

She points out that in the case of the Greeks, the cyclical time concept inherent in their cosmology was not seen by scholars as negating a sense of history, and asserts that 'a refusal of history through recourse to cyclical time was identified more frequently with colonial cultures' (Thapar 1996: 43) and was a 'device used to define the "otherness" of other societies' (ibid.: 6). Pandey (1989) has also challenged the view that early Indians had no sense of history by highlighting an eleventh-century literary reference to prehistoric times that discusses the economy and material culture of pre-agricultural peoples of the remote past. Similarly, Prasad (1989) has drawn parallels between the past as revealed by archaeology and as described in the Puranas.

There is a need to go beyond simply identifying indigenous perceptions of the past in *the past*, however, as such perspectives continue to play a key role in contemporary India. While archaeology and indology may hold the dominant position within academia as far as authoritative statements on the past are concerned, other indigenous frameworks may continue to constitute the main guidelines for dealing with the past in everyday life for many South Asians. Appadurai's (1981) discussion of the dispute over control of a south Indian temple in which the past has been called upon to legitimate claims to authority demonstrates how multiple lines of evidence, from British records to Hindu texts to local history (*sthala-purana*), have been called upon as valid sources in the negotiation forum. Can it be right to subvert all such indigenous forms of knowing in the championing of a single, non-indigenous framework such as archaeology (as Chakrabarti [1997] would appear to desire)? The adoption of a Western value system that privileges certain views of the past, and creates hierarchical relationships between frameworks for understanding the past might be seen as the acceptance of a Western social-evolutionism that perceives the West as having arrived at the best available means of knowing the past. Furthermore, it must be recognized that the granting of *the* authoritative position on the past to archaeology poses a threat to those whose voices will not be heard in the elitist world of state-organized and academic archaeology. Voices not rooted in the academic disciplinary forum form an important challenge to archaeology, and demand that Indian archaeologists begin to question the whole-hearted adoption of an externally-derived archaeology that may not be ideally suited to India's needs.

On a more positive front, it is worth emphasizing that there is certainly a potential for archaeology to play a role in revealing non-elite, alternative pasts. As both Thapar (1966) and Chakrabarti (1997) recognize (though as a basis for vastly different conclusions), ancient Indian texts are ideological documents that reveal more a society 'as wished for' than a society 'as was'. The authors of these texts were almost solely elite, upper-caste males who had certain vested interests and aims, and as such, the light that is shed on the lives of the vast majority who did not contribute to such discourse is both minimal and distorted. Fortunately, archaeology is capable of accessing the past by a different means that may lead to the supplementing or even outright contradiction of textual evidence. Such alternative views are provided, for example, in the work of a number of South Asian archaeologists who have found evidence for non-mainstream ritual practices in the archaeological record (Kenoyer et al. 1983; Sinopoli and Morrison 1995; Jayaswal

1989). These archaeologists have been able to use material culture remains to supplement the limited textual record with information on the practices of women, peasants and tribals. Such studies indicate the potential of archaeology to act as a tool for the discovery of cultures of resistance that exist alongside the dominant culture, and have contributed to the development of Indian society.

AUTHORITY, IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION, AND EXCLUDED PASTS: CULTURAL HERITAGE MANAGEMENT IN INDIA TODAY

As post-processualism awakened a recognition of the inherently political nature of the past, it simultaneously elicited a greater interest in the uses and role of the past in contemporary society. As the people primarily involved in the creation of the past, the onus was placed on archaeologists to emerge from the ivory tower of academia and to take an active and responsible role with respect to the representation of the past in wider society and the management of cultural heritage. Growing awareness of this responsibility can be seen in India today, as scholars begin to consider and debate the role and aims of museums, conservation and heritage education in India. Questions have now been raised regarding *who* decides what is valued and presented, *how* it is presented, and *to whom*.

