centre of pilgrimage which houses a relic acquired in the year 1953 believed to be that of St. Thomas. A research publication that was brought out in 2000 by this shrine calls Kodungallur the “Cradle of Christianity in India” (Menachery and Chakkalakkal 2000, front cover).

⁷⁷ Independent translation

⁷⁸ Below is an excerpt from the brochure of the St. Thomas Forane Church, Kottakavu, North Paravur,
 The Kottakavu church of Vadakkan Paravur in the Diocese of Ernakulam is the first among the seven churches established by the disciple of Christ Apostle *Mar Thoma* in A.D. 52. When Apostle Thomas reached Kottakavu the temple festival was on. He spoke of Christ to the people and they ridiculed him. Then a storm broke out...Many accepted the faith and desired that a cross be erected as symbol of their faith...The old church is on the location where this cross was erected

The title of the brochure describes the church as “*Bharathathile Prathama Kraisthava Devalayam (AD52)*” (The First Christian Church in India (AD52))

In many of the tradition accounts described above, Muziris and Kodungallur/Maliyankara are used interchangeably or as synonyms as the location on the coast where St. Thomas disembarked in CE 52. The brochure of the Azhikode Marthoma Smrithilayam for instance says it was Azhikode-Kodungallur area which was known by the name Muziris that was witness to the historical event of the arrival of Apostle Thomas to India (*Marthoma Smrithitarangam* n.d.) Muziris is a frequent presence in a similar manner in the *kudumbacharitrans* also (Alexander 1991; Jacob 2011; Kudumbacharitra Committee 2000; Kulathakkal Kudumbayoga Committee 1974). Thus Pattanam can be associated with the St. Thomas tradition as it could be the location of Muziris, where St. Thomas is believed to have landed in CE 52.

In the 2007 season, among the visitors who came to the site was a Catholic priest. On seeing the remains of the log boat that was being excavated from Trench PT07V he remarked that those were the remains of the boat on which St. Thomas arrived.⁷⁹ Dineesh Krishnan, one of the archaeologists who have worked at the site from 2004, remembers a group of nuns and a church-based tour group that visited the site from Kothamangalam in 2012 associating the site with the arrival of St. Thomas.⁸⁰ The first instance of the Catholic priest is especially interesting. He makes a direct association of the evidence that he encounters at the site (the log boat), with a tradition narrative of history which is part of his belief system (the arrival of Apostle Thomas by means of boat/ship at Muziris). His response is comparable to the stories that the local residents tell at Pattanam that we discussed above where the archaeological material is incorporated and becomes significant to an existing lore. In this latter case while this incorporation allows the narrative to remain largely undisturbed, in the former, it allows the strengthening of a tradition.

Establishing a direct link between the archaeological materials and the tradition accounts is not always necessary for effecting the Christian association of the site. The incident discussed above might in fact be unique in that aspect. One possible reason for this is that the significance attached to Muziris in the tradition accounts, like those found in the family histories, is not ecclesiastical. Muziris invariably comes into discussion as part of the long history of maritime commercial interaction of the

⁷⁹ Personal observation by the author as part of the excavation team

⁸⁰ Personal interview with Dineesh Krishnan on 24 April 2013 at Pattanam

west coast with West Asia and the Mediterranean. Hence, the absence of material with any direct religious significance does not preclude the possibility of associating the site with these accounts. To take an example, Pattanam finds mention in the family history of the Kadavettoor Kottacad family (Koshy 2011) in the section 'Trade with the Near East'. The book says that the present day Pattanam was close to Muziris as confirmed by the archaeologists who found evidence for the settlement from the site. It also uses the *Tabula Peutingeriana*⁸¹ to stress the importance of Muziris as a port of trade. In the section on 'Christianity in India' it is mentioned that Apostle Thomas is believed to have landed in Muziris, but "there is no remaining evidence of this first Christian teacher" (Koshy 2011, 36).

At a formal level the Syrian Christian churches or groups of Kerala have not attributed religious significance to Pattanam. The interest, when expressed by them, occurs mostly at an academic level. This could be through allowing publication space or through organising seminars on the theme and has to be understood in the context where there is a strong link between the Christian churches and modern education in Kerala. A triennial conference of the Southern India Branch of the Church History Association of India held on 17-19 October, 2009 in Thrissur organised a panel discussion on "Muziris Heritage and Pattanam Excavations". P.J.Cherian told me that a number of Christian institutions have shown interest in inviting him to do presentations on the excavations. While in a few cases he has rejected the invitations on account of the politically motivated character or identity associations they make, most of these seminars offer platform for a scientific discourse on the excavations without expectations for making religion-based associations.⁸² Even so, the nature of these spaces is such that they allow the discussions to be framed in certain ways that might not be possible in other contexts. For instance an article by Cherian (2011b) in Malayalam in the *Festschrift* published in honour of Rev. Dr. Joseph Mar Thoma Metropolitan is titled "*Pattanam Puravasthuthelivukalum Keralathinta Adima Kraisthava Charitravum* (Archaeological Evidence from Pattanam and the Early History of Christianity in Kerala). Unlike what the title suggests the article does not

⁸¹ *Tabula Peutingeriana* (Peutinger Table) is a Roman map (*itinerarium*), the original of which is believed to be from circa 4th to 5th century CE. Only copies of the same from the medieval period are available.

⁸² Personal interview with P.J. Cherian 24 April 2013 at Pattanam

seek to forge any direct connection between the archaeology of Pattanam and the early history of Christianity in Kerala. However, it discusses ideas like the importance of myths and lores in the absence of other forms of evidence and the possibility of travel of ideas alongside artefacts. The author says that, while more evidence might be needed, one cannot discount the possibility of the Apostle coming to the coast by means of a trading vessel (ibid., 305). We see that the article makes speculations and hypothetical connections between the two themes- the early history of Christianity in Kerala and the Pattanam excavations - that are completely absent in all the other publications by the researchers associated with Pattanam. It is in this particular space of publication offered by the *Festschrift* that two themes with no obvious connections come to be discussed together.

From the 8 to the 13 of September 2013, I attended an international seminar at the Christ College, Irinjalakkuda, Thrissur District Kerala, on the theme *Imperial, Rome Indian Ocean Regions and Muziris: Recent Researches and New Perspectives on Maritime Trade*. The seminar was jointly organised by the Institute for Research in Social Sciences and Humanities (IRISH),⁸³ Nirmalagiri, the Marthoma Research Academy (MRA), Azhikode, the Christ College and the ASI. The stated aim of the conference was to address the “differences of opinion” that exist in relation to the Pattanam excavations and the “hypothetical identification of the site with Muziris” by evaluating the findings from the site “against the other Roman sites ‘in the Indian Ocean region’ without entering into “*any controversial discussions*.”^{84,85} The seminar saw the participation of archaeologists and historians from India and abroad working on specific archaeological sites including Pattanam or in the broad theme of maritime trade. The MRA, one of the organisers of the seminar, is a research organisation of the Marthoma Pontifical Shrine. This is an organisation that started with aim to provide “*intellectual support to the pilgrim*”⁸⁶ who comes to the shrine” (MRA nd) where the relic of Apostle Thomas is preserved. The inaugural address of the seminar delivered

⁸³ IRISH is an independent social science research institute and a research centre of the Kannur University, Kerala. Maritime commerce and interactions is one of its areas of interest

⁸⁴ Emphasis mine

⁸⁵ As given in the section titled “Scope of the Seminar” in the souvenir released on the occasion.

⁸⁶ Emphasis mine

by Rev. Fr. Joseph Thottiyil is especially illuminative of the nature of the church's interest in Pattanam excavations.

Muziris cannot be forgotten...It is through this very same sea port (Muziris) that three great religions of the world-Judaism, Christianity and Islam- reached the shores of India...and all the three religions established themselves in the Kodungallur area where the sea port of Muziris was located. Hence, any research on Muziris will be of interest not only to the historians or archaeologists but also to the people of these three different religions. As far as Christianity is concerned it has great interest in research related to Muziris and Kodungallur, because it believes that it was through Kodungallur that St. Thomas brought the light of faith to India...The names Kodungallur and Muziris have been synonymous over the years. After the archaeological excavations carried out in the area (Pattanam) from 2007-2011, I understand that people have differences of opinion about the real location of Muziris. What that means is we need to do more extensive research which will shed more light to the history of our people⁸⁷

His words highlight a particular aspect of the church's interest in Pattanam. The history of Christianity in the coast, as gleaned through the traditions, is understood as a given. The new insights provided by the excavations are relevant in so far as they add on to the details of this existing understanding. The absence of material with religious signification from Pattanam is conducive to maintaining this compartmentalization of belief and academics. Rev. Fr. Jose Frank, Convenor of the MRA expressed a similar view in my personal interview with him. He said that the excavations related to Muziris were scientific and had no connection whatsoever with religious belief. The excavations would gain such significance only if they yield material with clear religious association, a cross or the like. Similarly he was dismissive of my observation that the site was attracting visitors due to religious reasons as well. For him scientific curiosity is the only reason that attracts the visitors to the site.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ Personal observation as participant in the international seminar on "Imperial, Rome Indian Ocean Regions and Muziris: Recent Researches and New perspectives on Maritime Trade" held at Christ Collge, Irinjalakkuda from 8-13 September 2013.

⁸⁸ Personal interview with Fr. Jose Frank, convenor MRA, Azhikode on 27 October 2013 at Azhikode, Kerala

Another notable feature of the popular and formal Christian associations with Pattanam is that these are not affected by the dominant presence of the territorial conflicts around its identification with Muziris in the public sphere. Even though the Muziris-Kodungallur equation is an important part of the St. Thomas tradition, the ‘shift’ in location of Muziris from Kodungallur to Paravur does not cause any serious rupture. One possible reason for this is that, the Kottakavu church, which is believed to be one among the seven churches established by the Apostle, is located in close proximity to Pattanam. Thus the understanding of Kodungallur and Paravur as separate regional entities which is integral to present territorial imaginations does not seem to work in a similar manner in the case of the Christian associations of Pattanam. By virtue of its proximity to different sites with traditional (Kodungallur) and current (Azhikode and Kottakavu) significance to Syrian Christianity, Pattanam can easily fit into the territorial imaginations of the Syrian Christian past.

Despite the tendency of the Syrian Christian organisations to allocate their interest in the archaeology of Pattanam to the realm of the scientific, the perception of the popular association of the site with Christianity sparked off antagonism from the Hindu Right. It also became a political tool to discredit the excavations and the KCHR. While the resentment has largely been channelled through media, there was a singular incident from Pattanam that merits attention. In the 2007 season, the site was visited by a high ranking officer of the Indian Navy. The officer was a person with a tall and broad physique and fair complexion. He was dressed in shorts, shirt and sneakers. He was also a North Indian and hence communicated with the archaeologists and others on site in English. Some of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) supporters made an issue out of his visit and portrayed it as an attempt by Christians to hijack the excavations. This occurred because they thought the visitor was a *sayipp* (the Malayalam appellation for a white foreigner). The accusations came through a short circuiting whereby Christianity was rendered to the realm of the foreign (read, the west) and a white foreigner thus became the representative of the west and thereby of Christianity. Here we see the popular image of the foreigner working together with a right wing perception of Christianity as foreign to the region. This constitutes a narrative of conspiracy to hijack the heritage of the place from the “legitimate” (Hindu) owners.⁸⁹ Apart from the few incidents narrated above,

⁸⁹ Personal observation by the author, as part of the 2007 excavation team at Pattanam

association of the site with religion has not been a major issue at a local level at Pattanam. In the interviews I conducted among the locals and wage labourers from the area I have had only a single respondent who associated with the site with St. Thomas. This middle-aged respondent, Lilly, a resident of the Vadakkekara panchayat, MPRA area, had no direct interaction with the excavations and had never visited the site.⁹⁰

Attacks of a more organised kind by the Hindu right wing occurred primarily through opinions expressed *via* media. A few instances are discussed below. Two articles came out in the *Organiser*, the official mouthpiece of the RSS in 2011 (Special Correspondent, *Organiser* 2011, Chandrasekhar 2011). These articles accused that the archaeological exercises at Pattanam were part of the “the left-church conspiracy to shift Muziris from Kodungallur to Paravur, with the evil intention of legitimising the myth of St Thomas’s visit to Paravur” (Chandrasekhar 2011, 42). They alleged that the former government led by the CPI (M) and the left historians have vested interest in shifting the location of Muziris from Kodungallur to Paravur. The depiction of Muziris as the location of a composite culture was perceived as a ploy to erase the “Hindu” past. Accusations of a similar nature were voiced through websites and blogs also. The website “Haindava Keralam” is one of the portals that hosted a number of such articles and newsfeeds (“Haindava Keralam” nd). There is also an independent blog with Hindu Right wing leanings, called “Pattanam: Ideology, Abuse and Archaeology” (n.d.) which is a campaign against the excavations with a focused attack on the alleged St. Thomas connections of the site.

In all these accusations, the effort is to delegitimize the St. Thomas connection through superficial allegations of conspiracy theories. We also see targeted attacks on individuals associated with the excavations. For instance, one of the articles that appeared in “Haindava Keralam” accuses among others associated with the KCHR, P.J.Cherien and historian and then, Chairman of the KCHR, K. N. Panikkar, for their “blind commitment to the Marxist Party” (Issac 2011). Cherian is a name usually used by Christians in Kerala. In an article he is referred to as “Christian fraudster” (“Pattanam Excavations–Another” 2011). Such abusive use of identity appellations

⁹⁰ Personal interview with Lilly, Vadakkekara panchayat on 22 October 2013 at her residence

become a means to discredit the individuals associated with the excavations⁹¹. Unlike the other associations made with and debates that sprung around Pattanam excavations that I have discussed so far, the criticisms made by the RSS through the *Organiser* and the Hindu Right through the new media does not engage with the archaeological excavations in any manner. The engagement is bypassed and replaced by targeted slandering where the religious identity of the archaeologist also comes to be questioned.

The responses from the political Hindu Right to the perceived Christian link to the site have taken a more organized nature over the years. A Hindu Right Wing organization, Bharateeya Vichara Kendram (BVK), functioning from Thiruvananthapuram in Kerala has been active in their attacks on the Pattanam excavations. With the BJP coming into power in the centre through 2014 elections, the BVK began to channel its discontent with the excavations through official means. The BVK sent memoranda to the Union Minister for Culture on the issue (Nair 2015, Press Trust of India (PTI) 2016, Roshan 2017) and as a follow up the ASI was directed by the ministry to conduct an enquiry on the complaints (PTI 2016, Roshan 2017). License for the excavations were not renewed for the year 2016.

3.7. Brand Muziris: Archaeology and the Constitution of Muziris as a Brand

We have seen that in the years that followed the initiation of archaeological excavations at Pattanam, the word Muziris has entered the public imagination in a major way. One indication of this is visible in the informal interactions with the public in Kerala. I have observed that people, except those from the immediate locality, seldom recognize the place name Pattanam. On the mention of archaeology, I am immediately asked if I have any association with Muziris. A more tangible expression is the word Muziris acquiring the status of brand. We saw how commercial establishments, a Residents' Association and even a *panchayat* ward in Pattanam have adopted the name Muziris. Even prior to the excavations there was occasional use of the name as in the case of the Muziris Bakery in Kodungallur. With the excavations

⁹¹P.J. Cherian also made the observation that the Christian identity associated with his name was a major target of attack in the criticisms that came up from the Hindu Right wing. (Personal interview with P.J. Cherian 24 April 2013 at Pattanam)

the use has become more prevalent and it occurs across a wider geography. One encounters a number of such cases if one travels in the Kodungallur-Paravur belt. To take a few examples, in the 2009 Onam season a number of discount sales in Paravur were named after Muziris. We have the Muziris Natural Fibre emporium at Kottapuram on the Paravur-Kodungallur stretch of the National Highway - 17. This was established nine years ago. Across the road from the Cheraman Juma Masjid Kodungallur, there is mutual fund group run by the Muziris Cultural Society. There are two private educational establishments by the name Muziris College, one at the Kottapuram Toll Junction (See Figure 3.4) and the other at Kothaparambu, Kodungallur. At V.P. Thuruth, Kottapuram we have a second Muziris Residents' Association. The boat M.B. Muziris ferries regularly between Cherai and Azhikode. Similarly there are Muziris tourism festivals and Muziris boat races. Away from the Paravur- Kodungallur belt, at Kochi, about 30 km South of Pattanam also there is a Fort Muziris Hotel.



Figure 3.4. Muziris College, Kottapuram Toll Junction (Photo: Author 2013)

As a brand name Muziris is thus highly flexible and can go with a wide range of commercial establishments and programs (see Figure 3.5). While the proliferation of brand Muziris has occurred alongside and as a consequence of the public discourse on

Muziris generated by the Pattanam excavations, rarely does this type of branding require making any direct reference to the excavations themselves.

One interesting exception to this is the Indriya Beach Resorts and Spa (hereafter Indriya), Cherai, a five star resort owned by the ABC Group of companies. The Cherai Beach is located less than three km west-south west of Pattanam as the crow flies. The Indriya's website ("Cherai Beach Resort and Spa" n.d.) has a page on Muziris where there is a short write-up on the excavations. The Pattanam excavation site is also listed under the 'Places to Visit'. More interesting is the naming of the different facilities that the Indriya offers for its visitors. One of its banquet halls is named 'Pattanam'. Another multi-purpose meeting space is named 'Amphorae'. While both these names are drawn directly from the excavations, it also uses appellations related to Muziris like Sangam and Yavanapriya⁹² for designated areas.



Fig 3.5: Muziris as Brand name (Photo: Author 2017)

Two instances where Muziris has played out as a brand on a grand scale are the Muziris Heritage Project (MHP) and the Kochi Muziris Biennale (KMB). The section will now discuss these two in detail as occasions where Muziris becomes a global heritage brand. The process has to be understood against the fundamental changes that the idea of heritage has undergone in the last few decades alongside the emergence of

⁹² The word *yavanapriya* refers to black pepper. It means loved by the *yavanas* or the Greeks

a global modernity. This is a dialectical process that “transports heritage from origins which are local or related to the nation state towards clearly global dimensions from which local dimensions are reconfigured” (Hernández i Martí 2006, 96). The shift has been fuelled and propelled in the last few decades by multiple agents, in addition to and transcending the state or national ones. These include civil society or identity groups that evoke local heritage for identity and political assertions and supranational agents like the UNESCO that imagines a generic community of humankind with a shared heritage. A major role is also played by the increased commercial interests in heritage as a global commodity, often associated with tourism. Contexts as these often demand creation/(re)appropriations of historical narratives. The MHP and the KMB are two such contexts where particular imaginations of Muziris are put forth in relation to its constitution as a global heritage destination. The focus of the following discussion is to understand how archaeology forms part of such constitutions of global heritage destinations.

3.7.a. The Muziris Heritage Project: Archaeology in the Making of a Global Heritage Tourism Destination

Background

The MHP is a heritage-tourism initiative launched by the Government of Kerala in the year 2006. As the name indicates, conceptually, the project centres on the idea of Muziris and has the stated aim to “reinstatement the historical and cultural significance of the legendary port of Muziris” (Department of Tourism n.d.a). The entry of Kerala into the world tourism map happened in the late 1980s. The state declared tourism as an industry in 1986 and the first tourism policy of the state was announced in 1995, underlining “the importance of Public-Private Partnership” (Department of Tourism 2011, 2). In 1999, the *National Geographic Traveller* included Kerala in the special edition of their print magazine *Fifty Places of a Lifetime* (National Geographic 2009). It was also listed by the same magazine as one of the ‘ten paradises in the world’. Following this, the Department of Tourism adopted the phrase ‘God’s Own Country’ as synonymous with the state in its promotion as a global brand. The brand ‘God’s own Country’ has focused primarily on natural heritage (backwaters, beaches, waterfalls, hill stations etc.) laced with forms of ‘cultural heritage’ including *Ayurvedic* rejuvenation programmes, art forms and festivals. Kerala’s tourism

initiatives have been centred primarily on the international market since the nineties. The focus on the global market and private partnership initiatives are underlined by the entry of Kerala in 2000 as a partner state in the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC)⁹³, a non-governmental forum for the business leaders in the Travel and Tourism industry. It is against this backdrop that the Department of Tourism, Government of Kerala launched the MHP in 2006. The MHP represents a shift of focus from the branding of Kerala in terms of natural heritage, to one where historic heritage with a causal evolutionary link to cultural heritage becoming the central commodity for global tourism.

The initial discussions on the MHP began the same year as the KCHR initiated its archaeological explorations in 2006 in the Kodungallur-Paravur region. And in the beginning the project was closely associated with the KCHR. In the 2006 Kerala budget (“Budget Speech” 2006), which allocated Rupees fifty lakhs towards the shaping of the MHP, the KCHR was assigned with giving technical advice for the project. This association found detailed mention in the interim reports of the excavations at Pattanam by the KCHR. The interim report of the first season of excavations by the KCHR notes that the proposal for the MHP was submitted to the government of Kerala by K.N. Panikkar, Chairman KCHR. The proposal was to conduct research and conserve and manage the historical, archaeological and cultural resources of the Kodungallur region (Cherian et.al. 2007). The research in Pattanam, was initiated “under the aegis of the Muziris Heritage Project of the Kerala Government” (Cherian et.al. 2008, 10) and the KCHR as “the nodal agency for the Muziris Heritage Project provides academic guidance and undertake archaeological/historical researches in the region” (ibid., 11). Thus the archaeological initiatives undertaken by the KCHR in the Kodungallur-Paravur region and the excavations at Pattanam appear to have provided the initial impetus for the conceptualisation of the MHP.

⁹³The WTTC, established in the year 1990, is a forum for business leaders in travel and tourism industry, with the CEOs of a major travel and tourism companies and selected government representatives in its member list. The WTTC strongly advises public- private partnership in travel and tourism. The WTTC India Initiative (WTTICII) was launched in the year 2000 and the Principal Secretary of the Ministry of Tourism, Government of Kerala is a council member of the WTTICII along with the managing director of the Indian Railway catering and Tourism Corporation (WTTC n.d., WTTICII n.d.)

