PREFACE

While presenting the first volume of the book 'New Era of Indian Archaeology' the happy memories of the camps at Sisupalgarh (Orissa) and Hastinapur (U.P.), where I learnt the fundamentals of excavation, are brought back to my mind. The job of excavation, the most important branch of archaeological pursuit, is no doubt a very strenuous one, yet it appeared to me to be most absorbing and interesting. The thrill at every moment to unearth any valuable antiquity, that may reveal the story of man's past, is a feeling which can only be experienced and not imagined or expressed in words. It is an instinct, not inborn in any student of archaeology, but has to be developed by undergoing the continuous stress and strains in the field in a most devoted manner. The serious student in the field is expected to merge himself completely with the buried soil and the remains representing the story of man's past, so as to unfold the mystery of bygone days.

The title of the book 'New Era' has been labelled after Sir Mortimer Wheeler, who introduced the technique of Scientific Excavation based on the Principles of Stratification in the country, besides bringing a military discipline in the field. Though I was not fortunate enough to receive the first hand training under Wheeler, I still feel proud of having been introduced to the subject by one of his best pupils, B.B. Lal, who is still regarded as the topmost field archaeologist in the country. There had been a number of occasions when I got impatient to speed up the work, while working under him, at the same time I frankly admit that I was always amazed by the keen observation of my teacher. In this context I very well remember to have been once told by my teacher that according to Wheeler the primary requirements of a field archaeologist are a long walk and a keen eye.

The absorbing interest in the field created by my teacher had such a deep impact on me that I developed an attachment with the subject and tried to specialize in it. I consider it to be the proper forum to record the truth that during the long span of about thirty years of my service career the attachment to field archaeology had always had an upper hand on any other branch of archaeology, whatsoever, leading ultimately to the epoch-making discovery of the lost town of Kapilavastu. With the same consideration in view I was sent to Egypt as a member of the Indian Expedition to Nubia to assist B.B. Lal in excavations. My continuous involvement in Exploration and Excavation gave birth to an urge to produce a book on the subject based on my life-long experience. The absence of any book on it, particularly in Indian context, was always felt, both by the post-graduate teachers and students of Archaeology. In the circumstances Wheeler's book 'Archaeology from the Earth' was the only volume to which
they could refer, though it did not cover all the aspects of the subject. Like the buried remains of man’s past, the urge to produce the book remained buried in my mind till the year 1980 when the first volume of Wheeler’s Memorial Lectures delivered by Graham Clark was released by the Archaeological Survey of India. The volume acted like a switch to put on the light considered necessary to produce a book.

Though the stay of Sir Mortimer Wheeler in India as the Director General of Archaeology was limited to four years, he left behind a deep imprint on the scholars by his strategic planning, new techniques and above all a military discipline in the field. The lessons imbibed by the Indian scholars continued to have their hold on the field for a considerably long time. I, however, very much regret to put on record that the spirit, enthusiasm and the military discipline introduced by Wheeler are gradually dying away from the country. According to my own assessment there are only a restricted number of reasons to account for it. First of all, the number of students who absorbed the strategies and principles of Wheeler in the true sense was very limited. Secondly, those who assimilated the lessons of Wheeler did not make an earnest effort to generate those lessons in the same spirit to the younger scholars, not only to keep them alive but to develop upon them. Of course, the last but the most important reason for the dying spirit is the complete change in the bent of mind of scholars. They are trying hard, and to a great extent they are successful as well, to achieve their goal not by toiling in the field, but simply earning the credit of excavation in one way or the other to add to their qualifications. With this book I fervently appeal to all those who claim to be field archaeologist to see that the dying spirits are revived again in order to maintain the recognised high standards of the country in the world, so far as excavations are concerned.

There need not be any misconception amongst the scholars that the above statement means that excavation and exploration are the only branches in Archaeology in which they ought to specialize, but the scholars who claim to be field archaeologist must be very serious about it. The term should not be used as loosely as the current trend is developing. Further, as I have already emphasised in the second sentence of my preface, any scholar, who claims to be an archaeologist, must have basic grounding in the field of exploration and excavation. Archaeology is a science to study and reconstruct the various stages of the development of man in the past with the help of those tools, weapons and other traits left behind by him, which have survived the on slaughts of time, nature and climate. If the above definition of Archaeology has any meaning, the basic knowledge of exploration and excavation, which help in bringing to light various equipments of man in the past, is a primary necessity.

In this book I have tried to place before the scholars my own experiences in the technique of Excavation and Exploration, besides incorporating all those for which we are indebted to Sir Mortimer Wheeler. The second volume of the book will cover an altogether new field relating to various advancements achieved in archaeological pursuits after the lessons of Wheeler. When the manuscript of the book was in final stages I received a valuable suggestion from a senior professor to add one more chapter on ‘Sequence of Cultures’ in it. Though the chapter has converted the handy book into a voluminous one, I feel grateful for the suggestion, because without it the book
would have been rather incomplete. The sequence of Stone Age Cultures of Sohan finds a place in the book on account of the fact that in almost all studies of Stone Age problems a reference is made to the tools and climate observed in Sohan valley, though of course the sites are not in India. The case of Indus Valley Civilization in India may be considered by the scholars to be on the same footing, though the sites representing the civilization in India have their own individual characteristics. The subject will, however, be dealt with in the subsequent volume. I hope the book will be of some use to all those working in the field.

A fairly good number of hands are responsible in making this publication see the light of the day within a short time. Of all, the first credit goes to Shri S.N. Mukherjee, Stenographer, who had always been goading me to produce a book on excavation based on my own experience. In addition to goading he appeared to be prepared at every moment to render any service which may expedite the preparation of the book. He always kept me alert and up on my feet, particularly for this job. Sarvashri S.P. Nandi, Draftsman and S. Roy, Photographer of the Museums Branch of the Archaeological Survey of India, were of immense help to me in readily coming forward to prepare the illustrations within a limited time. The manuscript was finally typed by Sarvashri S.N. Mukherjee and J. Pal. In the last stages Shri Jassu Ram, Draftsman of the headquarters office prepared the map of India showing the principal explored and excavated sites at a very short notice. I stand beholden to them all. M/S. Cosmo publications also deserve all appreciation for bringing out the publication within a limited time.

I must express my deep sense of gratitude to my wife Smt. Shanta Srivastava, but for whose constant inspiration a book of this kind would not have been possible. I used to remain away from home on the exploration or excavation field continuously for months together, but my absence was always taken in the right spirit. This was a source of great encouragement to me. Had I not been on the field, away from hearth and home, for such a long time, I would not have been able to acquire an adequate knowledge of the subject, which is essential to produce a book.

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