



RESEARCH PAPER

**Vernacularizing Knowledge in Pakistan: Archaeological Literature
in the Punjabi Language**

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the vernacularization of archaeology through writings in local languages in Pakistan. Two books written by Dr. Saifur Rahman Dar, a veteran Pakistani archaeologist and historian, in Punjabi make the archaeology of Taxila and Harappa accessible to lay persons. The books have been placed in the framework of vernacularization of archaeology. Qualitative methods with context analysis have been used in the study. Brief summaries of the books have been given followed by an analysis which shows the accessibility of the works to lay person. The socio-cultural and political situations in which such kind of literature used to be produced during the late twentieth century Pakistan have also been pointed out.

Keywords

Archaeology, Dar, Harappa, Punjabi Adabi Board, Punjabi, Taxila, Vernacular

Introduction

The colonial origins of archaeology in the Indian subcontinent can hardly be doubted. It started and evolved over the last more than two centuries. Scholarly investigations and analyses in this regard have brought various perspectives to the fore. Some consider Indian archaeology as the result of European imperialism and the process of colonialism while according to others a relative neutral interest and scientific thought, since the Asiatic Society, led to its emergence and development. These polemic debates aside, archaeology in South Asia is now a discipline which is not only entwined to purely scholarly considerations but also feeds political and social concerns. All this, undoubtedly, has diversified the concept and practice of archaeology in the region. One of the related issues shall be the history, academic practice and politic of vernacular archaeology and vernacularization of archaeology. And this article deals with archaeological publications in the Punjabi language with a focus on two books, namely *Taxila* and *Harappa* by Dr. Saifur Rahman Dar.

Literature Review

Literature of the Punjabi language is, no doubt, marked by its richness in various forms. However, it cannot be said with respect to history and archaeology, and about social science subjects for that matter. This study relates to some works in recent years. Samina Batool, in her Master's thesis (2013), has presented an overview of Dr. Saifur Rahman Dar's research papers published in the *Journal of Asian Civilizations* of Taxila Institute of Asian Civilizations, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad. Azizullah Katpar (2022) has worked on Sindhi scholars' researches and

writings in the field of numismatics. He has brought works in Sindhi to the fore through discussing contents and contexts of indigenous scholars and their publications. This Master's thesis directly relates to the present study. This author has also recently investigated role of common people of Taxila in Alexander Cunningham's archaeological surveys in the valley during the early late nineteenth century. The local collaborators have been termed as ultra-subalterns who need to be treated as 'other archaeologists'. But the article does not include the issue of formal local scholarship (Shaheen 2022). A chapter in Tariq Rahman's book, *Language and Politics in Pakistan* (1998), deals with the Punjabi language movement in Pakistan and it provides a sort of contextual setting for the purpose of this study. K. Paddayya (2018) also refers to works in various Indian languages about South Asian archaeology, particularly ones by H. D. Sankalia.

Theoretical Framework and Methods

One of the issues in the studies of cultural and archaeological heritage in Pakistan shall be the history and practice as well as research and politics relating vernacular archaeology and vernacularization of archaeology. A workable distinction may be made between vernacular archaeology and vernacularization of archaeology. The former may be defined as the diversification of the concept and practice of archaeology. The latter is the process which aims to serve especially two purposes. It can be used in pursuits aiming at taking archaeology to the general public. This can be done through different media - media, popular literature, cultural caravans, exhibitions, etc. - and with different philosophical positions i.e. appropriate simplifications and new model with an emphasis of openness to non-professionals and outsiders (see Khan & Shaheen 2018). Vernacularization of archaeology shall also attend to questions regarding decolonization of the discipline epistemologically and philosophically. Furthermore, this pursuit necessarily and purposefully calls for paying due attention to vernacular languages. These languages garner special significance in any sort of indigenization of knowledge, which in turn contributes to the revival of those non-western rationalities which have been marginalized and suppressed by colonialism. In the postcolonial socio-cultural and political situations non-western multiple realities are believed to have great potentials with respect to the emancipation of the once colonized groups of people, and the world at large (Lydon & Rizvi 2012). K. Paddayya (2018) also illustrates the need of sociological turn in South Asian archaeology so as to engage people with their heritage through different means, including literature in vernaculars. Keeping these insights in mind, this study aims at exploring Pakistani archaeology through publications in the Punjabi language. The focus has been on two works of the well-known Pakistani scholar, Dr Saifur Rahman Dar.