Over the years the scope and focus of the project has undergone many changes. The budget allocations of the Government of Kerala over the years for the project will illustrate this. In the 2006 budget speech (“Budget Speech” 2006), certain specific sites were identified as areas to be developed under the project. These were the “Kodungalloor Bhagavathi Temple, the Cheraman Masjid, Azhikkode Mosque, Kodungalloor Kovilakom, Kottappuram Fort, archaeological area of Pattanam and the Jewish synagogue in Chendamangalam” (ibid., 32). By 2009 the budgetary estimate for the project had increased to 90 crores from the initial 50 lakhs. Rather than focusing on specific sites, the stated project objective broadened to “link the historic memories of places like Kodungallur, Chennamangalam, Gothuruth, Paravur, Pallipuram, Azhikkode etc., and provide a cross section of Kerala's history to the visitor” (“Budget Speech” 2009, 25). And, in the following year, the MHP is described as a “network connecting about 100 museums, palaces, forts, temples, churches, synagogues, other historical monuments, traditional weekly fairs etc” (“Budget Speech” 2010, 39). The total project cost is estimated at 150 crores in the 2011 budget (“Budget Speech” 2011a, 19). The MHP was an LDF government initiative. The change in regime is visible in the revised budget speech of 2011 (“Budget Speech” 2011b) which failed to mention the project. In the subsequent years, with a revival of interest in the project on part of the UDF it again received fund allocation, albeit considerably less than in the earlier years (“Budget Speech” 2012, 2013).

In the year 2009 a Conservation Development Plan (hereafter CDP) (Consultation Draft) of the project prepared by the Benny Kuriakose, the Chief Project Consultant was released. This 150 page document, downloadable from the official website of the MHP, discusses the aim, vision and scope of the project and also the development plan in detail. While this is a consultation draft, this is one of the key documents used in my discussion in the absence of other official documents of a similar nature and focus. Other major sources of information include relevant Government Orders, the official webpage of the Department of Tourism, Government of Kerala (Department of Tourism n.d.a) and the brochures and newsletters published by Kerala State

Institute of Children's Literature (KSICL)⁹⁴ for the Department of Tourism, Government of Kerala (*Muziris Vartha* 2010, 2011, 2012; *Muziris: Past Perfect* n.d.).

The Muziris Heritage Site

The MHP imagines a Muziris Heritage Site (hereafter the MHS) (CDP 2009; Department of Tourism n.d.a.), which stretches across North Paravur in Ernakulam District to Kodungallur in Thrissur district. Four panchayats in Ernakulam District - Chendamangalam, Chittatukara, Vadakkekara - and three panchayats in the Thrissur district - Eriyad, Mathilakam and Srinarayanapuram - fall within the project area. The key sites of the project as identified in CDP are the Paravur Jewish Synagogue, Kottayil Kovilakom, the Vypeekotta Seminary, the Chendamangalam Jewish Synagogue, the Paliam Dutch Palace, the Paliam Nalukettu, Gothuruthu, the Kottappuram Fort, Cheraman Parambu, the Kizhthali Siva Temple, the Thiruvanchikulam Mahadeva Temple, the Cheraman Juma Masjid, the Kodungalloor Bhagavathi Temple, Abdul Rahman Sahib's House, the Marthoma Church, the Pallippuram Fort and the Pattanam Excavation Site.⁹⁵ The MHS is understood as a single heritage site that incorporates all the key sites along with the landscape, primarily the waterways that act as a network for the entire site having "influenced and inspired the architecture and growth of the built heritage" (CDP 2009, 17) as well as by surviving forms of intangible heritage expressed in traditions like the "culture of worship, teaching, fishing and bathing" (ibid.) that have tangible present expressions.

Let us look closely at these different elements of the MHS. There are two Jewish synagogues⁹⁶, two Christian monuments⁹⁷ three Hindu temples⁹⁸ and one mosque⁹⁹.

⁹⁴ By a Government Order of the Government of Kerala, dated 3 October 2009 the KSICL and the KCHR were assigned the charge of publications related to the MHP (GO(P) NO.225/2009/TSM dated 03.10.2009)

⁹⁵ I take these to be the key sites because each merits a separate discussion under the chapter on "Significance of the Monuments" in the CDP. Other sites also figure in the CDP, even though with less prominence. And one sees additions to the list elsewhere (See for instance, Dept. Of Tourism nd., *Muziris Vartha* 2010). However the prominence assigned to them in the CDP allows them to be discussed as markers to understand the nature and vision of the project as a whole

⁹⁶ The two Jewish synagogues date from the 16th century CE, of which the Paravur synagogue claims a tradition dating back to 1165CE (Srivathsan 2010)

There are two monuments (the forts at Pallipuram and Kottapuram)¹⁰⁰ with Portuguese and one (the Paliyam Dutch Palace) with Dutch associations. The house of the anti-colonial figure Muhammad Abdul Rahiman Sahib (1898–1945) relates to the British colonial rule. Ceraman Paramb, Goturuthu, Kottayil Kovilakam, and the Pattanam Excavation Site are the other key locations in the list. The Ceraman Paramb, at present a plain strip of land, is generally regarded as the royal seat of the Ceras. The Goturuthu region is selected for its theatrical tradition of *Chavittunatakam* and Kottayil Kovilakam is the site of the fifteenth century palace of the Raja of the Villar Vattathu Swarupam. The sites represent different religious traditions and different facets of the colonial past. Some of the sites have multiple and complex signifiers, making them perfect markers of the cultural syncretism of the region.¹⁰¹

Even, before the conception of the MHP, some of the key sites had attracted visitors, either tourists or devotees. Some of the sites had been understood as having historic links with each other; for instance the Cheraman Juma Masjid and the Cheraman

⁹⁷The Vypeenkota seminary dates back to the Portuguese period. The Mar Thoma church, Kottakavu is a twentieth century church is believed to be on the location where St. Thomas built one of his seven churches in CE 52.

⁹⁸The present academic understanding is that the emergence of temples occurred in Kerala around the seventh to the ninth century CE (Gurukkal 1992, Veluthat 2009). The temples have evidently undergone reconstructions and renovations, like the Mar Thoma church and the Cheraman Mosque. They must have achieved their present forms in the period assigned as medieval-late medieval in Kerala historiography.

⁹⁹Tradition traces the origin of Cheraman Juma Masjid to CE 629.

¹⁰⁰The Kottapuram fort, built by the Portuguese and destroyed by the Dutch, is a site other than Pattanam where recent archaeological excavations have taken place. The excavations were conducted by the State Department of Archaeology and focused on exposing the structure of the fort. At present parts of the old structure revealed through excavations are open for the public (*Muziris Vartha* 2010)

¹⁰¹To take two examples, Goturuthu region selected for its *Chavittunatakam* tradition is an instance. The value accorded to *Chavittunatakam* under the MHP is for it being a “hybrid art form” (CDP 2009: 38), a blend of art forms brought in by the Portuguese missionaries with the local ones. Similarly, Kottayil Kovilakam becomes important because a Vishnu temple, a Jewish cemetery and a mosque co-exist there. Two Christian monuments, the Vypeenkota Seminary and the Forane church are also in the proximity of the region. “This site is much noted for its religious unity, as it is the only site in the country where a temple, a synagogue, a mosque and a church exist in harmony with each other” (Dept. of Tourism, n.d.).

Paramb or the Paliam Dutch palace and the Paliam Nalukettu. However, they were largely regarded as individual sites and never together as part of a single heritage complex. It is the conceptualisation of a single heritage complex that allows for the incorporation of aspects like circuit tours and museums into the framework of the MHP by building upon intra-site connectivity threads. Thus, the arbitrary collocation of the identified monuments/sites that configure the newly imagined MHS expands its possibilities as a commodity for touristic consumption. It has the potential to provide a holistic tourist experience by virtue of its dimensions and diversity. These possibilities had been non-existent prior to the imagination of the Heritage Site around the idea of Muziris.

Core characteristics of the MHS

The tourism brochures, the CDP and the press releases on the MHP available till now highlight certain core characteristics of the ancient port. First, it was a ‘cosmopolitan’ space, a microcosm of cultural co-existence - Muziris was a centre of trade that attracted diverse groups of people from different parts of the world; second, it was a location where people from different religious beliefs cohabited and third, it represents and showcases over 2000 years of history of the region. The seventeen sites listed above are a well-balanced representative mixture of international trade links, religious harmony and cultural symbiosis that agrees with the understanding of Muziris as “the focal point of commerce for over 2500 years” and as the “doorway to India for varied races: Buddhists, Arabs, Chinese, Jews, Romans, Portuguese, Dutch and even the British,” (Department of Tourism n.d.a). Together these emphases helped the MHS to be conceived within the framework of ‘heritage tourism’. One of the glossy tourism brochures in English, published by the KSICL on behalf of the MHP (*Muziris Past Perfect* n.d.)¹⁰² proudly declares this central characteristic of the MHS in the following manner:

It [Muziris] was famous for welcoming people from other religious faiths, especially Christianity, Islam and Judaism and, to this day, is a model of religious harmony. Muziris is also unique as home to India’s first church, first mosque and the oldest

¹⁰²Incidentally this is the brochure that drew the criticisms of M.G.S. Narayanan (2013) for its inauthenticity and misrepresentation of history and sparked of the second round of media debates in 2014 that we discussed in Section 3.5.

European monument. The heritage project is the first of its kind in India and when completed a major destination for cultural tourism (ibid.)

The conceptualisation of the MHS as a commodity for touristic consumption has to be understood in the background of the global shifts in the perception of cultural heritage in recent years. The development plan of the MHP identifies certain international charters that are primarily constituted by the conventions and recommendations made by the UNESCO and the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS)¹⁰³ from 1964 to 2007. The policy themes and objectives of the MHP, stated in the CDP, are adapted from selected documents relating to the management of particular sites in the UNESCO World Heritage list (CDP 2009, 58). A World Heritage Site, as per the UNESCO guidelines, should be of ‘outstanding universal value’ which is determined on the basis of certain loosely defined criteria that rely equally on the uniqueness of the site that makes it exceptional and the significance of the site that makes it universal, thereby at once homogenising and localising the site.

The ‘outstanding universal value’ of the MHS is synonymous with its definition under the framework of the MHP. The MHS becomes unique because it is imagined as the utopian landscape of Muziris that smoothly integrates and condenses different times and spaces on a single thread of over 2000 years of history, conceived as a process of assimilation of external cultures and people into an existing culture. The MHS, in this sense, I would argue, is a display of multiplicity on a horizontal plane. It has a hypothetical point of origin and it extends through time into the present. What happens in the MHP is a translation of a vertical ‘historical’ narrative into a horizontal surface configured and landscaped as the MHS. And, each of the key sites is a representative element of this geography. The Christian, the Jewish and the Islamic monuments represent the coming in of the early Christians, the Jews and the Muslims respectively. In the same narrative the Hindu temples stand for the ‘original’ culture that existed in Muziris before the coming in of the external elements. And a site like Kottayil Koviakam represents a state of peaceful co-existence of these multiple groups.

¹⁰³ The ICOMOS is a ‘global’ non-governmental organisation working on the conservation of architectural and archaeological heritage. The ICOMOS was a product of a resolution put forward by the UNESCO in the Second Congress of Architects and Specialists of Historic Buildings in Venice in 1964 (ICOMOS n.d.).

The process of collapsing multiple layers into a single horizontal geographical plane is most apparent in the maps that the MHP uses. The official site map of the MHS (Figure 3.6) outlines the geographical area covered by the MHS. The map has a base layer that differentiates the land mass from water bodies. The elements of the MHS form the second layer. They are marked using numbered yellow dots on the map. If needed, dots can be added on to or removed from the map. The maps for circuit tours are created in this manner and the highlighted dots are linked by lines (CDP 2009). The modern political boundaries between districts or panchayats are absent in the map. So are the usual markers of everydayness, like hospitals or schools. Markers of the contemporary are present only in so far as they relate to tourism; the visitors' centre and the boat jetty are instances. It is this selective removal of the contemporary that allows the MHS to cartographically assume unity.¹⁰⁴

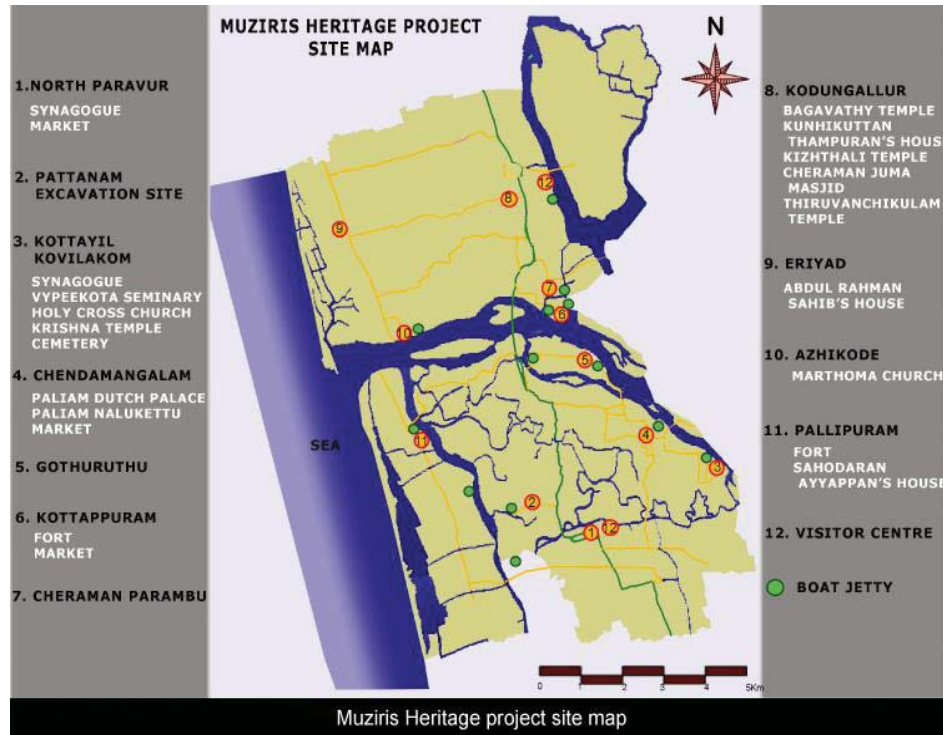


Figure 3.6. The Official Site Map of the MHS; Source: “Muziris Heritage Project Site Map” n.d.b

¹⁰⁴ In a similar way, the MHP incorporates aspects of the “unique lifestyle” (Dept. of Tourism n.d.a) of the region. This is by selectively representing certain occupational practices of the present like fishing, weaving, pottery making and other forms of craft production. The past-connect of these activities are achieved by severing them from the contemporary everyday life and economic structures.

Pattanam as Muziris: The Authenticity-Connect

We have seen that the archaeological exercises at Pattanam were important in giving an initial impetus to the project and that the KCHR had a prominent role to play in the initial conceptualisation of the project. A Kerala Government Order dated 3 October 2009 in relation to the project, calls Pattanam the “site that would possibly be the focal point of the project”.¹⁰⁵ The fresh discourse on Muziris that Pattanam excavations generated would have influenced the idea of a heritage project centred on ‘Muziris’. Apart from providing these influences, how has the Pattanam archaeological site contributed to the building of the particular heritage-tourism narrative where Muziris becomes a proto-cosmopolitan global nucleus occupying a vast geography and inviting a continuous flow of people and ideas over a span of 2500 years?

We have seen that Muziris was a (re)discovery that starts with the archaeological excavations at Pattanam. The MHP was initiated soon after the commencement of the Pattanam excavations and the excavations are described by the project as a “turning point” that “unearthed valuable information on its [Muziris’s] location and more” (CDP 2009, 7). The excavations at Pattanam rendered ‘a sense of reality’ to Muziris and became the key to the possibility of reimagining a heritage landscape, ready to be showcased. Most of the other constituent elements of the MHS were already in existence and some, we have seen, used to attract a moderate number of tourists individually. Among the 17 sites discussed above, only Pattanam is directly linked to the Early Historic port of Muziris. While the Kodungallur area has been traditionally associated with Muziris and some of the sites have legends that trace their origins to antiquity, all the other 16 sites are from historical periods past the height of activities at the port. Hence, individually, none of these could serve as the centre around which the story of Muziris can be built. The MHP has fallen back on the sense of reality that the excavations rendered to Muziris, to build a storyscape for the MHS that frames and re-contextualises the otherwise disconnected sites and monuments spread across a vast geographical territory of everydayness.

¹⁰⁵GO(P) NO.225/2009/TSM dated 03.10.2009

The Pattanam excavations had the potential to be a public spectacle owing to its scale and nature. Unlike a good number of excavations that seek to further expose an archaeological structure with partial visibility over-ground that characterised a majority of the archaeological exercises in Kerala, Pattanam follows a locus-based method of vertical stratigraphy involving determining discrete superimposed layers of features and examining their contents. An archaeologist or a lay observer who is broadly familiar with the disciplinary logic of modern archaeological practices thus sees him/herself as standing on a surface, which represents the present. Digging down from there, a continuous narrative, with distinguishable phases represented by each stratum/locus can be excavated that goes back along with depth into time. Thus the observer is connected to the past below the surface by virtue of placing him/herself physically on the surface, yet separated from it. The site visually presents before him/her the scientific evidence for the existence of various historical periods represented by the stratigraphic layers of soil.¹⁰⁶

The presentation and management plans that the CDP has for the Pattanam excavation site, exploits these very potentials of archaeology in general and Pattanam site in particular, to achieve certain desired effects of visitor perception. The first element is a site museum that gives the visitor access to the brick structure excavated at Pattanam. The display would “set it apart” from the modern construction (ibid., 124) thereby emphasising its difference from the present and its survival through time. Like most archaeological structures the brick structure is a partial survival from the past. To the tourist it lays a firm ground for authenticity as a piece of the past that has survived, “its materiality [being] witness to this survival, its metonymical bridging of time and making good of loss” (Schnapp, Shank and Tiews 2004, 11). The second is the exhibition gallery where artefacts from the excavations would be on display. The occupation of an archaeological artefact¹⁰⁷ within a specific space and time in the past makes it a tangible and authentic representative of the past it belongs to. At the

¹⁰⁶ However, a casual visitor to the archaeological site of Pattanam cannot be expected to have internalised this logic entirely. The encounter of the visitors will be mediated by both the notions and the expectations they carry with them as well as by how the site is presented to them.

¹⁰⁷ I use the term artefact here in the broadest possible sense to connote archaeological finds ranging from small transportable finds to built environments. Any indication of human activity that is retrieved or documented as part of an archaeological intervention is included in this definition of artefact.

conceived exhibition gallery at Pattanam the artefacts from each period will be displayed in separate galleries and the visitor “will be taken through various periods as he/she moves through the exhibition” (CDP 2004, 110).¹⁰⁸ The experience of the visitor is of a time-line tour where time is flattened to the gallery space and the visitor’s experience of traversing time is encapsulated in the duration of the visit. There is a further play on the depth-time link in archaeology with part of the proposed gallery is to be underground. Archaeological survivals possess an ‘aura’ partly because they are reminders of what have not survived. The ‘virtual reconstruction centre’ that is proposed in the CDP works precisely using this quality of archaeological material by scientifically reconstructing the ‘original’ three dimensional site with the aid of advanced visualisation tools, and thus allowing the visitor to experience the historical space that has not survived.¹⁰⁹

By means of the tools discussed above, it is possible to present Pattanam to the visitor as a site that tells the story of the maritime interactions of the port as a linear narrative of successive phases of interaction and assimilation. Artefacts can be selectively used, as is indicated for the ‘exhibition centre’ to represent each of these phases and the visitor can experience time as a vertical continuum that extends back from the present through skilful museum curation. For instance, a single Mediterranean amphora sherd or a Turquoise Glazed Pottery sherd from Pattanam can speak to the visitor of a phase of Roman contact or Sassanian contact respectively. As the present is the actual physical surface on which s/he stands, the experience of the visitor becomes even more tangible and rooted. Thus Pattanam presents to the tourist the same narrative thread that holds the entire MHS together. While the authenticity of each of the elements within the MHS is sought by restoring them to an ‘original’ condition (CDP

¹⁰⁸In off-site or non-site museums for archaeological artefacts, a description would be attached to the artefact under display which usually points to which time period and site it belongs to. In a more elaborate setting there might be reconstructions of the context of use of the artefact, depicted through pictures, models etc. In many pre-history/history museums time is the thread that connects the displays, especially when the displays are from multiple sites or when the links between them are weak. In these cases it is an evolutionary narrative that follows identifiable stages in prehistory and/or history that gives the display coherence. Each of the phases or contexts within the museum display are represented by a material remain from that period.

¹⁰⁹ The screening of a documentary film that describes the archaeological methods of site excavation is also to be a part of the museum.

2009), the authenticity for the narrative thread that holds the elements together itself is sought in Pattanam. This occurs through a process of short circuiting Pattanam-as-Muziris-as-Muziris Heritage Site.

There are a few mechanisms that allow this short circuiting. For instance, within the site development plan of Pattanam a ‘Kerala Maritime Museum’ is conceived, which will exhibit “military weapons and devices used on high seas such as guns, cannons and telescopes. There could be a section on how Vasco da Gama led his fleet to India in the late 15th century” (CDP 2009, 125). The maritime museum can display at Pattanam those elements that are not linked to the archaeological site physically and temporally, but are testimonies to the maritime contacts of the MHS. Another mechanism is to evoke archaeological metaphors like ¹¹⁰ ‘layers of time’ to describe the heritage site; that is, metaphorically endowing time-depth to a uni-dimensional space. We have also seen that certain present day activities from within the MHS region like craft-production are incorporated into it. These are promoted as practices that survived from antiquity. Such additions serve as further threads connecting an unfixed time in antiquity to the present thereby adding to the coherence of the MHS.

Thus, I would argue that the authenticity in archaeological practice and its lay perceptions represented by the Pattanam excavation are managerially appropriated to provide the illusion of integrity to the collocation of disparate monuments/sites of the MHS. In the process, the stratified diachronic authenticity of archaeological practice metamorphoses to match the synchronic priorities of the global heritage project. By collapsing over 2000 years of historical narrative into a single plane, the MHS effectively manipulates the disciplinary logic of archaeology to short-circuit the disjuncture in the narrative that holds the MHS together. Thereby, it falls back upon the disciplinary tools of modernity to authenticate its attempt to showcase the region’s past in response to the demands of an emergent global modernity.

¹¹⁰ “...history and tradition which slept at the *bosom of the earth* (emphasis added) are finally *unearthed* (emphasis added)” says the introduction to the project in the official website (Department of Tourism n.d.a). “You will be walking through history in the Muziris Heritage Tourism Circuit—through the layers of Dutch, Portuguese Roman and Arabian histories.” Dr. T. Thomas Isaac, the then Finance Minister, Government of Kerala to the press (as quoted in “Muziris Heritage Project to” 2011)

3.7.b. The Kochi- Muziris Biennale

One main reason to do the Biennale in Cochin¹¹¹ is its multicultural cosmopolitan aspect. When one goes into the real history of it which predates the colonial times the contribution is mainly in Muziris. Muziris really excites the whole project because you get to see that there is a strong history of more than 3000 years that existed...which attributes to creative production. It is a great concept where archaeology or history or even excavations become a huge metaphor. At a time where religious fundamentalism or issues of border or issues of cultural difference become huge, there exists something like Muziris which has a history of plurality, living together, multi- cultural existence, exchange of ideas, exchange of religious tendencies. It becomes a great plot for creative thinking.¹¹²

The Kochi-Muziris Biennale (KMB)¹¹³ is an international exhibition of contemporary art, organised by the Kochi Biennale Foundation, a charitable trust set up in August 2010. The first edition of the KMB was held from 12 December 2012 to 13 March 2013 across 14 main venues spread through Fort Kochi and Mattancherry in Kochi and the nearby town of Ernakulam. The Biennale hosted a number of permanent and temporary exhibitions of art installations including paintings and multimedia installations. It also organised cultural events and public intervention programmes including a series of talks under the heading ‘Let’s Talk’. Biennales organised around art have a long tradition starting from the Venice Biennale of 1895 (“History 1895-2017” 2017). Many of these Biennale’s are named after the city that hosts it, the Berlin Biennale, the Beijing Biennale or the Bucharest Biennale being other instances. Like its counterparts, the Kochi-Muziris Biennale also centres on a single host city of Kochi. The third edition of the KMB took place from December 2016 to March 2017.

Kochi, as can be seen from the above excerpt from the interview with Riyas Komu, Director of Programmes of the KMB 2012, becomes the apt location for hosting an international exhibition of contemporary art by virtue of its ‘multicultural’ ‘cosmopolitan’ past. The choice of Kochi occurs because its present significance as a

¹¹¹The anglicized name for Kochi

¹¹²Excerpt from Personal interview with Riyas Komu, artist and Director of Programmes of the Kochi-Muziris Biennale 2012-13 on 18 May 2013 at Kochi.

¹¹³A biennale can refer to any event that occurs once in two years.

commercial hub is perceived to be in continuity with a past of urban-mercantile cosmopolitanism. The official book of the Biennale titled *Against All Odds* edited by Sabin Iqbal (2012) stresses this idea of plurality time and again. It refers to Kochi's and by extension Kerala's experience of modernity as a distinctively 'cosmopolitan' one. The Biennale, as a platform for international visual arts theory and practice, debates in new Indian and international aesthetics and experiences as well as dialogue among artists, curators and the public, calls upon this "latent cosmopolitan spirit" (ibid, 20) of Kochi.

My interest in the KMB is primarily on the hyphenation Kochi-Muziris. The Biennale was initially to be called the Kochi-Biennale and the name was changed to Kochi-Muziris Biennale at a later stage. An order issued by the Government of Kerala on 3 December 2010 reads thus: "As the Biennale project will focus attention on the heritage of the Muziris Project region, and will give in international exposure that will bring in more tourists to the new destination, the event was renamed as the "Kochi-Muziris Biennale", to emphasize the importance of Muziris Heritage Project."¹¹⁴ The name changing appears here as a place-promotion strategy to bring the MHP, which was still in the first stage of implementation at the time to an international focus. Kochi (See figure 3.1) does not fall within the project area of the MHS (as it is conceived till date). The Fort Kochi-Mattanchery area where all the major venues of the KMB 2012 are located is a little over 20km south of southernmost part of the MHS which is in North Paravur. The two locations are rarely understood as a single entity in the contemporary times. For this discussion, it will be interesting to see what makes this conjoining of Kochi and Muziris possible.

The Story of a Deluge

Now, Edwin *chettan*¹¹⁵ will start his English and Johnson and I will be all ears. The by-heart rendering of the speech that Bristow¹¹⁶ made at the Ernakulam Maharajas College on a January day in 1937. The story of how, on an eventful day in 1341 the port of Kochi was formed. Sitting with his eyes closed for a while, Edwin *chettan* will begin, "A gigantic struggle was being fought out by the natural forces..." Edwin

¹¹⁴GO(Rt.)No.8398/10/TSM dated 3 December 2010

¹¹⁵ A common appellation in Malayalam to address a senior male person, literally meaning elder brother

¹¹⁶ The reference is to Robert Bristow (1880-1966) was a British harbour engineer who played a central role in the development of the port of Kochi.

chettan's voice will rise in a crescendo... The forces of nature assumed a unity and they turned their gaze solely towards Kochi. The high tide and the great waves joined hands with the forces of nature. And together they gave a long push - a good hard push - the famous sandbar of Kochi was lost to the sea (Madhavan 2003, 43)¹¹⁷

The above narration on the formation of Kochi is from the 2003 Malayalam novel *Lantanbattēriyile Luttiniyakaḷ* (*The Littanies of the Dutch Battery*). The understanding that the harbour of Kochi was formed in the flood of 1341 is a pervasive and popular one. In association with this narrative of the flood, it is often added that Kodungallur (interchangeably referred in these accounts as Mahodayapuram or Muziris), which was the centre of trade till then, lost its prominence owing to the same flood and other historical reasons (Abraham 2009; Bristow 1959; Department of Tourism 2013; Menon 1911; Narayanan 1999). The Biennale also, time and again evokes this story of the deluge in drawing the link between Kochi and Muziris.

While the usual narration, both academic and popular, of the formation of Cochin harbour, focuses on how it replaces Kodungallur as the port of importance¹¹⁸, in the case of the Biennale the focus is on the link between Kochi and Muziris where the latter becomes a mythical predecessor to the former. “Through the celebration of contemporary art from around the world Kochi-Muziris Biennale seeks to invoke the historic cosmopolitan legacy of the modern metropolis of Kochi, and its mythical predecessor the ancient port of Muziris.” says a press release by the Kochi Biennale Foundation (2012). In the publications by the Foundation, the press releases and other official documents related to the Biennale, there is a reiteration of the aptness of Kochi as a location to host the event. This owes to certain latent historic characteristics which include an openness to the outside world, cultural plurality and cosmopolitan spirit. The Biennale opened at a time when discourses on Muziris as a destination for global heritage consumption were in place through the MHP. And we

¹¹⁷Independent translation

¹¹⁸See for instance, this excerpt from a work of popular history on Fort Cochin:

Muziris thrived. A flourishing town, it witnessed the arrival of new religions and global influence. This was until the flood of 1341 AD that swallowed life and land. Silt built up at its harbour and the port's mouth became too narrow for ships. What happened was a phenomenon that would thus change the course of history. The land across widened and a new harbour opened up at Cochin (Abraham 2009, 21).

have seen that the MHP centres on a particular imagination of an early model of *cosmopolitanism* with Muziris as its *global nucleus*. It is this similarity in narratives that allows for the hyphenation Kochi-Muziris.

The direct references to Pattanam excavations in the KMB are minimal. What happens in the KMB is the assimilation of a narrative that is already in place. An exhibition of contemporary art has different authenticity requirements than a heritage project. For the latter, past is the primary product of consumption. Past, in the case of the KMB, is a point of reference. The invocation of the past strengthens the significance of the location of the event. Hence, the KMB does not need to refer back to archaeology or history in the same manner that MHP does even though there are occasional references to it (Sabin 2012, 20). Riyas Komu stresses that the approach of contemporary art practitioners to history is unlike that of an archaeologist who excavates, researches and re-deposits the material in the soil but is not “making anything there.”¹¹⁹ The artist on the other hand considers history “as a work to be done”¹²⁰ and the art thus created allows something like the Pattanam excavations or Muziris to reach to the people. This approach to archaeology and history and to Pattanam archaeological site in particular is evidenced in one of the most celebrated work from the KMB 2012, Vivan Sundaram’s *Black Gold* (2012), which will be discussed in detail in the next chapter. In the second edition of the KMB, the Pattanam excavation site became one of the eleven venues selected for hosting the event.

3.7.c. “Muziris as Metaphor”¹²¹: The MHP, the KMB and the Forging of New Territorial Imaginations

From the above discussion on the MHP and the KMB we see that, in both cases, Muziris, as a location and a destination is defined by certain key characteristics. It is a proto-cosmopolitan space, a microcosm of cultural co-existence open to the world. In

¹¹⁹Personal interview with Riyas Komu, artist and Director of Programmes of the Kochi-Muziris Biennale 2012-13 on 18 May 2013 at Kochi

¹²⁰ibid.

¹²¹I heard the phrase first used by Aju Narayanan, project consultant of the MHP and lecturer in Malayalam at the U.C. College, Aluva. Here I use it in roughly the same sense as he does. (Personal Interview with Aju Narayanan dated 23 April 2013 at U.C.College, Aluva)

both the instances there is a linear narrative extending over a period of 2000 years into the present - a narrative that can be retrieved for touristic consumption at the MHS and as a latent presence at Kochi-Muziris. In the case of the KMB, Kochi represents a space whose cosmopolitan spirit continues unbroken from its mythical predecessor Muziris. For both the MHP and the KMB, Muziris is a heterotopic location that smoothly integrates and condenses different times and spaces on a single thread of history, conceived as a progression of assimilation of external cultures and people into an existing culture.

Through these processes of branding, new territorial imaginations are being forged. In the course of my fieldwork in 2013 in the project area, I became aware of inklings of the new heritage imagination feeding back into popular perception.¹²² The first is of the integrated heritage location - the Muziris Heritage Site. The second is of a hyphenated Kochi-Muziris. The conflicts on the exact location of Muziris have abated to a certain extent and have confined themselves to the quasi academic space of debates in periodicals. In many of the locations the initial infrastructural works related to the project were already in place and in these locations ‘Muziris’ has come to denote any such activity related to the project. While the infrastructural development related to water transport as envisaged in the CDP has not been implemented completely the idea of the *Muziris Waterway* networking the different sites of the MHS is well in place in the region, with two circuit tours in operation in 2017¹²³. In 2013, much before the official boat cruise had started, there was a private boat tour called Periyar Vision, which promised “help in discovering the old waterways of the Muziris town.” Boat races and fishing competitions in the area announce Muziris Waterway as their venue¹²⁴. Another indication of the acceptance of this new landscape imagination is seen in the active demands made by the local public of different parts of the project area for more attention within the project. For instance,

¹²²While the project has started to attract visitors in moderate numbers, the holistic touristic experience that the site promises, is not yet operational. Hence, visitor narratives that could offer an interesting point of comparison with the local perceptions are not a part of this study.

¹²³ Notably, the Pattanam archaeological site is not a part of the waterway as it is not easily accessible at present through water transport.

¹²⁴See for example, a news item that appeared in *Mathrubhumi* in 2014 is titled *Muziris Jalapathayile Choondayidal Matsaram Aveshakkodumudiyeri* (2014). This translates as “Excitement Peaks at the Fishing Competition on Muziris Waterways” (Independent translation)

Vypin Press Club announced a seminar on the topic *Muziris Paithrukapadhati: Avaganikkapedunna Vypin* (Muziris Heritage Project: Vypin that is Ignored). It was to address the issue of Vypin, where some of the monuments included in the MHP are located, seemingly receiving less attention than other regions within the project area (“Muziris Padhati: Press” 2013).

Similarly the idea of Kochi-Muziris also appears to be gaining slow currency. I will take the case of a glossy coffee-table book (Tom n.d.)¹²⁵ titled “*Kochi-Muziris: A Pictorial Narrative*” which gives a pictorial presentation with short texts on the tourist attractions of the area designated as Kochi-Muziris. Here one finds that many of the sites of the MHP are presented together with the conventional tourist destinations of Kochi, to give the impression of Kochi-Muziris as a single destination. The Publisher’s Note to the work begins with a reference to Pattanam, illuminating its centrality in the Kochi-Muziris imagination. “The recent excavations and findings at Pattanam”, the text says, “has unveiled new historic facts and has brought Kochi and Muziris to the limelight. The studies of the findings affirm the fact that Muziris and later Kochi enjoyed a very important position in the ancient commercial world” (ibid, 3). Pattanam excavation site is one among the attractions which is qualified as “revealing hidden secrets” (ibid, 33). We also see interesting techniques of branding where the Kochi-Muziris link is strengthened by using the usual reference to Kochi as the queen of the Arabian sea to refer back to Muziris as the “erstwhile Queen” (ibid., 3) of the Arabian Sea.

An incident at the Pattanam excavation site during the 2013 season is also worth mentioning. An elderly man brought a group of non-Malayalees to visit the site. This was around the time when the dig was reaching the natural levels. At these levels at Pattanam, silt and clay is replaced entirely by fine sand. The man explained to his companions that the sand was from the flood of 1341 that destroyed the site. When asked for confirmation, I told the team that no indication of the flood has been observed from the site. However, the man told me that I was making the comment because I was not aware of the flood. While no direct connection can be attributed to this event being related to the new discourses around Kochi-Muziris, it is interesting

¹²⁵While the date of publication is not mentioned, the book was published either in 2013 or 2014 as it features a picture of Vivan Sundaram's *Black Gold*.

to see how the knowledge of the narrative determined how the viewer understood an observed phenomenon on site.

We see new landscape imaginations coming into place in the process of showcasing Muziris as a global heritage destination. While it is not necessary that these landscape imaginations constantly refer back to the Pattanam excavations, I would argue that the identification of Muziris with the archaeological site of Pattanam figuratively rooted a hitherto floating idea of Muziris. The excavations has allowed the identification of Muziris with an actual, though contested, physical location. And it is this rootedness in territory that allows new landscape imaginations to be built around and incorporating it and transcending existing imaginations.

3.8. Archaeology and the Popular Culture

The significations that an archaeological site can have for a visitor can be multiple. While the on-site narrative presented by the archaeologist to the multiple audiences might be similar in essence, the visitor can read multiple meanings into it. To take an example Usha, working at a Non Governmental Organization in the area of organic farming visited the site during the 2013 season. Seeing one of the unearthed terracotta ring wells that were on display at the site she observed that the survival of this particular artefact over time can be used as a tool to effectively communicate to the public the advantages of using nature friendly material like mud in contemporary constructions.¹²⁶

Archaeology and archaeological material can excite and enter into representations in popular culture in different ways that are unforeseen by the practitioners of the discipline. The Thaikal boat excavation (Nair, Selvakumar and Gopi 2004) inspired the plot of a Malayalam commercial film *Kappalmuthalali* (Ship Owner) by Thaha (2009)¹²⁷. In the 2010 blockbuster Malayalam movie *Salt N' Pepper* (Abu 2010) the excavation site is central to a sub-plot of the narrative. The hero (played by Lal) and

¹²⁶Personal Interview with Usha on 08 May 2013 at Pattanam

¹²⁷The plot is built around a youth who aspires to build a resort on a piece of land he owns. On digging the land for the foundation of the resort he encounters the remains of an old boat. He reports the incident to the archaeology department and the department blocks the construction of his resort.

one of his friends are both archaeologists. The archaeologists talk about the ‘Muziris team’ in the film. Prior to the shooting of the movie, some members of the crew visited the Pattanam excavation site. While the setting of excavation does not resemble the Pattanam site, the attire of one of the archaeologist (played by Vijayaraghavan) is highly reminiscent of those used at the time by the director of excavations at Pattanam. Another commercial movie in Malayalam where archaeology has a considerable representation is *Ezhamathe Varavu* directed by Hariharan (2013). One of the central characters played by actor, Vineet in the movie, is an archaeologist. One of the central threads in the movie is the romance between him and a daily wage labourer at the site (played by Kavita). While it does not refer to the Pattanam site, *Ezhamathe Varavu* is especially interesting because, the director required the set of the archaeological dig be laid in as authentic a manner as possible. This was done with the assistance of a group of archaeologists including this author. They also played the role of archaeologists in a few scenes in the film where excavations were shown. The team had people who had worked at the sites of Pattanam and Kottapuram and the creation of the set drew upon these sites immensely. When it comes to translating an archaeological site onto the screen, requirements of authentic representation are different from that in archaeological practice. For instance, though it is rarely practiced in Pattanam, the trench itself was laid out with baulks, with adequate width to hold the camera and equipment. The baulks were found to add to the visual effect of the trench. Similarly the different quadrants were left deliberately at different levels to add to the visual effect. In two scenes, particular artefacts are being unearthed. This required from the archaeologists a reverse sort of thinking where the artefacts were first made to look antique and then were hidden in the soil in such a way that they are revealed as they would be in an actual dig. The archaeologists also replicated a brick wall in one of the trenches which was highly reminiscent of the brick structures dug out at the actual sites where they have worked. The public fear associated with state takeover of land with archaeological significance (Thaha 2009), the visual potential of the archaeological excavation (Hariharan 2013) and the possibility to import the familiar thread of romance between the superior (male) and the sub- ordinate (female) into the context of the archaeological site (ibid) are all explored through the medium of cinema.

There are two important instances where the Pattanam excavations directly come into popular representation. One is the *Black Gold*, the installation by artist Vivan Sundaram (2012) at the KMB. In the installation, the artist employed port sherds from Pattanam in his re-creation of the ‘lost’ city of Muziris. *Black Gold* will be discussed in detail in the next chapter. Another instance is a novel in Malayalam by author Sethu (2011).

3.8.a. Marupiravi

“A region cannot remain unrevealed for a long while. Thus she, Muciri, also was waiting to break free of the curse. Like Ahalya. There is an apt time and moment for everything. Is it not?”

“True”

“These should not just be curios to be displayed in old museum shelves. A journey to the life of times. A cultural landscape that attained a stage- by stage development...”

Aravindan’s eyes were closed... “Why don't you write about it?” He opened his eyes on hearing Perumal's voice.¹²⁸

The novel *Marupiravi* centres on Aravindan, a Non-Resident Keralite (NRK) and his visit to his hometown Chendamangalam near Paravur after being informed by a historian friend Perumal, of the ongoing excavations at Pattanam. The narrative moves around Aravindan's return and his meeting up with friends and relatives. It is also trip of nostalgia through which Aravindan narrates the history of the Paravur area. The archaeology of Pattanam figures in different ways in this novel.

As we saw, the initial impetus for Aravindan to make his trip comes from the excavations. Aravindan, in many ways is a character that Sethu has drawn from his own personal history. Like the character, his maternal home is in Chendamangalam and paternal home is in Vadakkekara near the Pattanam excavation site. When I asked him about how he relates this aspect of nostalgia to the excavations, Sethu said that what he sought to evoke by using archaeological excavations as a trope is something much deeper or what he calls an “unsnappable umbilical cord.”¹²⁹ Excavations here serve to invoke this connection in a person who belongs to the place, but is currently

¹²⁸Independent translation from chapter seven of the novel *Marupiravi* (Sethu 2011, 73)

¹²⁹Personal interview with Sethu on 1 June 2013 at the author's residence(independent translation)

not residing there. Excavations are also used as direct subject matter in the narration. In Chapter 7, Aravindan and his friends visit the Pattanam archaeological site. This chapter moves through their observation of the excavations and conversations with actual figures related to the excavations, like Selvakumar and Cherian.

In the course of the narration, the protagonist starts to write a novel. This ‘novel-within- the- novel’, is the writer’s imagination of the life in Muziris as inspired by his/ Aravindan’s visit to the site. Unlike the hypothetical assumptions that the archaeologist or the historian reaches based on the archaeological material, Aravindan, the novelist, creates a coherent narrative of the past with characters and a plot. This narrative technique captures best the difference between a literary and an academic approach to archaeology. In Sethu’s own words:

What I have said in the novel is that historians are boring people. It is because you archaeologists and historians need evidence for everything. They are also debaters. Four historians will come up with four opinions. As far as the writer is concerned (s)he is right about her/his imagination.¹³⁰

Thus the novelist is not bound by the same compulsions that limit the archaeologist or the historian when they build a narrative based on the archaeological evidence. The authenticity of the narration is not a concern for the novelist. (S)he is free to play around with archaeology through techniques of story-telling, people the narrative and effect new connections and imaginations. The idea of Kochi-Muziris which started to be operational as part of the KMB by that time, also find presence in *Marupiravi*. At a point of crisis, the life in the imagined Muziris of the novel is transported to Kochi, with the same characters assuming new roles in the modern metropolis. Thus there is no rupture in the life of Muziris. It continues in novel forms of urban mercantilism in Kochi.

Like many of Sethu’s novels *Marupiravi* also was translated to English (Sethu 2017). The translation by Prema Jayakumar is titled *The Saga of Muziris*. The choice of the title has to do with the popularity of the word Muziris in the present times and the difference in readership that the publisher has in mind. Unlike with a Malayali readership, where Sethu’s novels do not require additional elements of branding, the translation is intended for a wider, non-Malayali or global audience and hence the

¹³⁰ibid.

relevance of the title. In Kerala, the release of the translation occurred as part of the KMB's third edition in one of its venues. The work was presented to a member of the Jewish community who had migrated to Israel from the Paravur region. P.J.Cherian, the director of Pattanam excavations and Riyas Komu, the director of programmes of the first edition of the KMB were speakers at the event. The event evoked nostalgia both as a personal and as a territorial experience by bringing together multiple elements and individuals implicated in the new global heritage discourse centred on Kochi-Muziris.

3.9. Responses from Pattanam: Tendencies and Changes

“All Archaeology, like politics, is local” (McManamon 2000, 9)

“I have relatives in Kodungallur. When they were building their house they found some pots etc. I told them that some people (archaeologists) might come looking for things like that. I warned them not to let the archaeologists anywhere near their land”. The response is from Anita (name changed for privacy) a resident of Pattanam, Ward no XV in the course of my interview with her in 2013.¹³¹ We saw in Section 2 that in the initial years of the excavation, the local population at Pattanam responded with considerable enthusiasm to the excavations incorporating it in multiple ways into their territorial organisation of space and their imaginations of the past. Over the years the nature of these responses has changed considerably, at occasions, even tending towards hostility as Anita's response indicates. Similar changes also occurred in the scale and nature of the visitors to the site. These changes can only be understood in the context of the multiple discourses around the site and around Muziris that we have discussed in the previous sections.