Content and contextual analyses along with comparative methods have been adopted in this work.

The paper first gives an out summary of two books in Punjabi dealing with Harappa and Taxila. It is followed by some contextual analysis including talking about the target audience and the need and importance of such literature.

Archaeology in Punjabi language

Archaeological literature in Urdu is richer as compared to such works in Punjabi as well as in some other languages like Pashto. Sindhi language is an exception as it is richer even than Urdu in archaeological and heritage literature. So

far, I have accessed two books in Punjabi dealing with archaeological matters. Both were written decades ago by the famous Pakistani scholar, Dr. Saifur Rahman Dar. It is interesting that both the books deal with two quite different periods in Pakistani history: the Indus or Harappan civilization and Gandhara civilization. Chronologically, Dr. Dar's book about one of the important centres of Gandhara, that is Taxila, the book is also titled as *Taxila*, appeared in 1977. His second book, *Harappa*, was published after around three years in 1980. Before summarizing the books, let us have some words about Dr. Dar himself.

Dr. Saifur Rahman Dar was born on 28 June, 1939, in Gujranwala, Punjab. He received his initial education in the same city and moved to the University of the Punjab for pursuing degree in history, which he received in 1961. After completion his education, he was inducted into the Federal Department of Archaeology and Museums and served in different parts of Pakistan, including Taxila and Lahore Museums. During his service, he was offered to pursue his PhD in Greece and the topic of his research was the archaeology of Taxila. Afterwards, Dr. Dar published abundantly in English. He published articles and chapters in books within Pakistan and from abroad. He also published books on Taxila, historical routes, arts and crafts and museums. Dr. Dar retired from the Archaeology Department, Government of Pakistan, as Director (Batool 2013, 1-4).

Dr. Saifur Rahman Dar wrote two books, titled *Taxila* and *Harappa*, on the invitation of the Pakistan Punjabi Adabi Board, Lahore, which they subsequently published. These publications, which are summarized below, show the institutional dimension to the process of vernacularization of archaeology in Pakistan. *Taxila*, September 1977, pp. 152.

Taxila consists of eight chapters dealing in detail with the meaning and etymology of Taxila, its geography and historical importance. The book also details upon the political and dynastic history of the valley starting with the stone Age evidence and coming down to the end of the ancient or beginning of medieval period. It also highlights the urban and monastic landscape of Taxila. Arts and crafts of the area, its daily-use utensils, jewelry, seals, coins and beads have been discussed. another interesting topic in the book deals with the inscriptions and written materials, both in Aramaic and Kharoshti, and their forms and styles. Taxila's archaeological monuments till the Muslim period have been elaborated as well. Finally, since Taxila has its own important museum founded in the British time (Marshall 1960), the book details upon its collections and material. *Harappa*, August 1980, pp. 47.

The second book by Dr. Dar is titled as *Harappa*. As it is clear from its name it deals with the archaeological site of Harappa, Punjab. Harappa is one of the four or five most important cities of the Indus civilization. Indus civilization is also sometimes called as Harappan civilization. The book *Harappa* comprises six chapters. It discusses the history of the discovery of the site in the nineteenth century followed by an elaborate treatment accorded to the urban structure of Harappa, the archaeological material recovered from it, the various residential and commercial quarters and its reference to the Kot Diji culture. Dr Dar also talks about the nature of religious system in the area and focuses on some other socio-cultural aspects of the city. It is interesting that he also touches upon the theme of the disappearance or transformation of this civilization. The possible reasons held responsible for the collapse of Harappan civilization have been said to be climatic, environmental, change in the course of river or even the Aryan advent.

Analytical Discussion

Dr. Dar uses very simple language in his books. Both the works are more comprehensive and great care has been taken in using comprehensible vocabulary for common local peoples. Both *Harappa* and *Taxila* are different from his English publications which, as modern academic standard requires, are profusely appended with explanations, quotations, citations etc. Dr. Dar does not use foot notes and end notes in his Punjabi books. He, however, has added a bibliography only to his *Taxila*. But overall the books aim to reach the wider local audience. He has tactfully used Punjabi words for the better understanding of his general readers. For example, he has used word GHUGHU GHURAY for small toys and GEHNAY for jewelry.