The contrast in local response was most apparent during the second season of excavations by the KCHR when the initial atmosphere of conduciveness and local enthusiasm appeared to have evaporated entirely. Even though I was not part of the excavation team during that season, this was evident when I made visits to the site. Once, on my way to the site, an old lady stopped me on the road. Suspecting that I

¹³¹Personal interview with Anita (name changed for privacy) on 27 May 2013 at her residence, Ward no XV, Pattanam (Independent translation).

was part of the excavation team, she warned me with dire consequences if I dared to go near her house. I also observed that the local visitors to the site were close to nil. I was told that this was due to a widespread fear of land take grab by the government. There was a social ostracization of the excavation team. The team was unable to get a house on rent at the village. Wage labourers from the locality refused to assist the excavations and labour support was procured from the nearby village of Pooyapalli. This atmosphere of hostility somewhat allayed after 2009. Houses once again started to become available on rent. And while, much of the labour force from Pooyapalli was retained, people from the immediate locality of the excavation site also sometimes became part of the labour force. However, by then, the initial levels of enthusiasm and voluntary involvement had disappeared and had given way for general indifference. Similarly there has also been a decline in the number of visitors to the site after the initial years. However, it does attract a moderate number of visitors especially during the excavation season and usually from distant locales. Through a series of interviews conducted during the 2013 field season and in October 2013, I try to identify the factors that characterized these changes.

3.9.a. Land

The single major factor that led to a complete reversal in the local attitude towards the excavations during the one year period from 2007 to 2008 was the fear of land acquisition by the government. The proposal to build a site museum and to undertake further excavations triggered this fear and an action council was formed during this period by the villagers to voice their concerns. One sees efforts on part of the state government and the KCHR prior to the second season to dispel these fears. In a meeting called by the Revenue Divisional Officer (RDO) of Paravur, where the action council representatives, the Director of the excavations and people's representatives participated, the Minister of the State, S. Sharma, gave assurances that, in the event of acquisition of land for the purpose of excavations or for the museum the compensation will be equal to the existent market price or more.¹³² In the 2009 season, the KCHR archaeology team members went from house to house to inform the locals regarding the importance of the excavations and to allay their fear of land grab. Possibly, also owing to these factors, the hostility of the local population seems

¹³²Personal interview with P.J. Cherian on 24 April 2013 at Pattanam

to have abated to some measure. The KCHR has acquired property, including the Pathamatham plot and two plots adjacent to it from willing sellers. Even so, popular misgivings continue to an amount. In my interviews with the locals in 2013, almost all interviewees expressed their concerns regarding the issue. To cite an instance, a part of a brick structure was revealed in the 2013 season of excavations. The trench was on the border of a private property. The archaeologists stood near the boundary and discussed where the structure might extend to, pointing towards the adjacent property. On the following day the owners of the property fenced and using plastic sheets covered the property from view. This pervasive fear of loss of land has to be seen in a context where land prices have been soaring and land becoming a highly priced commodity following the post 2000 real-estate boom. Much of the area surrounding the excavation site, are small resident landholdings. The interviewees from Pattanam told me that on occasions, the real estate agents also tapped the fear of land acquisition by the government. This resulted in many individuals making pre-emptive sales of their property. In 2013, the office of the Pattanam excavations was frequented by real estate agents, who identified the KCHR as a potential buyer of large properties.

3.9.b. Employment

At the Pattanam excavation site, a number of field hands are residents of the nearby village of Pooyapalli or of locations in the Vadakkekara panchayat farther from the immediate vicinity of the excavation site. This followed the ostracization of the team in 2008, when local labour force became unavailable. However in the following years, the continued employment of ‘outsiders’ has created a feeling of resentment in the immediate locality. This opinion was voiced most strongly by the residents of the by-lane where the Pathamatham plot is located in Ward no. XV of Vadakkekara panchayat.¹³³

Notably, the resentment regarding land acquisition also was voiced more strongly in this area. One reason for both the responses is the proximity of the locality with the areas where excavations have already been conducted. The threat of losing the land is more real here on the one hand. On the other, the populace feels that they should have a greater stake in benefits like job opportunities that the excavations bring in. The

¹³³Personal interviews conducted among the residents of Ward no. XV, Pattanam in May 2013

residents of this locality also are from lower middle class back grounds. They have relatively small landholdings and many of them are daily wage labourers. There was a visible difference in the people's responses in the other parts of the MPRA where I conducted interviews.¹³⁴ The fear of personal loss of land was less here, even though there was considerable scepticism regarding the land purchases. While many of the latter respondents stressed the importance of a project like this benefitting the locality through infrastructural development and employment opportunities, the actual availability of jobs at the site was not a concern for them.

3.9.c. Alienation

In contrast with the initial local involvement and interest in the happenings at the excavation site, there is a general sense of alienation from the excavations. The local residents said that they no longer visited the site. The decline in the number of visitors from the locality over the years was confirmed by the archaeologists and the wage labourers I interviewed. It is only when there is an 'unusual' find, like a ring well, that the locals express interest in it. Even so, these finds attract only a moderate number of people. Apart from the discontents discussed above, growth of the project in scale and its formalization also appear to have contributed to this sense of alienation. To take an instance, I mentioned above that the Pathamatham plot has been purchased by the KCHR. While this means a transfer of the property from private to a more public ownership, it has not been perceived in that sense by the locals. Some of the respondents said that while they used to regularly visit the site in the early years, now they feel ill at ease to go there. The shortcut through the plot of land connecting the adjacent plots and the road beyond, they said, is now rarely used. Coupled with this, the frequenting of the site by outsiders has created a feeling of estrangement. "You feel like an outsider at your own place", says a respondent who is a resident of the village for the past thirty years.¹³⁵ The association of the excavation with the MHP has contributed immensely to the change in public perception towards the excavations. There was a tendency among the respondents to confuse the excavations with the entire MHP. This has led to the assumption that the huge funds allocated in

¹³⁴Personal interviews conducted among the residents of the MPRA area, Pattanam in October 2013.

¹³⁵Informal conversation with Sarada (name changed for privacy) on 28 May 2013 at her residence, Ward no XV, Vadakkekara panchayath (independent translation).

each budget season for the MHP are meant solely for the Pattanam excavations and that these funds were being squandered. There is an expectation of infrastructural development in the region. The renovation of the road from Pattanam junction leading to the excavated area was seen by many as the singular positive development that the project has brought. There were also a lot of misgivings because the proposed museum on the site was not functional at the time I conducted the interviews in 2013. Many of the respondents complained that the project funds were flowing to other areas like Chendamangalam while Pattanam was the 'actual' location of Muziris.

A few factors need to be noted with reference to the change in attitude of the local population at Pattanam towards the excavation. In the initial years the locals connected directly with the excavations, enthusiastically claiming it to be a part of their inherited past. What one sees here is a generalised sort of response and an attachment to the locale and its past as it emerged through the excavations. Once the more direct effects of the excavations became apparent, the focus shifted from the results of the excavations to more immediate concerns like land and employment. Here we see that the local attitudes become diffuse and fragmented depending upon the perceived effect of the project on their daily lives at an individual/locality level. Thus it becomes no longer possible to talk about a general local attitude to the excavations. With the excavations becoming larger in scale and with the purchase of land by the KCHR, the existing relations of the locality towards certain locations changed creating a sense of alienation. The tying up of the excavations, with something of a grand scale like a heritage project, also led to a change in the expectations at a local level. The excavations are now expected to bring in infrastructural benefits to the locality. As in the early years, one sees an articulation of claims related to Muziris. However the claim is not as much on the past, as it is on the right to benefits brought in by related developmental activities in the present.

Meskell (2005) points out the tendency among archaeologists to use the word local as a catchall term without taking into account the multiplicity of those included in the label. Here, I have used the term local in a loosely defined sense, but primarily as a spatial category.

'(L)ocal' entails relating to place or being characteristic of a particular place - a spatial designation. And being "a local" is being from a particular locality - a social

designation. Locals are people. "Local" also encompasses a notion of scale: a smaller unit such as a town or district, rather than a region or nation" (Meskell 2005, 90)

I have limited my efforts to tracing the changes that have occurred in the local attitudes towards the excavations. My familiarity with the people interviewed sometimes forced me to limit my discussion to topics that were of current relevance to the interviewees and set the interviews mostly at the level of informal conversation. In the process, I have been able to understand the multiplicities in their attitudes and to identify some of the factors that determined them. While one can talk of general tendencies, I perceived an important difference in the attitudes of people living on either side of the small street on which the Padamatham plot is located from the attitudes of those living on the main street parallel to it to the South and the street to its north. In general, the first set of people was less affluent. Many of them were relatives as well. Fear or land grab, discontent regarding job allocation and feelings of alienation were more pronounced in these interactions. They tended to refer to these issues in the first person and with more passion and feelings of suspicion towards the KCHR. Many of the respondents belonged to the OBC¹³⁶ caste, *kudumbi*. However without more exhaustive studies it will be reductive to draw conclusions on how the caste profile might have worked into the responses. In comparison, the respondents from the main street were more affluent and were from middle class and upper middle class groups. The street had been recently repaired and they regarded this as a positive development associated with the MHP. They discussed the same issues, albeit not in the first person, but as issues of relevance to the locality. Similarly, more than passion and suspicion, disinterest or cynicism tended to dominate the character of these responses. The interviews I conducted at a street to the North of these and outside the limits of MPRA also brought out a difference in character. Due to its location, the daily interaction with the excavations and the team members were minimal or non-existent here. While general opinions as the above were expressed, they were not very well defined. Many of the respondents showed curiosity to know what was happening at the site during the current season of excavation as well.

¹³⁶ OBC or the Other Backward Class is a classification used by the Government of India to designate castes that are socially or economically disadvantaged.

3.10 For Further Discussion: Muziris in the Present-Subjectivities and Spaces

The previous case study discussed a highly regulated space where archaeological knowledge is constituted as expert evidence at the intersection of two state institutions. It also involved a definite set of actors with judicially defined roles. This ethnography sought to carry the discussion further by looking at a less regulated site, an archaeological excavation occurring far from the centre of power of the nation and not directly controlled by the ASI or the state department of archaeology. This discussion has not been an exhaustive one. For instance, while I took care to track the developments related to the site, the MHP and the KMB, after 2013 concentrated fieldwork was not done for these years. Hence the discussion does not focus on this period. It is also possible, to follow through some of the aspects studied in further detail. An important instance is that of local responses that I discussed in the previous section. Caste and gender as markers of subjectivity have not come through in the exercise and class has come through peripherally. It is possible to enrich the discussion by bringing these aspects into focus through a more exhaustive study, using sampling techniques and structured interviews, to bring out the different facets of the interviewees' subject positions.

While these are aspects that can help further the study, the discussion has allowed us to problematize the understanding of public as a single category. We saw different sections of the public interacting with archaeology and the past, either directly or in a mediated manner. The multiple categories are also fluid and overlapping in many instances. The archaeologist and archaeological practice get enmeshed in these different processes allowing one to interrogate the positioning of the archaeologist in relation to the public. It has also allowed us to discuss the mechanisms of branding of the past. The chapter looked at locations where the different stake holders like the state, the public as interest groups and private concerns interact to constitute new perceptions of heritage including archaeological heritage.

I have discussed the territorial significations attained by the idea of Muziris in recent years in the public domain of Kerala. The excavations at Pattanam and the revived interest in Muziris set into motion certain processes. At the first level it made the dormant discourses on Muziris come alive. Regional imaginations of the past were

configured negotiating with the existing historiographic and popular notions and the new archaeological understanding of Muziris. It is this live presence of Muziris in the public domain that permits its appropriation as a metaphorical prop around which the idea of a Muziris Heritage Site could be built. This could be considered as the second level where disparate sites with varying chronological significations come together to constitute the heritage touristic formulation of the Muziris Heritage Site. At the third level this new formulation feeds back into popular perception. It results in new ways of perceiving the familiar territorial spaces and excites novel imaginations of the past. One needs to look at these as constituted by mutually interacting processes happening at different scales, viz., the regional, the national and the global.

Chapter 4: The Figure of the Artist as Archaeologist: Archaeology in Artistic Representations

I am very careful not to pretend to be an archaeologist. I know what I do, is not what they do. I know my archaeological projects are not archaeology in the pure sense. At the same time I think there are aspects that do overlap.

-Mark Dion (Excerpt from video recording)
(Museum of Contemporary Art n.d.a)

In the previous chapter we marked the public as a multiple, proactive and multivalent category that engages with and interprets archaeological material in manifold ways. These interpretations are largely contingent upon contemporary preoccupations and can negotiate in different ways with archaeologists and archaeological practice. This chapter takes off from these observations to focus on a narrow set of such interpretations, *viz.*, art installations and representations where archaeology figures in a major way. I have selected four very recent cases - three location specific installations and one art exhibition. Two of the installations were part of the Kochi Muziris Biennale (KMB) 2012. The third installation was part of an exhibition conducted at the Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), New Delhi. The fourth was an exhibition titled *The Museum Within* by artist Debasish Mohanty exhibited at the Akar Prakar Art Gallery, New Delhi from 23 September 2016 to 5 November 2016. I look at this selection to introduce into this discussion a specific set of public in relation to archaeology, namely the *artist-as-archaeologist*¹, who engages as much with the method and practice of the discipline as with archaeological material and knowledge.

4.1. Art as Archaeology

Archaeology figures in multiple ways in art representations. Roelstrate (2009) identifies this as a recent phenomenon associated with what can be called the historiographic turn in art practice, whereby art increasingly tends to look back at its

¹ The formulation derives from Godfrey's (2007) seminal essay titled 'Artist as Historian'. As part of a series of talks at Art Basel in Basel, a group of artists who work with archaeology in different ways came together in conversation on 19 June 2015. The discussion was titled Artist as Archaeologist and was moderated by Hans Ulrich Obrist, Co-Director, Serpentine Gallery, London (Art Basel 2015).

own past or at past in general. He calls this “retrospective, historiographic mode” as a “a methodological complex that includes the historical account, the archive, the document, the act of excavating and unearthing, the memorial, the art of reconstruction and reenactment, the testimony” (ibid.). He identifies this as a mode that tends to bring out aspects of history that are generally glossed over in the dominant narratives and understands it as a response to what has been called the crisis in history. Here the relationship of art and archaeology is not conceived in the simplistic sense of art that represents archaeology or as art that deals with actual archaeological material (as with the case studies that are discussed below). What he tries to mark out is a much broader phenomenon which includes but is not limited to such direct representation. Archaeology is here used in a larger metaphorical sense, with artists referring to their work using terminologies borrowed from archaeology like excavation, through attention to detail and display, and by assigning primacy to material.

From 9 November 2013 to 9 March 2014, Roelstraete curated an exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago titled *The Way of the Shovel: Art as Archaeology* (hereafter *The Way of the Shovel*). As the title of the exhibition indicates and as reiterated by Roelstrate in the exhibition video (Museum of Contemporary Art n.d.a), the idea evolved from his essay (2009) discussed above. The exhibition responded to the historiographic turn in art practice identifying with the increased preoccupation of art with history and archival research in the last one decade. It brought together 34 artists who had studied the past through its material traces. In the exhibition, archaeology served as the “leading metaphor” (Museum of Contemporary Art n.d.b). The majority of the works that were part of the exhibition dealt with archaeology in an indirect or methodological sense. Some of them were early works by the artists that had been brought into the exhibition because of their relevance to the theme. A few works displayed a more obvious relationship to archaeology and will be interesting entry points to get into a closer discussion of the installations that we are looking at in this chapter.

Mariana Castillo Deball’s 2006 work responded to the legend around the looting and transportation of an antiquity to the National Museum of Anthropology in Mexico City (Deball 2006). Brunnen (2007/2013) used the shovel, the most prominent

archaeological metaphor used in the exhibition, as a tool to meditate upon the life of the artist. It included a video projection where the artist is seen digging his own grave using the tool and also an image of the results of his excavation. Another work of interest is the documentation DVD of Gaillard's early work (2009), which involved the excavation of a Nazi-communication bunker at Duindorp, The Hague. For the original work, Gaillard uncovered the bunker, which instead of being destroyed, was intentionally buried under sand as a cheaper option to get rid of it. On being opened to the public, people, especially the residential community of Duindorp, visited the bunker and climbed atop it for the view. The video displayed at the *Way of the Shovel* showed the documentary footage of the excavation, public visit to the monument and covering it back by sand to its former state. Also displayed on plinths were teeth taken from the digging equipment (Gaillard used mechanized tools, rather than archaeological equipment for the dig) used in the excavation, in a way that they resembled archaeological relics i.e., potential finds from a future dig. The archaeological artefacts stolen from the National Museum of Iraq, in the aftermath of the 2003 invasion by the United States inspired Rakowitz's (2007-present) *The Invisible Enemy Should Not Exist*. Its central piece was a series of sculptures that attempt to reconstruct those looted. "Alluding to the implied invisibility of the museum artifacts... the reconstructions are made from the packaging of Middle Eastern foodstuffs and local Arabic newspapers, moments of cultural visibility found in cities across the United States"(Rakowitz n.d.). Mark Dion's (2013) *Concerning the Dig* was about aesthetics of the workplace. It included a mixed media installation that displayed a workstation with the archaeologist's tools of trade and multiple drawings of the same that differed in minute details.

We see that these works that have a direct reference to archaeology also show considerable variations in the approach of each artist to the discipline. Deball (2006) and Rakowitz (2007-present), for instance, are responding to the contemporary political conditions and the current life of the archaeological artefact. Their works parallel with academic writings on the politics of archaeology where destruction and loot of archaeological artefacts, the political significations they acquire in the present etc. become the subject matter. Gaillard (2009) also locates his work firmly in the present. Through the act of recovery of a disused site, he gathers the public around it, thereby, reclaiming in the present "a platform for viewing the landscape, recovering

the potential of the site that lay buried beneath the sand” (Rosales 2009). The process of excavation is key to both Gaillard (2009) and Brunnen (2007/2013). While it is the recovery of a buried past for the former it is a subjective exploration for the latter. In many of these works there is a shared focus on the tools of excavation- the teeth of the digging equipment for Gaillard, the shovel for Brunnen. When it comes to Mark Dion (2013), the tools of trade become the central focus. He locates his work at “the place where it gets mediated with the public” (Museum of Contemporary Art n.d.a) and his effort is to play with the public expectation of what archaeology is about through presentation, here of the archaeologist’s tool and gear. All the four works discussed below similarly reflect varied approaches towards archaeology as a discipline, to past in general and to archaeological artefacts in particular. The three installations relate to archaeology in comparable ways that allow them to be discussed together. On the other hand, *The Museum Within* stands apart, at the first encounter itself by virtue of being non-location specific. It will be discussed separately to see how its approach to archaeology contrasts or relates to the former.

4.2. What Histories Lay Beneath our Feet?

The site-specific installation from KMB 2012 *What Histories Lay Beneath Our Feet?* (hereafter *What Histories*) is by the Afghanistan- based American artist Aman Mojadidi. Categorized by the artist under the head Site specific/Context specific Fieldwork, *What Histories* was a mixed media installation where Mojadidi created an imaginary archaeological excavation site named *Khana E- Bashary* (Humanist House) Heritage Project. Mojadidi used the history of migration of his own family to create “a historical narrative which was then supported by an archaeological excavation” (Rogowski 2013).



Figure 4.1 Excavation of Zaman Mujadidi's Commune Site, Venue: near Aspinwall House; KMB 2012 (Courtesy: Mojadidi 2012b)

The installation had multiple components including the excavation trench, information boards and a tool/storage house *cum* workspace, all invoking excavation in process. The information boards at the excavation show an uncanny similarity to the information boards used by the state and national archaeology departments with their plain dark blue background and un-ornamented white font. Two panels narrated the story of Zaman Mujadidi, the author's ancestor, one in Malayalam and the other in English. The narrative goes as follows:

As a young man Zaman Mujadidi had critical notions about the source of compassion. The human-centric notion of compassion and rejection of the conventional understanding of god placed him in adverse position with the beliefs of his father who had trained his son in the in the Naqshbandiya-Mujaddidiya school of Sufism. Disowned by his father, Mujadidi travelled via the Silk Route from Kabul to Kochi where he became a saffron trader trading between Kabul and Kochi. He bought a plot of land in Fort Kochi and built a house there, which became the centre of a humanist commune. He opposed the British attempt to forcefully occupy his land, went underground and joined the Freedom movement. He was imprisoned and died in

prison at the age of eighty. There is no tomb to commemorate him as the body was thrown into the sea. In 1867, the land seized from him became home to Aspinwall & Co. Ltd established by the British merchant J. H. Aspinwall. There was another information board in green (see Figure 4.2), which is of a very official nature, with information on the logistics and nature of the project, like location, budget, sponsorship and so on.



Figure 4.2.: Information Panel, *What Histories*. Venue: near Aspinwall House; KMB 2012 (Courtesy: Mojadidi 2012b)

The shed which was part of the installation was a temporary bamboo structure. Unlike a plain functional structure, it had certain features suggesting aesthetic ambience - like a conical thatch roof. The shed housed an archaeologist's workstation, with tools, maps and finds (see Figure 4.3). Some finds could be seen neatly arranged with labels as if they had been left for drying. Some others were packed and still others were in the process of being cleaned. Among the finds were ceramic sherds which had been found in the process of the excavation (Rogowski 2013) Tools, including pickaxes, trowels and hammers, appear used. The trenches showed structural remains being unearthed.



Figure 4.3: Work in Progress, *What Histories*. Venue: near Aspinwall House; KMB 2012 (Courtesy: Mojadidi 2012b).

4.3. Archaeological Excavation of a 21st century Rikshaw Carrying Electronic Waste

Azim Waqif's (2014) installation *Archaeological Excavation of a 21st century Rikshaw Carrying Electronic Waste* (hereafter, *Archaeological Excavation*) was done as part of the art exhibition *The Missing Pavillion* curated by the students of the School of Arts and Aesthetics (Visual Arts), JNU and funded by the Inlaks Shivdasani Foundation. The duration of the exhibition was from 6 December 2014 to 10 February 2015. The exhibition was conceived as a “poetic reflection on the absence of an Indian pavilion at the Venice Biennale” and explored “the related themes of loss, desire, frustration, identity, representation and cultural ambitions in a globalised world, using the language of contemporary art” (project88newsadmin 2016). Waqif is a Delhi based artist with professional training in architecture. Waqif's works “often employ manual processes that are deliberately pain-staking and laborious while the products themselves are often temporary and sometimes even designed to decay” (Waqif n.d.) His work includes sculpture, photography, video, site-specific public installations and large-scale interactive installations.



Figure 4.4. *Archaeological Excavation* by Asim Waqif at the JNU campus
(Photo: Author 2014)

For his *Archaeological Excavation* Waqif found discarded material from the JNU campus and buried the material underground in front of the School of Arts and Aesthetics building, inside and around which the exhibition was organized. On this ground he laid out a trench and excavated out the material partially. The installation was left at this stage of partial excavations with information boards and lighting (latter, only for the duration of the event). The information boards resemble those that are put up by the ASI at its protected sites, with their plain blue and red banded background, white margins and white unembellished font. The board had two sections of texts, both in Hindi and English. The first part, under the heading Protected Monument, read as follows:

This excavation has been declared to be of dogmatic importance under the creation of history and interpretation of artifacts act, 2024 AD. Whoever destroys, removes, injures, alters, defaces, imperils or misuses the site shall be punishable with impalement which may last up to 6 hours or the amputation of a limb or both!”
(Waqif 2014).

The second part was a description of the site and the excavation. The text ran as below:

Archaeological excavation of a 21st century rickshaw carrying electronic waste (probably abandoned during the War of Attrition, 2027-28). The site was accidentally found when two hikers chanced upon a cathode-ray tube and posted a photo of it on on-line forums as a curiosity. The location is known to have been site of a popular university campus that was partial towards Marxist thought. It is well documented that this university was forcefully shutdown during the right-wing nationalist movement of 2014-26, and saw heavy bombardment during the War of Attrition, 2027-28.

The site was marked out for an excavation in 2352 and first tentative excavation began in April 2364 AD. The artifacts seem to be piled onto a three-wheeled mobile cart that was probably powered by human force (to be confirmed). It appears that the university was migrating from CRT to LED/LCD technology for display units and these are the discarded units being transported to one of Delhi's toxic colonies for burn-cycling" (Waqif 2014).

The excavation exposed the rickshaw and the electronic waste that it was carrying partially. The trench was laid out with square grids demarcated by threads. Each of the squares had numbers assigned to them. For the digging, the artist had collected an assortment of tools, which were on display near the trench in a way that would invoke excavation in process (See Figure 4.4), much in a same way as Mojadidi's excavation.

The artist's idea was to leave the partially exposed site with the information board as it was and allow it to go through normal processes of site destruction. The threads that made up the grids were disturbed very early on by stray animals. The exposed material was being covered back gradually by soil, when in 2016 landscaping and construction activities took place in the area, destroying and obscuring what was left of the site completely.

4.4. Black Gold

Black Gold by Vivan Sundaram (2012) was an installation in two parts arranged in two separated locations within the Aspinwall House, one of the main venues of the KMB 2012. The first part is 17 ft*35ft*1ft terracotta installation set up on the floor of

spacious hall comprising of thousands of local body sherds from the Pattanam archaeological site (See Figure 4.5).



Figure 4.5: Close up of the terracotta installation, part of *Black Gold* by artist Vivan Sundaram (Photo: Author 2013)

The second part of *Black Gold* is a video installation of 13 minutes length, videographed by the well-known cinematographer Shehnad Jalaal. The video has three panels and it is projected horizontally on to the floor on a black monochrome background. The viewer is able to have a partial view from the top of the video, but not in its entirety owing to its size (8ft *30ft). The installation intends the re-creation of the lost city of Muziris by means of the potsherds from Pattanam excavations. The experience of the installation is of encountering a landscape made out of potsherds (see Figure 4.5). The artist has distributed dry black pepper in clusters amongst the potsherds. The effort of the artist is not to have a realistic reconstruction, but to invoke Muziris through his interpretation through different mechanisms that I will discuss later on in the chapter.

There are multiple ways in which the installation is vocal about the Pattanam- Muziris equation. The video projection is set inside a room towards the farther end of the

exhibition space. The visitor enters the projection space through an antechamber. Here in the antechamber, seven photographs from the Pattanam excavations are exhibited on two walls (See Figure 4.6).



Figure 4.6: Panel on one of the walls of the antechamber towards the video installation part of *Black Gold* (Photo: Author 2013)

Along with these, there is a map depicting the Indian Ocean trade route in antiquity. All the photographs are aerial views of the trenches with architectural remains. The visitor is directed towards the video projection through these images. The installation uses body sherds and tile pieces classified as local.² The signboard for the visitors, as we saw describes this connection. However the contextual details of the sherds used, do not become important for the ‘imaginary port city’ that the artist is recreating. The multiple ways of linking up the installation with the Pattanam excavations, unlike a museum display or an actual site visit, are not meant to be instructive. These seem to be there to summon up the site to the experiential plane of the visitor

²At Pattanam, local pottery sherds, tiles and brick pieces that are considered non- diagnostic are weighed, counted and deposited in concrete ring wells on the site itself. These are stored together in a manner that context- based retrieval is not possible. The sherds that are used in *Black Gold* are part of these ‘discarded’ sherds.

4.5. Discussion

Like the works mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the three installations discussed above engage with archaeology as a discipline and practice in multiple ways. I would place the discussion under three heads: Location, Materiality/Authenticity and Process.

4.5.a. Location

All the three works are location-specific installations. In installation art, “the space, and the ensemble of elements within it, are regarded in their entirety as a singular entity. Installation art creates a situation into which the viewer physically enters, and insists that you regard this as a singular totality” (Bishop 2005, 6). For a site-specific installation, the venue of display is equally important to what is displayed. The installation derives its meaning also from its location. Two of the works discussed above are from the KMB. They both engage with the past of their location, but in very different ways. On the other hand, in Waqif’s *Archaeological Excavation*, it is not the past, but the present and future of the location that comes into attention.

In *What Histories* the artist excavates into the past of the Biennale venue (Aspinwall house). As we saw in the previous chapter, Kochi was selected as the venue for the KMB, owing to a perception of its past as a cosmopolitan one. The history of colonialism and maritime trade are integral to this imagination. Hence the Aspinwall house, a complex that hosted colonial business and served as the premises and warehouse of Aspinwall and Company Ltd., became an apt venue for the Biennale. What Mojadidi does is to use his excavation to bring out previous layers of history of the same space- a past that is hidden from the dominant biennale narrative. Pamela Bannos’s (2013) *Shifting Grounds: Block 21 and Chicago’s MCA*, at the *Way of the Shovel* allows us to draw an interesting comparison. She uses different types of archival material like letter, maps and photographs as well as other tools to look at the history of the plot of the land where the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, the venue of the exhibition is located. While the direct reference to archaeology that Mojadidi’s excavation brings in is absent in Bannos’s work, she is using archaeology as a methodological tool in a comparable manner towards similar ends. The location of the installation becomes important for *What Histories* at different levels. It seeks to

reveal the hidden pasts of the actual location where the trench is laid. By doing so, the work engages with the Biennale narrative in a dual manner. First, it critiques the narrative of happy cosmopolitanism built around the KMB, bringing out aspects of violence and conflict of the colonial encounter through the story of Zaman Mujadidi. At the same time the ‘history’ that is excavated out is one of maritime networks, humanism and cultural co-existence, that resonates with the KMB narrative.

Unlike, *What Histories* and *Archaeological Excavation* (which will be discussed below), *Black Gold* does not seek to subvert dominant discourses. The location of *Black Gold* as part of the KMB is the first cue for its logical consistency. We saw in the previous chapter, how its hyphenation with Muziris is integral to recasting Kochi as an ideal location for the Biennale. Muziris becomes the mythical predecessor of Kochi, through a process of short circuiting where a mythical flood is evoked as a connecting factor. What happens here is the bringing together of two regions which are territorially separated. Thereby Kochi-Muziris is a location with narrative integrity but it does not have territorial fixity. *Black Gold*, taps on the same narrative. The installation would not make the same sense elsewhere as it would in the biennale. Housed in the Aspinwall house, *Black Gold* identifies its location as Kochi-Muziris in a broader sense. The work attempts to highlight this aspect, by calling up Muziris through photographs from the Pattanam excavations and the map of Indian Ocean networks of trade. It also plays with the flood myth in ways that invoke the territorial non-fixity of Kochi-Muziris. The video installation shows the terracotta city being flooded with water, muddy water and pepper corns flowing through this landscape, altering and transforming it.

A scene of devastation. A cityscape submerged in a cataclysmic spill-millions of floating peppercorns...The video image oscillates between showing a bed of detritus, a geological phenomenon, an emerging gestalt deciphered as history.

Often in mythic and historic tales there is a tragic end- the flood.

There is the sound of the deluge.

There is the silence of the aftermath...

reads the information panel at the installation. The video projection is done in three panels. In each panel the same video is played in loops, but with a different part of the video being projected at a given moment. This again breaks the notion of fixity or

even of cyclical time. The viewer, standing near the projection on the floor, watches it from above and experiences chaos and instability. The first part of the installation, namely, the terracotta landscape is rendered dynamic through this technique. The viewer who is looking at the video display on the ground, gets a sense of being rooted on the shore of the turmoil and flux unfolding at his/her feet.

Disturbing this neat logic of location specificity *Black Gold* was also exhibited in the gallery space of the National Museum, New Delhi as part of a temporary exhibition titled *Unearthing Pattanam: Histories, Cultures, Crossings* opened to the public on 28 November 2014. The focus of the exhibition was the Pattanam excavation and the cues to the location significance of *Black Gold* discussed above were more or less irrelevant in that exhibition space. The installation was part of a section on contemporary art inspired by the Pattanam excavations. It was displayed along with a sculpture in wood by artist Riyas Komu of one of the finds from Pattanam, paintings of Muziris as imagined by artists and a series of sketches by E.P.Unny, titled *The Pattanam Sketchbook*, which depicted different sites that are part of the MHP. The exhibition displayed archaeological artifacts and gave detailed information on the Pattanam excavations. Consequently, *Black Gold* as displayed in the National Museum did not require cues that would establish its link to the excavations or to Muziris. The terracotta installation itself was absent and was replaced by a photograph of the same. While this was to a large measure due to the impracticality of recreating the installation in that gallery space, the audience could still get a sense of the actual installation because they were viewing it in a gallery which already housed actual artefacts from the site including sherds similar to those used in the installation. Local body sherds were made available to the public, especially children to handle and create patterns suiting their imagination. The video projection was housed in conditions comparable to the KMB. But, the pictures that depicted the Pattanam excavations or the maritime trade networks were not displayed as they were not probably deemed necessary in a space where such connections were already established. The location of *Black Gold* in Delhi, where the artist Vivan Sundaram is based, rendered it a special significance. Through the duration of the exhibition I observed that some among the audience had turned up specifically to see Sundaram's work, with one of them referring to the exhibition as a whole as 'Vivan Sundaram's exhibition'. While *Black Gold* was a part of an exhibition on the archaeology of

Pattanam, for these viewers, the logic was reversed with the exhibition being perceived as one centred on Sundaram's work.

The *Archaeological Excavation* is different from the other two in the sense that it is not concerned with the past of its location. Rather its hypothetical location is in the future and the artist is excavating back to the present or the near future. While it does not explicitly refer to the JNU campus, the connection with the location is made obvious in the information panel that talks of the space as the "site of a popular university campus that was partial towards Marxist thought... which was forcefully shutdown during the right-wing nationalist movement of 2014-26" (Waqif 2014). The JNU campus is known to be a politically charged space with dominant left wing ideas. With the coming in of the right wing BJP led government into power in India, the JNU, located in the national capital, has been a target of concentrated attack. In the year 2016, the elected President of the Student's Union and two student political activists were arrested on charges of sedition. This triggered a debate that had a national reach around the discourse on nationalism/anti-nationalism. The politically and emotionally charged situation saw at many times a clamour to shut down the university.³

Located within the state capital and on the campus of a left-leaning university, *Archaeological Excavation* is a clear response to the growing right wing assertion in the nation. The conditions that Waqif talks about in his excavation, materialized in about a year in the location of the art work. The material that was first covered and then excavated out also was entirely collected from the waste found discarded on the campus adding to its integrity with the location. Thus Waqif's work is firmly grounded on its site. It is a response to the present and a caution towards a dark future which can be visualized in the retrospective mode as a prospective vision from the present.

³ The movement led by the students, staff and alumni of the university against the attack has been dubbed as the Stand with JNU movement. For an exhaustive documentation of the same, see "Stand With JNU" n.d.

4.4. b. Materiality/Authenticity

The privileging of material and how to construct both space as well as memory and history informs that work that I am engaged with. And what is dug up and what is made available to one are what are called discarded sherds. What it communicates when you physically see them or touch them is that it is a piece of terracotta. But the aspect of age, of it having been dug out, carries a sort of resonance or aura. I hope that when the work is made, that something of this aspect will come out” (Sundaram n.d.).

Materiality of the archaeological artefacts is an important aspect for all the three works, but more so for *Black Gold*. The installation tries to invoke Muziris by means of potsherds from Pattanam. *Black Gold* is not trying to recreate Muziris or Pattanam ‘as it were’. Nor does it have the function of a museum display where the artefact on display is a direct testimony to what that has not survived. It is hypothetically possible for the installation to have the same physical appearance by using other sherds of pottery as well. However, the use of pottery sherds from Pattanam makes the visual experience of the installation more ‘authentic’. This is by banking upon their “aura” gained through their “materiality”, “age” and the fact of them “being dug out”. Similar to how the presence of black pepper invokes the image of Muziris as a hub of spice trade, the realization that the potsherds come from the Pattanam excavations plays with imagination of the observer to provide coherence to his/her experience of the installation. ‘Authentic’ archaeological material figures less prominently in the other two installations. However, it is important to see how they do. In *What Histories* Mojadidi has carefully labelled and put on display artefacts that were supposed to have been found from the excavation including- a compass, lapis lazuli beads and ceramic sherds. In an interview (Rogowski 2013) he stressed that the ceramic sherds had in fact been found at the time of the excavation. While the pastness of material that he has used in other projects has been important to Waqif⁴ this does not become a concern in the *Archaeological Excavation*. This is primarily because, while the trope that is used in the installation is that of excavation, Waqif’s concern is with the present. However, in the course of the excavation, he encountered material like ceramic sherds and quartz bits. In his interaction with the archaeology students he also tried to understand the archaeological significance of the material found. He included these along with modern material, like plastic bottles, found at the excavation among

⁴ Personal interview with Asim Waqif on 4 December 2014 at the JNU campus

the finds labeled and kept on display near the installation. Materiality of what has been dug out is immensely important to archaeological authenticity. In the case of these installations it is imperative to go beyond the material authenticity of the artefacts and think of what they mean to the viewer.

The notion of ‘pastness’ as proposed by Holtorf would be a useful concept when it comes to encountering archaeological artefacts as part of art installations. Holtorf (2013) uses the idea of pastness with relation to archaeological artefacts in archaeological, museum or heritage setting in an effort to reconcile his own relativist position with regard to authenticity with a more materialistic approach. Perception of authenticity of archaeological artefacts is not just a function of their age, but of their pastness which is produced together through material clues, perception of the audience, and a meaningful and plausible narrative that connects the past to the present. For the installations, techniques of display, treatment of artefacts and textual cues are equally or more important as the ‘authentic’ and other artefacts. Thus the potsherds used in Sundaram’s installation exude pastness for the viewer because the fact of them “having been dug out” is made explicit through the information boards and photographs of excavation that are on display. The body sherds that were used in the installation were from different levels and contexts. As they were stored together without the intention of further documentation, each sherd cannot be traced back to its context. The absence of contextual data would render the sherds useless in an archaeological study of the site. They cannot be attributed archaeological authenticity and are hence ‘discarded’ sherds. But when we come to artistic reproduction, the expected authenticity is of a different kind. It is the pastness attributed to the sherds by the spectator that gives it authenticity and aura. In *Archaeological Excavation*, there were deliberate efforts to endow pastness to the artefacts like treating them with chemicals and applying soil on to them. Waqif pointed out that he wanted to convey this idea of pastness by subjecting the material to more corrosive treatment processes, but that could not be done due to administrative red tape. The creation of such ‘authentic reproductions’ also engage with spectator perception in similar ways.



Figure 4.7 Archaeologist's work station; Top: *Concerning the Dig* by Mark Dion (2013); Bottom: *What Histories Lay Beneath our Feet?* (Mojadidi 2012).

There are other means to achieve authenticity in the art installations. Just as the presence of pepper in *Black Gold* evokes the history of Muziris, the presentation of the archaeological excavation gives numerous cues to authenticity in the installations of Waqif and Mojadidi. While fiction dominates the stories that they narrate, the presentation of the excavations approximate authentic representations of actual excavations. We saw how the information boards on both the excavation sites bring to mind official sign boards put up by the ASI or the state departments of archaeology, both in terms of their physical characters and the language used. Similarly care is taken to replicate an actual dig site. While the work is in progress, the impression of the same would be conveyed through pans filled with soil (*What Histories*) and used

tools (*What Histories* and *Archaeological Excavation*). The finds were bagged and labelled, or cleaned and kept for drying. Mojadidi created a workstation, complete with tools, maps, clothing and other equipment used by an archaeologist. This has much in common with Mark Dion's (2013) *Concerning the Dig* as can be seen from the figure above (see figure 4.7).

Thus, we see that when it comes to authenticity, the priority of the artist is very different from that of the archaeologist. I would posit that pastness and authenticity become important in art works not at the spectatorial level, but for the artist also. While it is theoretically possible to reproduce the same installation with different sets of sherds, the excerpt from Sundaram's interview cited above makes it clear that it is the fact that the sherds came from the excavations that excites him. And he seeks through his work to convey to the audience, the 'resonance' or 'aura' that he has felt the material possesses. The actual finds from the excavations become part of Mojadidi and Waqif's installations in a similar manner, even while the artists do not take any special effort to direct the attention of the audience towards these artefacts.

Often, as in Waqif's *Archaeological Excavation*, the past is not even the primary referent of the installation. In both *Archaeological Excavation* and *What Histories*, the fictional narratives are framed by the excavations and hence it becomes important for the audience to perceive the excavation as authentic. "What I try to do" says Mark Dion "is to short circuit or go against the grain of how archaeology is presented to the public and to play with their expectation of what archaeology is" (Museum of Contemporary Art n.d.a.). The viewer has an expectation of what an archaeological site might look like and the artist seeks to engage with this expectation to build a site from which a fictional narrative is dug out. Here also the authenticity of the site and excavation thus presented is enmeshed with the aesthetic priorities of the artwork. The artistic reproduction of the excavation site might have a perfection that is rarely there at an actual dig site but might add to the spectator perception of authenticity. The square grids across the trench in *Archaeological Excavation* (See figures 4.4 and 4.5) are an instance. In a real archaeological situation, grids of the dimensions are not usually put up unless the micro-level variations need to be documented. Mojadidi's work station, with its conical thatch roof and handsome finish, similarly attests aesthetic compulsions that go beyond the actual.

4.5.c. Process: Why Excavate?

The idea is more about how we use processes to unearth things. At one level also I am talking about the writing of history... You cannot say that this is what happened. It is a matter of interpretation to some extent. So, I was trying to look at this process as a mechanism for interpreting the future.⁵



Figure 4.8. *Fieldwork* (2003) by Jeff Wall. Courtesy: Artsy 2016

Another important aspect that comes out, especially in *Archaeological Excavation*, is the attention given to the process of excavating. We saw in the previous chapter, the case of a movie set where an excavation trench had to be created. Here the trench was made by removing soil using mechanized tools and the singular concern was its final presentation. Unlike this, often in art installations the process becomes equally significant as the final presentation. To take a few examples, Canadian artist Jeff Wall's *Field Work* (2003) is the photographic presentation of an archaeological fieldwork, depicting two archaeologists excavating the floor of a dwelling in a former Sto:lo nation (Indegenous American) village in Greenwood Island, British Columbia (see figure 4.8). One individual is kneeling down, immersed in his work in front of a small cut that he seems to have excavated as the other is seen observing the field, their

⁵ Personal interview with Asim Waqif on 4 December 2014 at the JNU campus

gear distributed about the site. Michael Fried (2004) notes that what Wall has attempted in this work, is something called ‘near-documentary’, i.e., the depiction of an event almost as it is. For the work, Wall first put up a scaffold near the site to take photographs from, and then spent three weeks photographing the fieldwork. His idea was that the fieldworkers would eventually grow accustomed to his presence and discount it allowing his depiction to be as close to natural reality as possible. We saw that, a video footage of the artist digging his own grave was a prominent aspect of Brunnen’s (2007/2013) work in the *Way of the Shovel*. Attention to process is indicated by the photographs of excavation put up in association with *Black Gold*. Tools that indicated use and wear and artefacts at different stages of cleaning and documentation in *What Histories* have a similar impact. Aman Mojadidi involved archaeologists in setting up his installation. He visited the sites of Pattanam and Kottapuram, where excavations were going on at the time. He also took the assistance of one of the student archaeologists working at Pattanam at the time. Her inputs were incorporated in the layout of trenches.⁶ Being an observer and then a participant in setting up the *Archaeological Excavation*, I could observe the attention given by Waqif to the archaeological process closely. While the excavation was in progress it attracted a number of spectators, including students from the Centre for Historical Studies, JNU who were trained in archaeology. The artist engaged in conversations with them regarding tools and methodology in archaeology and invited them to participate in the excavation (see Figure 4.9). While Waqif had a prior judgment about how much of the material that he had put in the ground should be excavated out, the work that went into it was much like the labour that goes into an actual dig. Care and time were given to excavate and to label the chance finds.

⁶ Personal interview with Jaseera C. M. 10 October 2015 at Auva, Kerala



Figure 4.9: Archaeology students excavating at the *Archaeological Excavation*
(Courtesy Waqif n.d.)

The students, including me, also became participants in the excavation, bringing their own tools. Finds that came out of the excavation, that had not been put there in the first place by the artist, like a few ceramic sherds, and quartz bits/flakes, stones etc., were labeled and kept on display as the excavation progressed. The artist pointed out that involving the archaeology students was a learning experience for him into the methodology of archaeology in addition to the theoretical understanding that he had gained while researching for this work.⁷ Unlike the artist, the participants were unaware of the exact nature of what was hidden, and hence the work for the students closely resembled the effort put in into an actual excavation. This led to interesting occasions where the priority of the students clashed with that of the artist. The archaeologists felt a keen desire to expose what was under the soil. Habituated by our training it was difficult for us to excavate without considering the grids that the artist had laid out. While the artist also had a keen focus on the process of excavation, for him final display was equally important. The focus was on partially revealing the cycle rickshaw and he often had to remind the excavators this. For him the archaeologists working on site was also part of the process and performance leading

⁷ *ibid.*

to the installation. As archaeology students, the art installation played with our minds forcing us to break certain notions and givens in transferring the process of doing archaeology to a different context.