What is even more important to mention here is the wider cultural, political and literary context of writing on different themes in the late twentieth century Pakistan. The political and cultural scene of the period was highly marked by ethno-nationalist and language activism (Rahman 1998). Beside the language movements relating to Sindhi, Pashto, Siraiki, Balochi/Brahvi, there were also activities of sorts for the protection and promotion of Punjabi language. Different literary and academic bodies and organizations were particularly active in the 1970s and 1980s in relation to Punjabi language and identity. Tariq Rahman writes, 'After the emergence of Bangladesh in December 1971, the Punjabi movement became somewhat subdued although these were the best years for the production of consciousness-raising literature. The relationship between identity and literature also received direct expression at different forums' (Rahman 1998, 204). Pakistan Punjabi Adabi Board was definitely one of these forums which was busy in language and cultural services to Punjabi. Dr. Dar's books may, therefore, be considered as a logical result of this literary-cultural-political landscape of the last three decades of the twentieth century. But it should be especially noted that he maintained his scholarly neutrality in his work unlike many popular writers having cultural nationalist inclinations.

If we take a broader view of self-consciousness about ethnicity and language, the phenomena would become more obvious and understandable. Scholars, literati, language activists and different cultural-academic institutions and bodies, throughout Pakistan, were busy in promoting and protecting their respective languages. The well-know late medieval Pashto-Persian book, *Tawarikh-I Hafiz Rahmat Khani* by Pir Muazzam Shah, was published by the Pukhto Academy, University of Peshawar, in 1971. Robert Nichols (2017, 228) observes that '... one intention was once again to reclaim and self-interpret the telling of the Pakhtun past. It might be said that in 1971 the Pashto Academy was also projecting and consolidating a self-consciously regional Pakhtun sensitivity, one in danger of being marginalized in a newly independent nation-state of often powerful, competing identities.'

But as we have noted above, Dr. Dar's books are written in pure academic fashion. And we can better compare them to work in this direction by the legend of Indian archaeology, H. D. Sankalia, who, though primarily writing in English, also wrote in local languages such as Hindi and Marathi. K. Paddayya states that 'I must in particular draw attention to his 31-page-long popular book entitled *An Introduction to Archaeology* published in 1965 in English, Hindi and Marathi' (2018, 497). He further highlights the important of this publication, 'It gives in a simple language an excellent account of the aims and methods of archaeology and romance and adventure associated with it as a field discipline. Even today this is the best introduction to archaeology available in India and is widely used by school children and educated

laymen' (ibid.). There is great understanding of this kind of situation in India. Amongst others, 'Darshak Itihas Nidhi, a foundation for studies in history, has two major objectives: one, to promote work on less chartered areas of history; and, two, to take history to society.' In 2012 they published Virchand Dharamsey's volume *Bhagwanlal Indraji: The first Indian archaeologist. Multidisciplinary approaches to the study of the past*. 'This volume fulfills the first objective; the second objective' was to 'be [shortly] fulfilled by the Gujarati rendering of this story.'

Conclude

Communicating archaeology in vernacular, both verbally or in written, is, although negligible, not unknown in Indian subcontinent. Long before some writers made this experience in this field. H.D. Sankalia is well-known for making efforts to vernacularize archaeology. However, we can also locate some works in Sindhi which appeared before 1947. Similarly, many other languages of the subcontinent can be mentioned in this respect. What is important to note is the vitality of individual commitment and institutional involvement in such kinds of vernacularization projects. With respect to Dr. Dar's books, we have seen that these were published by the Punjabi Adabi Board. Similarly, some pamphlets were long before published in Pashto by the Federal Department of Archaeology and Museum. Lok Virsa also has the potential to work in this direction (personal communication with Dr. Dar). But unfortunately, this kind of interest and mission seem to have long been gone into oblivion. It needs to be revived along with a focus on reaching out to potential readers regarding vernacular archaeological literature. The most recent example, which can be used as a model in Pakistan, is Darshak Itihas Nidhi.

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