The question of why these artists excavate, brings us back to the initial part of this discussion and to what has been described as the historiographic turn in art practice. Godfrey marks it as a recent tendency reflected in different types of artworks and involving archival form of research leading to works “that invite viewer to think about the past... and to reconsider ways in which past is represented in the wider culture” (Godfrey 2007, 143). Roelstrate points out that these artists “seek out the facts and fictions of the past that have mostly been glossed over in the more official channels of historiography” (Roelstrate 2009). Thus the project of artists engaged in the archival mode of research is seen as one of alternate history writing, an almost political project which seeks to bring out aspects of history that are obliterated in the dominant narratives. Archaeology and more specifically excavation becomes a powerful mode, be it metaphorical or real, in such artistic expressions. Artists often consider their labour as excavation in the metaphorical sense, for it involves meticulous searching leading to recoveries. Terms like shards and fragments are used to signify art conceived as “traces preserved in sediments of fossilized meaning” (Roelstrate 2009). Depth is seen to deliver truth. This can be read together with Sundaram’s understanding that the fact of being dug out renders an object resonance or aura and by extension authenticity. Another important aspect is that of display. Roelstrate draws a parallel between the archaeologist’s objective to display his/her finds in museums and artists’ desire to communicate his/her work. The most significant parallel that he finds between the two is the primacy accorded to matter, the earth excavated to the archaeologist and the material that he/she works with to the artist.

In the light of such observations, what do we think about the three works discussed above? All three are narrative projects. There is the desire to reveal or address what has either been hidden or suppressed. *Black Gold* appears in the first instance to be a more straight forward project, an artistic rendering of the story of Muziris. Important here is the stress given to loss, highlighted through the mythical flood. Sundaram considers his work to be one that seeks to construct history or memory through a privileging of material (Sundaram n.d.). The use of discarded sherds is thus a

powerful tool. It is the privileging of what are called ‘diagnostic sherds’⁸ that leads to the discarding of material (non-diagnostic bodysherds) at archaeological sites. This is often necessitated by logistical concerns. At Pattanam, unlike the usual practice of backfilling the material to the trench, the ‘discarded sherds’ are stored in huge ring wells, albeit without their contextual information. The construction of an imagined history through what is discarded thus is almost a subversion of the official archaeological narrative to create an alternative story. It is, in this sense, a critical comment on archaeology as a discipline. *What Histories* is more vocal about its criticism of official narratives. The story of Zaman Mujadidi put up as part of the installation, is told in a way that highlights how official/dominant narratives of places often erase the sub-strata of violence and conflict that would be part of the place’s history. We saw earlier in the discussion, how this stands in opposition to the biennale narrative of Kochi as a cosmopolitan utopia. A more playful subversion of official narratives is achieved in *Archaeological Excavation* (and to an extent in *What Histories*) by means of the information panels put up. Waqif has modeled these, both in form and in narrative style, on the signboards seen at the protected sites of the ASI and the state archaeology departments. The narration on them, on the other hand, directly critiques contemporary state practices. The suggestion of a ‘Creation of History and Interpretation of Artefacts Act’ directs one’s attention to how nation states use their official tools and bureaucratic apparatus to create histories that suit their agenda. In India where archaeology is a highly state-controlled practice, drawing deliberate attention to state-control becomes highly significant. The punishment to anyone who threatens the official narrative is made to sound deliberately absurd (Whoever destroys, removes, injures, alters, defaces, imperils or misuses the site shall be punishable with impalement which may last up to 6 hours or the amputation of a limb or both!). This again points to the fragility that is inherent in such dominant narratives and the oppressive mechanisms employed by the state to keep them in place.

While a dominant function that ‘excavation’ serves in art practice is thus to retrieve suppressed or hidden narratives as suggested by Roelstrate (2009), it is necessary to reflect critically upon his assumptions about the historiographic turn. For Roelstrate

⁸ Diagnostic sherds are those sherds of a vessel that allow forming informed assumptions about its morphology.

this stems from a larger crisis in history and the inability of art in contemporary times to “grasp or even look at the present, much less to excavate the future” (ibid.). The installations that we have looked at in this discussion necessitate a rethinking on this assumption. *Archaeological Excavation* for instance specifically looks at the present and excavates it from an imagined future reference. Godfrey (2007), looking at the works of artist Mathew Buckingham, offers a different approach towards the contemporary bend of artists to historical representation. He suggests that it is the “urgency of a particular idea in the contemporary moment” that produces such works and hence they are “political re-interpretation of the present” (ibid., 147). While *Black Gold* and *What Histories* are talking about the past, we see that they are responding to the present. The space constituted by the Biennale, where their works are located, is for them a location infused with multiple meanings and they seek to critically engage with these meanings. *What Histories* is simultaneously a subjective exploration. By connecting his past (the history of his ancestor) to the location of the Biennale, Mojadidi is once again making sense of the location in the present. *Archaeological Excavation* is explicitly about the future and the present. The contemporary moment is thus a moment of contemplation and excavation is a tool that allows one to view the present from the vantage point of the future.

4.6. The Museum Within

A recent exhibition titled *The Museum Within* by artist Debasish Mukherjee is presented as a case in point to suggest alternate ways of artistic engagement with archaeology. Mukherjee is a Benaras Hindu University (BHU) graduate currently based in Noida. The exhibition was curated by Kanika Anand and was on display at the Akara Prakar Art Gallery in the Hauz Khas Village of New Delhi from 22 September 2016 to 30 November 2016. The exhibition included a collection of the artist’s recent works in different media like terracotta, paper, acrylic paint, wood, cloth and mirror. As per the curator’s note the exhibition raises questions about “preservation and neglect” by recreating architectures and objects from the artist’s own past. In these works he draws from “cartography, archaeology and design” “donning the mantles of archaeologist, museum curator and conservator” (“The Museum Within” 2016).

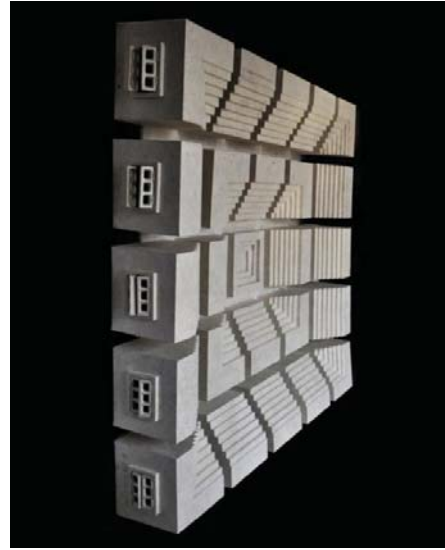


Figure 4.10a. *Box-series* by Mukherjee (2016a) (Photo: Author); Figure 4.10b *Step well* by Mukherjee (2016b) (Courtesy: Akar Prakar n.d.)

In the first room of the gallery, on the left wall is the Box Series. This has a white cube with rectangular niches on its sides with steps carved in and a terracotta head mounted inside one of the niches (see Figure 4.10a). On the wall next to it is a square block in wood, paper and mirror, mounted on the wall, which is an obvious representation of a step-well. Grids neatly divide the square surface of the block, and on the lateral sides (left and right) are small windows. Looking through the windows, one sees mirrors, i.e., a reflection of the observer (see Figure 4.10b). The next piece is what appears like an aerial view of a landscape with fields and landmasses done in cloth hung from a rod, like washing.

Mounted on the right-hand wall of the room is *Banares* (see Fig. 4.11). The “(t)wenty sculpted tablets mounted in two rows represent the architecture of the city” of Banares (Akar Prakar n.d.). Hollowed out of the tablets are what appear to be architectural elements like steps, the *linga*, step wells and vaulted door.



4.11. *Banares* by Mukherjee (2016c) (Courtesy: Akar Prakar n.d.)

There are three different series done in square blocks, of which, all except a single piece are exhibited on the second floor of the gallery. The first series, done in white have on their square surface what looks like pale impressions of landscape features. All these have a circular centre portion, the top layer of which is partially or fully absent to reveal successive layers that go down to meet at a central point. Artefacts are placed either as fully or partially revealed upon this circle (see Figure 4.12).



Figure 4.12: *Untitled 01*⁹ by Mukherjee (2015) Courtesy: Akar Prakar n.d.

The second series is done in blue acrylic paint on rice paper. The square blocks are displayed vertically on the gallery walls. The shape is achieved by layers of paper placed one on top of the other, horizontally. The top surface is painted in shades of

⁹ The serial numbers of the untitled works are assigned by me for the purpose of this discussion.

blue and green and white, resembling satellite images of the earth rendering the appearance of long-distance aerial view of a landscape (see Figure 4.13)



Figure 4.13: *Untitled 02* by Mukherjee (2016d) Photo: Author

The third series also is similarly done, but with stacked newspaper (see Figure 4.14a and b). Here the square blocks made out of layers of paper are arranged horizontally in separate glass cases. Each glass case is double-layered and the blocks occupy the bottom layer. The dominant tone of the surface is brown indicating an aerial view that



Figure 4.14a: *Untitled 03* by Mukherjee (2016e); Figure 4.14b: *Untitled 04* by Mukherjee (2016f) Photo: Author

is closer than the blue acrylic paint series. The observer, viewing it from the top, sees the surface of what resembles a single unit in an excavation grid. On the top surface

of the square blocks are shallow niches in the shape of terracotta vessels. On the top portion miniature terracotta vessels are placed in vertical position.

The introductory panels say that the exhibition suggests alternative forms of enquiry into the keeping of Indian heritage. The archaeologist's quest, it mentions, is used as a means to resist ruin that claims many historical sites today. The archaeological quest is suggested in the exhibition, primarily through the idea of the grid. The idea of the grid dividing a landscape into fixed units from a given reference point is elaborated on the information panel. A number of works on display, as seen above, follow the grid like plan, "with repetitive units recording a series of related finds" (Akar Prakar n.d.). Dividing archaeological sites into grids using a Cartesian co-ordinate system means any area that falls within the grid can be assigned a number, or co-ordinates, to distinguish it from the others. In this way meaning of the site becomes concentrated within a square unit and the entirety of the site is the cumulative meaning of successive squares. Excavating vertically on selective areas of the grid adds the dimension of depth to the square, whereby it becomes a square block. Any artifact can be represented along the three axes X, Y and Z within this square block. In all the works displayed, except for the landscape done in cloth, one sees a play on this idea of grid. All the works are in the shape of square blocks, i.e., an excavated unit in the negative. Niches of different shapes suggest artifacts or architectural elements having been excavated out. In many instances, the excavated artefact is represented only as a hollow or through its absence (see Figures 4.11 and 4.14b).

In comparison to the three installations discussed above, the exhibition and the employment of archaeology here differ in many key respects. One major difference is the absence of a narrative that renders coherence to the exhibition. The three site-specific installations had a narrative that tied them to their locations. This was by referring either to the past of the location or to its present from a point in the future. The exhibits in *The Museum Within* do not have narrative coherence of this kind. They can be exhibited in any gallery space. The objects can stay as part of the whole exhibition, as part of a series or as individual pieces. The gallery-in-charge pointed out that even the pieces that were part of a series are available for sale individually. Any textual reference to the location or identity of the objects is absent in the gallery space- including titles like *Banares* or *Step well*. However, these aspects are important

to the artist himself, for whom *The Museum Within* “is a gathering of (his) personal observations of historical sites and museum collections in India having travelled widely to cities and villages, vast open spaces and obscure tribal areas” (Mukherjee 2016g). In the same interview he points to the connection he has had with the history, mythology and the present of the city of Banares. The artist’s personal history is tied closely with the representation of the city in his work *Banares* (Figure 4.11) as was the case of *What Histories*. But the viewer, unless (s)he reads the exhibition brochure or makes assumptions based on familiarity, will not be able to contextualize the works in a similar manner. This rupture of coherence is often deliberate. The series with blue acrylic paint on paper (see Figure 4.13), is a case in point. The square blocks appear to have been cut from a larger block. Some of the lateral sides of each block have a smooth uniform appearance, and layers of paper are visible on other sides, suggesting that the block has been cut through. However, the landscape depicted on each does not show any indication of being part of a whole.

The three installations sought to tell a story not yet told. It could be of a lost mythical time and place (*Black Gold*) or of a repressed past (*What Histories*). It could be a critical commentary on the present times (*Archaeological Excavation*). Archaeology plays out the role of authenticating the story told. Mukherjee, on the other hand, is foregrounding what is already there—“architectures and objects from his past”, “to raise questions of preservation and neglect” (“The Museum Within” 2016). Rather than presenting the architecture or the objects themselves, what the artist does is to expose their context as three dimensional blocks from where they have been exhumed (hollows) and sometimes placed back. The ideas of depth and stratigraphy are well expressed by revealing the layers that form these blocks (see Figures 4.12 and 4.14b). Notably the works are arranged as in a museum, many of them in glass cases. The idea of display seems equally central to the exhibition as the idea of excavation. Figure 4.14a and b that we discussed above form part of a series where the excavated units are placed on the bottom layer and miniature terracotta objects are placed on the top layer of a glass case, simultaneously speaking of the context and presentation of the artifact. The artist says that in this series, the excavated site appears as if seen from a great distance (Mukherjee 2016g). The objects on the other hand are clear and defined. Through this strategy, he critiques the “distance that we place between ourselves and our land” and of acknowledging the past only as existing in “curated

collections” behind glass cases or as “memorabilia” (ibid.). Given, the difference in the artist’s priority, the works exhibited as part of *The Museum Within* are not concerned with authenticity of the artifacts or authentic representation of the excavation. The miniature terracotta vessels displayed as part of the different works that form part of *The Museum Within* are complete without imperfections and signs of age. “An object’s materiality speaks to its age through obvious traces of wear and tear, decay, and disintegration” (Holtorf 2013, 432). In the three installations, through selection or deliberate modification, the artists sought to reproduce such material indications of age that exude pastness. On the contrary, in *The Museum Within*, the intention is not to evoke authenticity, but to draw attention to the objects themselves which are as much part of the present as they were of the past of the region; i.e., “living history” (Mukherjee 2016b). Similarly, the process of excavation is not a direct concern in the display. It is the excavated unit (square block) that becomes important. The effort is to rethink the existence of artefacts or architectural elements as ruins by placing them in context and rendering them time-depth through layers. Unlike the previous cases, archaeology is not an obvious or ‘authentic’ presence in *The Museum Within*.

4.7. For Further Discussion: Archaeology without the Archaeologist

The artist as historian or more specifically the *artist-as-archaeologist* adds a new dimension into our discussion on the interface of public and archaeology. In many instances archaeological material and knowledge produced by the archaeologists are reinterpreted through artistic representations (*Black Gold*). In other cases, there might not be any direct interaction with the archaeologist or with archaeological material at all and what happens could be a reinterpretation of the methods and practices of archaeology. While the archaeologist and artist-as-archaeologist undertake very different endeavours, their projects overlap in terms of how archaeology is presented to the public. This overlap is not “much with archaeological science itself, but rather that place where it gets mediated for the public”, says Dion (Museum of Contemporary Art n.d.). So what the artist does is to “play with their (public’s) expectation of what archaeology is” (ibid.). Thus we see that authenticity in such artworks is not pegged so much to the material that is presented or excavated, but to

the presentation or the excavation itself. In this sense it is the materiality of the excavation and not the artefact that communicates with the public in *What Histories*, *Archaeological Excavation* and other works of the kind. What is presented in turn can be a fictional narrative where the artist has the liberty to play with imagination and reality in ways the archaeologist cannot. The artist-as-archaeologist need not always be concerned with the narrative project alone (*The Museum Within*). Her/his approach to aspects like authenticity and process in archaeology can differ from what is expected of a narrative project. Apart from the figure of the artist-as-archaeologist, for the larger concerns of our discussion, it is interesting to see what happens to the figure of the archaeologist him/herself in these works. While these are essentially art projects, the overlap we discussed above often brings the person of the archaeologist also into its fold. How do we characterize this presence? Time is a prominent concern in all the works that deal with archaeology or use the archaeological method. The artworks we saw are never about a single temporal plane. In the case of the three installations, the discussion focused on the way they relate to their actual location. What other space-times does their multi-temporality suggest? These queries will be taken up in the next chapter.

Chapter 5: Archaeology in the Present

The three case studies discussed here allow us to further develop the conversations initiated in the first chapter around the two inter-related themes- archaeology and the public and archaeology and the nation/region. Each case was expected to illuminate different facets of the archaeology-public interaction that would help bring out the complexity of the concerns. In this chapter I will revisit the case studies and develop the discussion around aspects hinted at in sections titled 'For Further Discussion' in Chapters 2, 3, and 4. In the course of this discussion, I will also take up certain generic issues raised at the beginning of the study. The first case study explored the Ayodhya judgment and the related documents, with the specific aim of understanding how archaeological evidence is transformed into legal evidence by the interaction of two state institutions namely, the ASI and the High Court of Allahabad. The focus had been on a highly regulated space, where the actors involved, including the archaeologists, were expected to play clearly defined roles. This cannot be understood as public sphere in the Habermasian (1991) sense. Rather, I have characterized this as a bounded space of interaction. The second case study on Pattanam had the purpose of opening up the discussion further, by exploring the developments in and around a site that has been undergoing archaeological interventions in recent years. Association with the site from the early years, in the capacity of a field archaeology trainee allowed me to observe the discourses as they unfolded. This was complemented by focused field study in 2013. I have used multiple source categories, including personal observations, unstructured interviews, newspaper reports and branding mechanisms to map out a descriptive ethnography of what I would consider a more or less unregulated public(s)-archaeology interaction. In the third case study, I explored a category of works that allowed me to remove the figure of the archaeologist from the centre of the discussion. I looked at a category of representation, namely, art installations where artists use archaeology, especially excavations, as the primary trope.

5.1. Case Study 1

The exploration of the judgment and the related documents revealed the judicially mediated excavations at Ayodhya as a site where specific categories of public come

into interaction with the archaeologist. Significantly, the Ayodhya case allows one to mark the archaeologist him/herself as a non-static category. The judicially ordained excavations transform the archaeologist into a new judicial category, that of the scientific expert, whose expertise is judged by factors that fall outside the purview of the discipline. Perusal of documents brought to our attention other sets of individuals who have assumed particular roles in judicial terminology. There is a second set of archaeologists who are experts appearing for the two opposing parties. They formulated their opinion on the excavations as these progressed, and on the final report. They also sought to bring about certain procedural changes in the excavations and gave their interpretations and opinions on the report. From the judicial point of view these archaeologists are performing a role different from the scientific commission (ASI) which is appointed by the bench. As we discussed in the second chapter this is the role of the 'hired expert'. The hired expert, unlike the expert who is part of the scientific commission, has to prove his/her credentials individually before he/she is accepted in the role. Agreement with the report of the commission and previous affiliation with the ASI are factors that work favourably in this assessment of expertise and vice-versa. The adverse process of scrutinizing expertise involves bringing into the legal dispute factors other than academic expertise, like personal credibility and political/ identity positions of the experts as archaeologists. While experts from both sides of the dispute could be subjected to the process, the judgment highlights these aspects in relation to only those experts who are in disagreement with the report. The archaeologist who is part of the scientific commission gains his/her credibility through institutional affiliation and archaeologists who act as experts for the parties are bound to prove their credibility individually. I consider this to be the essential difference between the two categories of archaeologists discussed. The only exception to this has been the court decision to replace the director of excavation. However rather than discrediting him as an expert, as was done in the case of D. Mandal, he is retained in the team.

Among the other actors that interact within this space, there are experts from fields like history or religion appearing for the parties. They are also subject to similar levels of scrutiny and could be discredited, as we saw in the case of Sushil Srivastava. Archaeology, if it comes into their evidence, does so only peripherally. There are also an 'absent' set of experts from different fields, people whose works are quoted

extensively by the judges. In the final decisions on those issues where archaeological evidence was central, the judges have taken into account both these categories of expertise. This is indicated clearly in the way justice Agarwal reaches his conclusions on the basis of the report that we discussed in Chapter 2. In the judgment, we come across two categories who relate to archaeology in the capacity of intermediaries. The first is the court-appointed observer. Objections by the parties and explanations by the ASI are channeled through the observer. The other category comprises the lawyers appearing for the parties who integrate archaeology into their arguments. I call these two intermediaries as their function appears to be that of translation of archaeological knowledge into legal parlance for the benefit of the judges in the case of the former and to put forth an argument in the case of the latter.

The final category that I will consider is that of the three judges themselves. The judgment has accepted the scientific commission's report as evidence as described in Section 45 of the IEA. Regarding the usefulness of the report in resolving the issue at hand, the opinions of the judges diverge, with two judges considering it as successfully answering the issue of whether a temple existed at the site of the Babri Masjid, which had been demolished to build the mosque. This solution, we saw, is not stated verbatim in the report, but is rather suggested. So what the judges do is to reach their personal interpretations of the report. The third judge, who also made the minority judgement, does not consider archaeology as necessary to resolve the matter at hand and he does not reach the same conclusion based on the report as the other two. He reaches an entirely different interpretation which is radically different from the other two. Thus what we have in the judgment are three alternative interpretations of the same report, with two being slightly different from each other in terms of how the judges reach the interpretations. The two judges, who considered archaeological evidence as crucial in resolving the issue, have worded their interpretation as definite answers to the problem. As Jasanoff (1995, 44) points out, expert claims are "presented and deconstructed in the court room, and courts ultimately achieve closure in spite of the adversarial structure of the litigation." This is what happens in the case of the archaeological report also. However, it is not a process confined to the courtroom. From defining the research question, the entire exercise is directed towards this end. And within the regulated space, each of the actors involved have clearly defined roles which they are not allowed to step over.

While judicial arbitration may be considered a bounded space, the boundaries are also, to an extent, permeable. In the context of ordering the archaeological excavations, Agarwal (Volume 15, 3739) states that “(e)xt¹raordinary situations demand extraordinary steps and strategy”. In all the three judgments there is a tone that the case is of an extraordinary nature and the judges assume their roles to be proportionately important and larger than that of adjudicating a typical civil dispute. This assumption of singularity has also meant that they would resolve to unusual measures to protect the boundaries of the space of arbitration. This occurred primarily in the form of curbs on dissemination of information to the public. Being a case with huge political import, the public interest in the Ayodhya Case was also very high. Hence this jealous guarding of boundaries led to situations of conflict and negotiation relevant to our discussion.

A very important instance is the charge of Contempt of Court² on archaeologists Shereen Ratnagar and D. Mandal³ on 11 March 2011. This was in relation to the publication of the book *Ayodhya Archaeology after Excavation* (Mandal and Ratnagar 2007), co-authored by them and published by Tulika Books. Indira Chandrasekhar of the *Tulika Books* was also charged with Contempt of Court in the capacity of publisher. The publication was brought to the notice of the court by the counsel for defendant no.2 in Suit no.4. The court observed that the persons concerned were aware that the matter was sub judice. Hence the publishing of their opinion on the ASI report was considered criminal contempt of court. It was also pointed out that the ASI report was the *property* of the court. Ratnagar, Mandal and Chandrasekhar in their

¹ Emphasis added

² As per The Contempt of Court Act, 1971, “unless the context otherwise requires, (a) contempt of court Means civil contempt or criminal contempt; (b) civil contempt means wilful disobedience to any judgment, decree, direction, order, writ or other process of a court or wilful breach of an undertaking given to a court; (c) criminal contempt means the publication (whether by words, spoken or written, or by signs, or by visible representation, or otherwise) of any matter or the doing of any other act whatsoever which (i) scandalises or tends to scandalise, or lowers or tends to lower the authority of, any court; or (ii) prejudices, or interferes or tends to interfere with, the due course of any judicial proceeding; or (iii) interferes or tends to interfere with, or obstructs or tends to obstruct, the administration of justice in any other manner.”

³ Contempt Case No. 1 of 2010 In Re: O.O.S. No. 4 of 1989

response apologized for their ‘offense’. The publisher withdrew the unsold copies from distribution. However Ratnagar and Chandrasekhar qualified their apologies saying that the purpose of the book had been academic.

This instance brings out certain important aspects of the space of judicial arbitration. Expert knowledge produced for the courtroom is fundamentally different from that produced otherwise by academic institutions. In the case of the latter, the compulsion to give definitive answers within a fixed time-frame is rare or non-existent. It is possible that problems and their resolution may be left open ended. On the contrary, it becomes imperative for the judiciary to prevent the possibilities of alternative ‘truths’ or explanations, at least until the court has had its word, and hence the measures to prevent the academic and public dissemination of knowledge from crossing its boundaries. The ultimate authority in these cases has to be the judges. This is evident from the following observation made in the contempt of court case against the archaeologists.

This is serious matter since such attempt on the part of a party to a case or a witness in a matter amounts to an attempt of influencing a Court of law in a most unwarranted and illegal manner. It is a different thing *that no one can and could succeed in such attempt since the Court is/was beyond such influence.*⁴

However, as Jasanoff (2001) points out judges cannot be expected to have more sophistication or expertise in scientific fact finding than the average lay person; this being the logic of seeking expert evidence. Hence, the judiciary, as we have seen in the discussion of the Ayodhya case will “defer more often to science's institutional authority, with consequent loss of critical capacity in the adjudicatory process” (ibid., 35). This is to the extent of actively preventing critical views outside the courtroom.

On 20 August 2002, a gag order on the media was issued. In Volume 1 of his judgment Agarwal discusses the order and reproduces lengthy excerpts from it. The court took offence to the reporting of its order dated 1 August 2003, where it proposed excavations, ordered the GPR survey and invited the parties to give suggestions on the matter. The order observed that the newspapers were not allowed to publish any opinion “threatening the Court from passing the order” (quoted in, Agarwal,

⁴ ibid., para 15. Emphasis mine

Volume 1, 195) and such action would amount to contempt of court on the part of the press. The publishing of opinion by the parties, counsels or others on the matter pending in the court was also to be considered as contempt of court. The editors were to be held responsible for these actions “which hampers fair trial or poisons public mind” (ibid.). Television channels also were prohibited by the same order from telecasting interviews of the parties, counsels and any others on the Ayodhya matter as it was sub judice. Through this rather stretched definition of the provisions of contempt of court, media was prohibited from discussing the matters related to the case. Similarly, it prevented, not just the parties or the counsel, but anyone from publicizing their opinion through the media. Thus through the above order, an issue with an enormous public life was sought to be contained within the limits of judicial arbitration, and to prevent the functioning of the media as a forum for public engagement on the issue. There were criticisms on the move to curtail freedom of expression.

(A) ban on the media as a whole even if it is on a single issue amounts to depriving the nation of the media's vital contribution to unravelling this issue in all its ramifications, and to depriving the judiciary of the benefit of the inputs it requires and which the media has been able to provide for wrapping up the issue as speedily and judiciously as possible (Radhakrishnan 2002, 4099).

The National Union of Journalists (India) gave an application for recalling or reviewing the order. Upon this, the court issued a clarification on 21 March 2003. While it held that the media is entitled to “publish a fair and accurate report of the proceeding”, (as quoted in Agarwal, Volume 1, 197) the clarification reiterated if not strengthened the earlier restrictions. The newspapers were directed not to give their opinions via the editorial page or to publish the opinion of any other person regarding the matter. There were even directives regarding the title of news items. Within the definition of fair and accurate reporting, matters such as statements of witnesses were not allowed to be reported, until their scrutiny by the court had been completed. We see, again, the court actively seeking to prevent public dissemination of information or formation of public opinion on the proceedings, including the archaeological excavations.

This led to a few instances of conflict regarding access to the excavations. On 2 June 2003, the *Outlook* magazine published an exclusive report titled ‘Secrets of the Shrine’ (Deb 2003a) by Sandipan Deb, who was then the managing-editor of the *Outlook*. The article announced that Deb had managed to enter the excavation site bypassing its tight security. Deb, in his report, described the security measures at the site and the progress of the excavations. He also reported in detail about an inscription that had supposedly been discovered on 8 May 2003 and the discussions it led to among the two camps - one that supported the temple theory and the other that was against it. On 28 May 2003, Jilani, counsel for the Sunni Waqf board complained that a member of the ASI team had leaked information and a photograph of the above mentioned inscription and also that Sandipan Deb had been given access to the site. The Observer of the excavations recorded responses from the Deputy Superintendent of Archaeology, C.B. Mishra of the ASI team and the Magistrate in charge of issuing entry passes to the site. The charges were denied by both.⁵ In the Observer’s note on the Magistrate’s response it is stated that “(I)nstructions were given to Authorised-Person for not permitting entry of any one, *how so ever high he may be*⁶, in the excavation area, who is not covered by the orders of the Hon'ble High Court”(quoted in Agarwal, Volume 16, 3753). On 23 June 2003, Deb wrote another short piece clarifying some of the matters (Deb 2003b). Here he asserted that he had indeed entered the site, without announcing his identity. There was also a complaint raised regarding the unauthorized entry of archaeologist S.P. Gupta in to the site (Agarwal, Volume 16, 3784).

The above are instances of conflicts and negotiations at the boundaries of the space of judicial arbitration. On the one hand these boundaries are jealously guarded, with those who come inside it assuming specific judicially defined roles (eg. the scientific expert). Those who are thus inside are the main actors in the constitution of expert (archaeological) knowledge. On the other hand the boundaries are also permeable as evidenced by the above instances, and there is a constant effort to regulate this

⁵ There is a confusion of dates in the way these events are reported in Justice Agarwal’s judgment (Agarwal, vol.16 3751-53). The date of the note recorded by the observer based on Mishra’s reply is given as 29 May 2003. However the excerpt from the said note mentions Deb’s article published in the *Outlook* on 2 June 2003. Hence the first date must have been mistyped in the judgment.

⁶ Emphasis mine

permeability. These aspects of the space of judicial arbitration allow us to move into the discussion of the second major concern addressed in the thesis; that of spatialities.

While the trial is contained architecturally and delimited in space and time, it must comprehend those places which are to be introduced as evidence. This comprehension must be filtered through the requirements of evidence, taking account of the various legal and technological devices which are available (Mohr 1998).

The area of land that underwent GPR survey and excavations at Ayodhya is a space of this order. Its limits are defined by the court in accordance with its needs to resolve the civil dispute for ownership. Ashish Chadha (2007) examines, the way the ASI transforms a place into an archaeological site. He examines the non-epistemic processes by which, the landscape is tamed into a statist space, where the elements of authority and bureaucracy of the ASI are reproduced. Further, through the epistemic practice of superimposition of the Wheelerian Grid onto the excavation site, “the anonymous landscape was rationalized and brought within the encompassing grip of Cartesian perspectivalism, a perspective that had both aesthetic and disciplinarian effect” (ibid., 131). What is produced through these practices is a ‘disciplinarian spatiality’ constituted thus simultaneously through the statist /bureaucratic structure and the epistemic practices of the ASI. The differences of one excavation site from the other in the present are, to a large measure, erased through these practices of transformation. Being an extraordinary situation of judicial constitution and mediation, the statist/bureaucratic and epistemic conventions of the ASI, get altered at Ayodhya. Examples of these have been discussed in the second chapter. The space is already delimited and defined through judicial inscription. Its statist/bureaucratic nature are strengthened by the coming together of the two institutions - the Allahabad High Court and the ASI. The negotiations for entry that happen at its boundaries indicate this concentration of power at the site. Usually, at an ASI excavation, it is possible for outsiders to enter and engage with the archaeologist, although the archaeologist will have the authority over the interpretation of the site. In the Ayodhya case, such interaction is not permitted and the boundaries of the excavation site are physically impenetrable. Entry is restricted by means of passes issued by the judicial authority. The magistrate’s statement quoted above that unauthorized persons would not be allowed entry *however high he may be* is meant to suggest that the power equations outside get suspended at the boundary of the excavation site. Thus

when the journalist manages to breach the boundaries and report the event, the report of the excavation attains high symbolic value- it becomes an 'exclusive' story (Deb 2003a).

While both the Allahabad High Court and the ASI, conceive the designated space as a 'regular' excavation site, the public and political nature of the Ayodhya case is such that it is not possible to overwrite the present meanings attached to the site. Order 3 prohibited excavations at the area where the makeshift temple was located and 10 feet around it. By insisting on the maintenance of status quo, the Hindu devotees get a privileged entry into the heart of the excavation site, but without actual access to the excavations.

The pilgrims reach the makeshift structure where Ram Lalla sits through a long cage-like corridor that winds through the excavation site. Not only does the pilgrim have any way to enter the excavation site - he would have to cut through the steel rods of the cage walls to do that- he cannot even see what's going on outside his cage. To keep the excavation totally concealed from the public eye, the walls of the cage have been covered from roof to ground with dark-red curtains. And there are policemen patrolling the cage to make sure no one is peeping (Deb 2003a).

The court initially held that the place where the idols were kept should be shifted so that excavations can proceed there. In Order 3 it is stated that as the trenches excavated are backfilled, the excavations cannot alter the nature of the land. Even so, considering that status quo at the site has to be maintained, the bench changes its earlier stand and prohibits excavations in and around the shrine and facilitates the entry of the worshipper. The demolition of the Babri Masjid was an act that sought to erase the Muslim identity of the place. While the Hindu devotees do not have access to the excavation site, the site itself is overlaid with its present meaning as a Hindu site of worship. By actively prohibiting excavations there, the Hindu identity gets additionally sanctioned. Whether or not such an overlay of Hindu religious identity has any import upon the excavations themselves, is a question that needs to be looked into.

Finally, the site of the excavations is also invested with a particular imagination of the nation. All the three judges view the task assigned to them as having political and social consequence at a national level- much exceeding its nature as a civil dispute for

property rights. This gets expressed in the embellished language and poetic and prose references that the judges allude to. All the three judges indicate that the dispute is, in one way or another, one of national import. To cite one example, in the section titled 'Prelude' Khan says, "[H]erein follows the judgment for which the entire country is waiting with bated breath" (Khan, 4). The national imagination at work here is a very particular one defined through religious identities. Agarwal talks at length about the idea of 'unity in diversity' as a defining feature of the nation. Before going into its specifics it is necessary to briefly discuss what this phrase has meant to the modern Indian nation.

Secularism, along with socialism, was added to the preamble of the Indian constitution in 1976, through a constitutional amendment, as a defining feature of the Republic of India. The modern Indian nation has struggled with the idea, ever since independence in 1947. Independence saw the colonial territory bifurcated into India and Pakistan over religious lines and widespread incidents of communal violence. Scholars have pointed out that the idea of secularism in India is fundamentally different from the western model. As opposed to a complete separation of religion and politics, at a constitutional level, this means state interference in religious matters (Bhargava 2010) and recognition of religious and cultural diversity (Mahajan 2002). In popular notions and sometimes in academic debates there is a tendency to associate Indian secularism "with tolerance, and India's constitutional framework is presented as a continuation of the long tradition of peaceful coexistence of diverse communities in India. This suggests that the Constitution of India merely carried forward the existing tradition of tolerance..." (ibid., 33). While instances of discord have always been prevalent, they are perceived under the model as aberrations to the norm or tradition. This rosy picture is encapsulated in the catch phrase 'unity in diversity'. It is based on the problematic notion of history of the Indian territory as existing from time immemorial which presumes the existence of an original (read Hindu) tolerant, welcoming culture that provided a conducive environment for assimilation of external religions and communities (principally Muslims and Christians and others) to be integrated within its framework.⁷ The national imagination that is invoked by the judges is pegged to this problematic notion. Agarwal, talks about the existence of

⁷ In the next section, I will discuss how this idea works in the heritage imagination of the MHP.

non-Hindu communities in Ayodhya using the terms “accommodation” and “absorption” (Agarwal, Volume 21, 5036). He draws in examples to illustrate this point, all of them of north Indian cities, including Ayodhya, which he considers as essentially Hindu, where other religious communities also exist. Khan’s minority judgment also is not different in this aspect. He describes the status of Muslims in India as unique. He says that they have been the rulers and the ruled in the past. Their present condition is considered as one where power is shared in the capacity of “junior partners” (Khan, 279). In Chapter 2 we discussed the implications of conceiving the Ayodhya dispute as one between the two major religious communities of the Indian nation upon the excavations. Infested with a religious national imagination of the kind discussed above, the excavation site at Ayodhya becomes a miniature space where the ‘nation game’⁸ is played out. The excavations become a metaphorical dig into the distant past of the nation in search of its ‘original’ owner and ‘legitimate’ heritor in the present. The excavations here serve as a legitimizing mechanism, permitting modern notions of property ownership to be stretched back into the pre colonial and archaic past and to collapse present identities onto past ones.

5.2. Case Study 2

Unlike the first case study, that sought to isolate a single aspect of a very wide problematic, the second case study may be described as descriptive ethnography that traces the events that opened out around the archaeological excavations at Pattanam in Kerala. Beginning with the identification of the archaeological potential of the site in the late 1990s, the happenings gathered momentum from 2004 and have attained a multifarious character in the present. Many of the aspects discussed in the chapter are unfolding in the present with their implications being felt in the region in diverse ways. Having been associated with the site from 2006, I have had the privilege of being a participant observer. However this study was conceived much later and hence, rather than following a consistent replicable methodology, I proceeded by exploring sources as per their availability, the details of which are discussed in the chapter.

⁸ I adapt the phrase from Benjamin Zacariah’s (2011) work on nationalism in India.

People make sense of the presence of archaeological material in their everyday, whether or not the potential of the material is recognized by professional archaeologists. At the site of Anakkara, which I have referred to in the chapter, there existed the story of a subterranean passage in relation to the rock cut caves. The local myth of the beads at Pattanam has also been discussed in the same vein. The chapter identifies many categories of people who have engaged with the site over the years. These include local and non-local visitors, manual labourers who work at the site, student trainees and other professionals, community and political organizations, people's representatives, public figures and organized market interests. The obvious idea that comes out of the discussion is that public cannot be considered as a single category- but only in its multiplicity as publics. More importantly, the study allowed us to mark the publics as fluid and dynamic. I have discussed the issues associated with defining the category, local. Nevertheless, taking it as essentially a spatial category with which a person forms a personal identification, I have been able to trace the trajectories of change in the local responses at Pattanam over the years. Up till 2008, the responses towards the excavation had been enthusiastic. Here local remained a rather loosely defined category. Over the years, the interest in the excavations gave way to other immediate concerns like fear of land grab, economic benefits etc. We see that in such contexts, the idea of the local becomes more defined, often invoking existing political boundaries, and understood in terms of the other. The most important instance of this is the discontent that the labourers from the neighbouring Pooyapalli village have been getting preference as wage labourers at the site. The habitation pattern of the region is of such a nature that it is not possible to visually distinguish the boundaries of one village from the other. And being from the neighbouring village did not automatically lead to the assumption that a person is not a local inhabitant. But with the change in the nature of concerns surrounding the site, the category of the local attained more rigid meanings in relation to these concerns.

Religious identity associations with Pattanam-as-Muziris were briefly dealt with in the case study. The instances that we discussed were isolated. The extant presence of Muziris in the St.Thomas legend evoked this association with the site in these instances. In the case of the family from Hyderabad, we saw that the tour agent had banked on the religious interest of the visitors and offered them a narrative of the site that would capture their attention. Such storylines will tend to proliferate and be

reinforced as the tourism potential of the site grows and the MHP narrative gets strengthened. During a casual visit to the site in 2016, I interacted with a group of American Jewish tourists. They were visiting the temporary museum which had just been set up at the Patamatham plot. One of the questions that were raised by most of the visitors was whether the site has yielded any remains that point to Jewish tradition. The nature of their queries suggested that they had certain pre-formed notions in this regard. The reactions of the Hindu Right Wing regarding the perceived Pattanam- Christianity link were initially confined to organizing seminars and publishing articles. With a right wing government coming into power at the centre, more focused efforts to directly interfere with the excavations began by asserting state power through the bureaucratic mechanism of the ASI.

An important aspect discussed was the formation of new collectives around and in relation to the site. The action council formed by the people of Kodungallur, to address their concerns over the identification of Pattanam with Muziris and the perceived loss of their claim to Muziris, is one of the earliest examples. We see seminars being organized to address the issue. These are temporary groupings that come together in response to an event and dissolve thereafter. We also have the Muziris Pattanam Residents' Association (MPRA) and the Muziris Ward at Pattanam. These two were formed on the basis of residence and are hence of a more permanent nature. Deficit based approaches to the concept of the public will not be able to account for formations such as the above that are constituted in engagement with archaeology or the past. We also saw the responses and roles that the archaeologist assume in relation to the public being determined by these engagements. The incident of the brochure where public demand leads to alterations in the information disseminated is an important instance. The hostility of the local population to the excavations after 2007, led to conscious efforts on part of the KCHR to allay those fears. This was done through press statements and public events. During subsequent years, the team members were asked to make rounds of the nearby areas in groups of two on bicycles to distribute information brochures at houses. During these visits people pointed out the ineffectiveness of the brochures as they were initially printed in English and also gave air to their criticisms of the project. At a personal level, these exercises had the effect of pulling one out of the comfort zone of working at the site to directly encounter the present implications of the work undertaken. While the idea

of the initiative was dissemination of information from the archaeologist to the public, the direction of the actual transaction was mutual and often unsettling for the former.

The quasi-academic space of the print magazines, are special in terms of the wide array of people from the literary public sphere that it brings together in discussion. It also allows an easy interweaving of academic archaeology with other contextual factors related to its practice. Even, personal animosity among discussants can find space in the pages of the magazines. These are aspects that are imperatively filtered out in reports and academic publishing. I have also discussed the ways in which Muziris acquires a brand value with individual establishments and projects and events of a larger scale adopting the name; though often without any direct reference to the excavations. As part of the process different categories of public including entrepreneurs, heritage and tourism professionals, government departments and artists come into the picture. The *Black Gold* and *Marupiravi* are conscious efforts at alternate readings of archaeology through the professional lenses of the artist and the novelist respectively.

Thus, one can see the Pattanam excavations as an event that excites multiple discourses, often in interaction with existing/dormant notions regarding the past. It will be reductive to place the multiple categories of the public into rigid compartments. Individual and collective interests were seen to be forming and transforming around the site over the years. The object of these interests is not necessarily the archaeology of the site, or past *per se*. Questions of state power (in the case of fear of land grab), politics, religious identity and economy (employment aspirations) are equally important in determining these interactions. Finally discourses that were once pegged to the excavations are seen to be taking a life of their own as in the case of the MHP or the KMB. With the establishment of the heritage/touristic imaginations that these projects put forward, the excavations are relegated to the periphery and are only occasionally called upon.

Pattanam excavations activate new ways of relating to territory and bring into play novel imaginations of space. I have discussed the ways in which the existing understandings of the past connect with present notions of territory to effect these imaginations. I indicated at the end of the third chapter, multiple scales at which the spatial imaginations at Pattanam operate. Specific locations associated with the

excavations attain new meanings in the local imaginary. The vantage point of looking at the site, for instance, whether one is located inside the village or outside of it also is important in these significations. With the coming in of the MHP, a larger territory gets marked with the label Muziris. This is seen to further strengthen the local sense of claim towards Muziris at Pattanam. The authenticity of the claim of Pattanam as the ‘original’ location of Muziris is invoked once again by referring to the excavations.

An important aspect that comes out of the discussion is that public-archaeology encounters are very specific to each context. The proactive nature of public engagement in archaeology has been marked by Selvakumar (2006) as a facet that makes the state of Kerala distinct from the rest of India. “The people in Kerala”, he observes, “respond very promptly to the issues that affect them and have the ability and inclination to organize and take action” (ibid.). He observes that sub-nationalistic and micro-regional feelings are very deep rooted in the region. Selvakumar points to the high literacy rate in the state as a factor that positively contributes to the proactive nature of public engagement with archaeology in the state and identifies an important role to mass media in the process. As I have taken up only one case study from Kerala, it is not possible for me to deal with these assumptions. However, we see regional and micro regional identities playing an important role in the way people engage with archaeology at Pattanam. In a recent work that looks at public controversies on science in Kerala in the early 2000s, Shiju Sam Varughese (2017) discusses the generation of “a scientific public sphere in the region, a separate deliberative space for debating science. He marks the emergence of this public sphere as being made possible through the “mutual resonance of science media and politics” in the 1990s (ibid., 67). He underlines the importance of the proliferation of a newspaper-reading culture in Kerala and marks the political public as a reading public. We discussed briefly the role played by newspaper reporting in the constitution of public opinion at Pattanam in the early years. The Pattanam excavations and the related developments received extensive media coverage, especially through the print media, and this has to be seen in the context of the proliferation of mass media in the 1990s. The debates that have been carried forward through the quasi-academic space of the print magazines also point to the agential role of the reading public in Kerala. However unlike risk perception related to scientific

controversies, we only have a few instances where archaeology or the past becomes a topic of public deliberation in this manner. While it is possible to underline the role of the print media in constituting a deliberative space for archaeology in the region, it is too early to suggest the generation of a mediatized public sphere around these issues.

The association of Pattanam with religious identities points to the existence of another kind of spatial imaginary. The St. Thomas legend connects the west coast of India to West Asia through maritime link; a connection that is invoked at the sites that are associated with the legend, like the churches that he is supposed to have established in the region. Two of these churches, the Kottakavu church and the Azhikode church are located in the vicinity of Pattanam and are part of the MHP. Hence, it is possible to imagine a Christian sacred geography in the region which incorporates Pattanam. The Jewish American visitors, I mentioned were interested in the Paravur region owing to its significance in the history of the Jewish Diaspora. The entire Jewish population in the Paravur region has migrated to Israel. The synagogues in the region - the Paravur synagogue and the Chendamangalam synagogue - have been renovated and made into museums to be included in the tourism imagery of the MHP. As a port that received external waves of populations, it is possible to include Pattanam in the spatial imagination of the Diaspora, as a node for a population that is constantly in flux. That is, it can assume the role of a fixed location in the fluctuating territorial imagination of history for the Jewish visitors.



Figure 5.1.: Muziris Guest House, Kottayil Kovilakam with the picture of a sail ship

An image that gets reproduced in all the different contexts and locations at which Muziris is invoked is that of the sail boat (see figures 3.3 and 5.1). The sail boat is an emblem of both the past and the idea of contacts with the outside world that Brand Muziris is about. It is not necessarily a conscious reproduction of these aspects in each individual case, but a connection that has been established through association. In both the instances where Muziris attains a brand value at a large scale- at the MHP and the KMB - these are the ideas that are repeatedly evoked. The historical location of Muziris as a port of significance in the trans-oceanic networks of trade is discussed within the MHP and the KMB using a fresh set of terminology and definitions that resonate easily with the needs of global heritage tourism. These include terms and phrases like ‘proto-cosmopolitanism’ and ‘cultural melting pot’ that are repeated time and again in the promotional material of the project. Here, two processes that are mutually constitutive and integral to tendencies of globalization are at work - “an increasing awareness of the global as well as of the local, of the universal as well as of the particular” (Glover 2008, 106). The entry of Muziris into the global heritage tourism discourse has imbued it with meanings and values in response to these two tendencies. It relies heavily on the past of Muziris as a port of importance in the trans-oceanic networks of trade in antiquity and selectively plays up facets of the past and present of the sites and other elements that constitute the heritage assemblage. At the same time, it infuses the past “with new meanings that resonate with trans-national/global consumers of heritage” (Varghese 2017, 170). The location of the region away from the national power centre, its openness to trans-oceanic connections from the early historic period, and a pronounced culture of migration for labour, especially to the Persian Gulf, suggests the possibility of spatial imaginations that bypasses the national and evolving through the interaction among the local/regional, the oceanic and trans-national.⁹ Being at the periphery of the national, having strong

⁹ In the introductory essay to a collected volume of interdisciplinary essays on Kerala Modernity, the editors point out that “the outward openness of the region is quite significant in understanding its modernity. The ‘globality’ of the region- a sense of being connected to and participating in the world through multiple channels and pathways- indicates that Europe might only be one of the sources of modernity for regions like Kerala” (Bose and Varughese 2015b, 11). The title of the essay, ‘Situating an Unbound Region’, is indicative of the authors’ position urging one to look beyond limiting models such as the sub-national.

regional/micro regional identifications and active engagement with the global heritage discourse in recent years allows imaginations around archaeology and the past that are not centred or defined in relation to the nation.

This brings us to one of the questions we raised in the first chapter. Is the nation as a category redundant in the notions of territory/space that are activated around the Pattanam excavations and the idea of Muziris? The right wing attack on the excavations was based on the imagination of India as a Hindu nation, where the Semitic religions represent the outsider. The incident at Pattanam excavations, where the white-skinned VIP visitor was misidentified as a foreign national and hence a Christian, and the misconception of his visit as a Christian scheme to hijack the excavations, operated on this logic. The right wing attacks against the excavations get channeled through the national power centre. Another way in which the nation state comes into picture is through the bureaucratic authority of the ASI. While the ASI is not a pervasive presence at the excavations, it has the authority to control the excavations and even bring it to a halt, as it did in 2015. In the criticisms leveled against the excavations through the print media, the ASI is placed as a body of higher expertise and status than the KCHR which is an autonomous regional academic body (Narayanan 2011; Shashibhooshan 2011a).

The MHP and the KMB respond to the shifting tendencies in heritage discourse which are symptomatic of the changing world order that stresses the global as opposed to the national. But this does not entail a complete shift or disjuncture from the narrative preoccupations or needs of the national modern. Muziris derives its value as an international tourist destination by virtue of it being a place that welcomed different religious groups and communities into its fold. This qualifies it to be branded as an ‘early model of cosmopolitanism’ and ‘world mall’. This idea of pluralism and co-existence, I would argue, resonates with the idea of ‘unity in diversity’ that we discussed above as the catch phrase that defines the secular preoccupation of the national modern¹⁰. Kerala is often portrayed as a place where this model of

¹⁰ This is an idea that is stressed in the nation’s official tourism narratives as well. The tagline *Athiti Devo Bhava* (Guest is God) used as part of the Incredible India Campaign (launched in 2002) of the Department of Tourism, Government of India is an important example. The tagline underlines the act of welcoming the tourist as an almost religious or sacred act. The National Tourism Policy drafted in the same year as the Incredible India Campaign was launched identifies that:

secularism, defined in terms of tolerance and co-existence plays out in a way that is ideal and, by virtue of its ideality, different from the rest of the nation.¹¹ Similarly, particular regions within Kerala have also been marked for their distinctive expressions of religious/communal co-existence (Menon 1932) which are often seen as contributing to their ‘cosmopolitan’ character (KMB n.d.; Riedel 2013). Just as Kerala is often portrayed as the ideal microcosm of Indian secularism, Muziris, within the MHP framework, in turn becomes a microcosm for the state, a past utopia. At first glance this appears to be a narrative that responds to the tendencies of the global heritage discourses which require sites to be presented as locales with ‘outstanding universal values’ that can have global resonance. A closer examination reveals it also to be closely tied in with the narrative compulsions of the secular modern nation, where by Kerala and by extension the MHS can serve as an ideal microcosm of Indian secularism.

The case of Pattanam reveals that significations that the past carries and the spatial imaginations that are generated around these significations depend on a number of factors, including the conditions of their production, present notions of territory and regional identities, and their potential to be part of contemporary processes of a grand scale as that of global heritage tourism. The discussion has marked these spatial imaginations as operating at different scales and as generated through their interaction. Muziris, as an idea is seen to assume multiplicity over the years and at

“India’s great competitive strength from tourism point of view is its ancient and yet living civilization that gave rise to four of the world’s great religions and philosophies, and brought travelers and trade millennia ago...India’s contact with other civilizations is reflected in the rich cultural diversity of its people through its languages cuisines, traditions customs, music, dance, religious practices and festivals, its holistic healing traditions, art and craft”(Department of Tourism 2002, 9).

¹¹ In India the religious demography shows that an overwhelming majority (a little under 80percent as per the 2011 census) of the population is Hindu. Kerala shows a different trend with the Hindus constituting only 54.7 percent of the population, the rest predominantly being by Muslims (26.6 percent) and Christians (18.4 percent). The presence of the Semitic religions in the South West coast is attributed to the maritime trade contacts extending to over 2000 years before presence. This again is different from the narratives of national history where Islam and Christianity predominantly attributed with a past of invasion and occupation, the latter of the colonial kind.

times the Pattanam excavations cease to be a part of or become peripheral to these notions. What I have tried to do in the case study is to map out this multiplicity in becoming. Through this exercise Pattanam excavations are seen to act as a node proliferating through time into multi-scalar spatial imaginations.

5.3. Case Study 3

In the third case study I went into a close analysis of a single category of public that I have called ‘artist-as-archaeologist’. Here I focused on selected artworks from the region where archaeology, more specifically excavations, become a motif/trope. The category of ‘artist-as-archaeologist’, allows us to further complicate, the archaeology-public relationship, because the professional archaeologist is not a visible/central presence here. Rather the engagement of the artist with archaeology is methodological or conceptual, and archaeology often serves as a metaphor in these works. The removal of the archaeologist from the centre of the discourse allowed me to approach the public- archaeology relationship in a novel way. Most of the studies that have discussed the issue have seen the relationship as one where the archaeologist assumes a central position. Even when the public(s) are recognized as having active agency that influences archaeological practice at every level, the archaeologist is present there in the discussion as being primarily responsible for the production of archaeological knowledge. In the art installations discussed in the chapter, the artist assumes this central role. But his/her effort is neither to “pretend as an archaeologist” (Museum of Contemporary Art n.d.a) or to produce archaeology *per se*. Rather the artwork, creates an impression of archaeology, an impression that is used in many of these instances as a narrative mechanism.

While the archaeologist does not occupy a central position in these instances, he/she is not always absent. In many, but not all, of the art works discussed, the archaeologist is an *absent-presence*. Figure 4.7 shows the archaeologist’s work station represented in the works of Mark Dion and Aman Mojadidi. Both the stations are set to suggest that the work of the archaeologist is in progress. The chair pushed back to an angle, the wheelbarrow with bags and tools (Dion 2013), the flask and glass and the soiled gloves on the work table (Mojadidi 2012) all pointing to the archaeologist having just left the station taking a short break from there. In Jeff Wall’s *Fieldwork* (Figure 4.8),

the archaeologist is included in the frame of the photograph doing archaeology. Waqif (2014) engages archaeology students in the dig in an effort to make the process as close to a real excavation as possible. While the installation that he leaves behind is an open trench which appears abandoned after partial excavation, in his own documentation of the work (Waqif n.d.), the process is important and he has taken care to include photographs of students working in the trench. In *Black Gold* (Sundaram 2012), the suggestion of the presence of the archaeologist is much vaguer - the photographs of the excavations (without people) placed at the antechamber of the room with the video projection. *The Museum Within* (2016), unlike the works discussed above, does not seem to indicate the presence of the excavator in any manner. The niches, empty spaces and the trenches in negative all seem to suggest emptiness. The archaeologist similarly is a completely absent figure here. I would call the figure of the archaeologist in all the other cases discussed above as an absent-presence, because the figure is either a suggestion or a representation. The archaeologist here is placed in the *role* of the archaeologist. He/she is not doing archaeology or generating an archaeological record. He/she is a part of the installation in the same way as a potsherd or a shovel is.

For the location specific installations that we discussed - *Black Gold*, *What Histories*, and *Archaeological Excavation* - the space-time of their actual location is the primary reference. The narrative projects that they undertake, take off from this location of their actual existence. *Black Gold* plays on the idea of Kochi-Muziris, a dominant idea that is central to the conceptualization of the KMB. It is a celebration of its location, the KMB in that sense. *What Histories* while being a part of the KMB itself, talks about the hidden/repressed histories of the location; a different way of engaging with the same location. While the narrative of the *Archaeological Excavation* is not explicit about its setting, the idea of a left leaning university space clearly suggests the JNU campus where it is located. The spatial imagination of the nation in its contemporary expression is pervasive in *Archaeological Excavations*. The information boards modeled on the ASI sign boards and the absurd and exaggerated punishments proclaimed on them for anyone who trespasses the site is a further play on the contemporary power assumptions of the nation state. The use of excavations as a trope or motif implies the concern with time. Roelstrate (2009) links this to the historiographic turn in art which meant a preoccupation with the past and inability to

look at the future. The futuristic excavation by Waqif in *Archaeological Excavations* puts this assumption into question. This being so, what the *Archaeological Excavation* does is also an excavation of the past from the vantage point of the future. Is this a strategy to cope with the difficulty to imagine the future or to talk about the present?

In the two installations from the KMB 2012, *Black Gold* and *What Histories* the biennale space is seen to inform the spatial imaginations that they generate. The terracotta landscape that recreates Muziris is temporally fixed in the past. It tells the story of a lost port city which had been a commercial hub (pepper corns distributed among the sherds) in the trans-oceanic networks of trade (the map of Indo-Mediterranean trading ports of the past exhibited at the antechamber to the video installation). The temporal fixity of the space, thus represented, is disturbed through the video installation. The video shows the same landscape of potsherds in flux, as forming an unforming, in a loop simultaneously displayed in three panels at its different stages. This creates the impression of impermanence, fluidity and vast temporal sweeps through which the landscape moves. Unraveling at the feet of the observer, the gaze from above allows him/her to experience the process happening at a large spatio-temporal scale in its entirety. I have discussed elsewhere how the space of Kochi-Muziris works as a utopian space (Varghese 2017). In *Black Gold*, similarly, “the past, or at least narratives of the past enable utopian imaginings of another time and place that is not yet here, but nonetheless functions as a doing for futurity, a conjuring of both future and the past to critique presentness” (Munoz 2009, 106).

What Histories is a rather straightforward retelling of a story that was not told in mainstream historiography. By digging into the landscape, its hidden histories are revealed. The autobiographical character of the narrative makes it different from the other two discussed above. It also unearths a personal history of the artist’s ancestor. What is excavated is also a personal space - the household of the artist’s ancestor. It is a contained, intimate space in that sense. At the same time, the story of Zaman Mujadidi resonates well with the KMB narrative. The idea of the humanity house and his history as a trader who operated through the silk route strikes a chord with the imagination of Kochi-Muziris as a syncretic, welcoming space. Personal effects like lapis lazuli beads (from Afganistan) that are presented as artefacts from the site, underline the cosmopolitan character of the trader. Established firmly in Kochi’s past

the trader expounds universal humanism. His deletion from history is by the hands of the British colonialists. This deletion in turn is reminiscent of the history of Kochi-Muziris, the loss of the utopian space of Muziris to flood.

5.4. Moving Beyond Broad Definitions and Fast Categories

In the first chapter we discussed Grima's (2016) work that raises the pertinent question "But Isn't All Archaeology 'Public' Archaeology?" Grima urges to go beyond the preoccupation of formulating broad definitions that seek to accommodate the ever increasing scope and range of topics that are discussed under the definition of Public Archaeology. The three case studies we discussed allow us to have an insight into very different aspects of archaeological practice in contemporary times in the region. I have sought deliberately to move away from devising a methodology for comparative analysis of cases. In two of the case studies I have tried a focused analysis of selected aspects and in one (the case of Pattanam) I have attempted a broad descriptive ethnography that goes beyond the immediate scope of archaeology to bring into the fold of conversation broader issues of heritage in the present times. The discussion of the case studies in the above section validates this assumption. They bring out very specific aspects of the public-archaeology interaction that a comparative analysis would have missed. Taken together, they have allowed us to acknowledge the role of the state, bureaucracy and institutionalized practices in archaeology, and to mark the public in its multiplicity as public(s). Archaeological interventions can be understood as constituting deliberative spaces of public interaction. Identities and collectives are seen to be forming and transforming in such spaces. Placing public(s) into categories seems a futile exercise here, as identities are seen to be fluid and transforming (as was marked in the case of Pattanam).

At a methodological level, I would propose, using the subject-position of the archaeologist to turn the gaze towards archaeology and the archaeologist in public-archaeology interaction. It is important to underline the idea that I am not placing experience as a necessary condition for theorization (the archaeologist can only speak for him/herself). I place this, on the basis of the discussion so far, as a strategy to advance the debates of public-archaeology relationship. The case studies show the academic and public practices of the archaeologist being affected by the conditions in

which they work. Within particular, often special, conditions archaeologists were seen to assume different roles like that of the expert in a court of law, a guide in a heritage-tourism situation or that of a narrative element in art installations. The archaeological knowledge produced on field, its recording and interpretation were similarly marked as being determined by such conditions. This came out with particular clarity in the Ayodhya case. The discussion also makes me wary of moving towards one or the other models that we discussed in the first chapter. The identification of the multiple roles that the archaeologist performs and the recognition of the ways in which the conditions of production determine archaeological knowledge, can be easy excuses to argue for extreme relativism. However by doing this one falls into a reverse trap of marking the archaeologist as a passive category without agency. Rather, I understand the case studies as occasions to see the ways in which archaeologists exercise their agency. What I would argue against is the reductive notion of archaeology as a scientific-truth producing enterprise which is still a prevalent notion in India and many parts of the world. This, as we have noted in the first chapter, is one of the reasons for the late uptake of the discipline of theoretical developments in social sciences. It is also a comfortable notion that allows the archaeologist to ignore the political and public nature of their work. Hence, I would also argue against treating Public Archaeology as a (sub) discipline in the rigid sense as it risks relegating these issues to the domain of the expert and placing them out of the realm of archaeology in practice.

Excavations are the dominant mode of archaeological practice explored in all the case studies. The excavation trench is one of the most significant representations of the image of archaeology as an objective scientific discipline. The trench is usually laid out in X-Y coordinates in the cardinal directions. The extensions that are added to it are also similarly laid out. From the sections vertical digging is done along the Z coordinate in a way as to obtain vertical/straight sections. Each artifact found can be marked along the three co-ordinates. The cubical space unearthed assumes significance by a concentration of meaning within its boundaries. It represents the entire history of the site. Each artifact unearthed has relevance larger than itself as it functions in conjuncture as bases of interpretation. I sought to explore how this symbolic value of the excavation trench works into contexts of public engagement of archaeology. Owing to its lay out along the cardinal directions, the excavation trench

has a high visual impact. It clearly breaks the physical logic of the landscape on which it is laid. This visual possibility of the trench has been explored in both *What Histories* and *Archaeological Excavation*. The break from the present reality that it signifies, can strengthen the narrative project - that is, it takes the observer from the present reality into the narrative. The pattern of grids and the possibility of the excavated cube have also been explored by Mukherjee in his works displayed in *The Museum Within*. Cubes in *The Museum Within* with layers revealed on the four sides are reminiscent of the trench in negative. Apart from the visual potential of the excavation site, the act of excavating also is immensely significant in the public perception of archaeology. Depth and origin are often equated with authenticity. An authentic artifact may be considered to possess aura, that involves a sense of distance and difference (Schnapp, Shanks and Tiewws 2004). This possibility of the archaeological excavation and the excavated artefact, we saw has been explored in the MHP. In the Ayodhya case also the expectation is that “earth may bear testimony”¹² to the question of original ownership of the disputed land.

The second problematic that has been explored in the thesis is the relation of archaeology with nation/region. This relation was assumed in the light of studies that have looked at how regional and national contexts and historical processes like colonialism define archaeological practice, and studies that examine how past and archaeology work into the regional/national imaginary. We saw in the first chapter that in the current context of globalization of cultural heritage, it is often assumed that earlier categories like the nation state have lost their relevance. This study took a skeptical attitude to this assumption. All the cases selected are from the post 1990s and our exploration showed the extant presence of the nation as a pervasive spatial category. In the introduction to this thesis I talked about the circumstances that forced me to drop the exploration of a case study that looked at the archaeological efforts to identify the location of Kapilavastu. It illustrated the extant presence of the nation state as a category that influences academic projects including my own work. In the case studies also, we saw that the boundaries of the nation state (alongside other contemporary political boundaries) are highly relevant to archaeological practice and knowledge production. In the Indian context the bureaucratic centrality of the ASI, the choices made towards the production of the nationalist past and the colonial and post-

¹² Order dated 5 March 2003 (Sharma, Annexure 3, 11)

colonial traditions of practice that the institution has been following were found to have a decisive role in archaeology. The Ayodhya judgment is a specific site where the nation state and the traditional state/bureaucratic institutions are strongly activated. I focused on this particular aspect of the Ayodhya case as a pointer towards understanding the determining role of these institutions in defining archaeological knowledge in the contemporary context. The case of Ayodhya is in a sense an unfinished project, because of this narrow focus. The political and disciplinary implications of the demolition of the Babri Masjid and the involvement of archaeology in the entire discourse have multifarious dimensions which have not been discussed in the thesis. The debates that occurred at the WAC point to the multiple scales at which the Ayodhya issue assumes relevance. Mapping the public and academic responses to the Ayodhya excavations and the judgment, possibly through an in depth study of the media coverage that it received at local, national and global levels would be a way to capture these processes and to extend the current assumptions that we have derived.

The nation state is not the only spatial referent with a determining function in archaeology. It is also affected by micro-regional, global and trans-oceanic categories of space and spatial categories with different chronological referents. Archaeology was seen to engage with and evoke multiple spatial imaginations that are not necessarily territorial in the physical sense. Hence, in the course of the research, I felt that rather than talking about the nation/region, it would be more effective to talk about different kinds of spaces that become relevant in each case study. We see multi-scalar concepts like the (g)local assuming relevance in heritage studies. Here the understanding is that rather than the local losing its relevance through global processes like heritage marketing, they assume new significations through a complex process of de/re-territorializing. This is a useful concept to understand the happenings around Pattanam, before and following its entry into the heritage tourism discourse. The concept of scales that I discussed in the first chapter will be an effective methodological tool to discuss these multiple spatialities. In each of these cases, spatial referents and imaginations are seen to occupy multiple scales and are often produced through the interaction of scales.

This study was conceived as an exploratory enquiry that looks at the public and political nature of archaeology. During the course of this research, there were many occasions when I was asked what the area of my research was. Ideas like Public Archaeology and politics of archaeology invariably required further explanations. When the question came from a non-archaeologist, the ideas could easily be communicated by referring to one of the case studies, either Ayodhya or Pattanam, as an example. Interestingly, communication was more difficult within the archaeology circles. On many occasions it was suggested to me that there is no relevance for the topic or that it was an easy choice not meant for 'real' archaeologists. Sometimes the suggestions took an accusatory tone. I was criticized for deliberately mixing 'politics' with archaeology. Given the political import of the Ayodhya case for the country, these views appeared incongruous, especially in comparison to ready comprehension by non-archaeologists. In the contemporary times, the past is getting increasingly enmeshed in the political and economic processes in the region. One of the very recent instances has been around the Taj Mahal, where the Hindu Right wing groups claimed its 'original' identity to be that of a Siva temple. The ASI was also pulled into the controversy to give its authoritative opinion. Among the reasons for the prevalence of attitudes as above are the particular conditions of the post colony that came out in our discussion. The link that archaeology has had with nationalist history making and the regulation of archaeological practice across the country through bureaucratic traditions inherited from the colonial times makes it difficult for the discipline to engage with theoretical developments outside its boundaries or from other parts of the globe. I am not suggesting a complete absence of such concerns in Indian archaeology. We have discussed a number of studies that engage with many of these questions with a sense of immediacy which this thesis also shares. What I have tried to do in this project is to suggest ways of looking at archaeology as a practice of the present.

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