Dahiya (1994) has addressed the problem of education in Indian prehistory and history in Indian schools, and demonstrated how conventional methods of teaching these subjects would likely be improved by an increased use of archaeological data and resources. She has emphasized how such a venture can only be undertaken if current resources are both recognised and expanded. It would seem that archaeologists in India might do well to take a more active stand on such matters, especially when it is considered that the lack of funding and employment prospects for archaeologists (see Thapar 1989) stems from a perception of irrelevance of the subject of archaeology by government bodies. Momin and Pratap (1994) have also addressed issues of relevance, and have rightly recognized the role of 'archaeological materials as symbols of national or ethnic identity among peoples who are in the process of defining their national identity in colonial and post-colonial situations' (Kohl and Fawcett 1995: 16). They have emphasized the problems of an overwhelming focus on urban-oriented, literacy-dependent mechanisms for disseminating knowledge about the past in a society which is still predominantly rural in nature. They envision a shift towards outreach programmes which would involve mobile exhibitions, the loan of display materials and culturally-relevant, meaningful and interactive displays.

It is perhaps unfortunate that neither Dahiya (*ibid.*) nor Momin and Pratap (*ibid.*) have really questioned the nationalistic goals of an archaeology for the public. For example, Dahiya noted how 'archaeological material may be used to create a sense of sharing of common traditions and belonging to the same past among persons of different communities and groups' (Dahiya 1994.: 299-300). While this may seem a fruitful goal, it fails to take into account that different groups may wish to construct unique identities for themselves within India. The existence of 'competing, often ambivalent, definitions of India's national

postcolonial identity' (Singh 1996: 14) cannot be ignored. The dangers of trying to subsume various diverse groups into a single whole by denying the existence of the parts has been argued by Kohl and Fawcett, who point to the failure of such attempts in the former Soviet Union and other Communist regimes, where it was learned the difficult way that 'ethnic issues are not resolved by declaring them non-existent or claiming that all peoples in the state live together harmoniously as fraternal brothers' (Kohl and Fawcett 1995: 16). Accordingly, Lane (citing Willett 1990) has pointed out the vital role museums have played in containing the divisive forces of tribalism in Nigeria, 'not, as one would expect, by suppressing ethnic differences, but instead by celebrating them' (Lane 1990: 3). Momin and Pratap (*ibid.*) endorsed both the aim of national reconstruction using the past (1994.: 293), and the writing and circulating of alternative histories (1994.: 296), but did not address the issue of how these two goals might well clash. Chakrabarti's (1997) proposal of focusing on cultural ecology while ignoring past cultural identities (ethnicities) would seem to suffer from a similar dilemma, despite his hopes that a focus on the land will produce 'the concept of an Indian past in which all Indians can share' (Chakrabarti 1997: 208). As Kaviraj has argued, 'the idea that the relation between territory and people can be arranged in such a way that only one single identity inhabits a particular space [is] a proposal that is both theoretically unjustified and unworkable in practice' (Kaviraj 1997: 339). A question which neither archaeologists nor politicians will be able to avoid is how potentially conflicting interpretations of the past within India are to be reconciled.

While the issues of archaeological museums and education reveal a strongly nationalist bent, the question of conservation practices would seem to return us firmly into the realm of the colonial. Menon (1994: 37) has argued that this is because the principles and practice of modern conservation in India are a legacy of British colonial rule. This has led to conformity with international conservation guidelines being an unquestioned aim of conservation (*ibid.*). She has outlined how the Archaeological Survey of India still follows criteria established by the British colonial government in selecting monuments to be targeted for protection and conservation, and how the adoption of an 'ideology of international orthodoxy' with respect to conservation practices has resulted in the dominance of 'an elite or privileged perception of what constitutes the cultural heritage of our society' (*ibid.*: 38). The international orthodoxy referred to can be observed in Feilden (1993), who uncritically elides world and Western values in outlining a 'relevant' conservation policy for South Asia. Such ethnocentrism can of course be traced back to colonial views on the matter. Curzon (1900) recognized a native interest in ancient monuments, but referred to efforts to maintain and restore them as 'misplaced enthusiasm' which placed Indian monuments in a dangerous position of being rendered counterfeits (cited in Linstrum 1995: 7). Such value judgements, as well as Curzon's overriding concern with aesthetics (see statements by Curzon in Linstrum) reflect European conceptions of the past that are rooted in a peculiarly European distance *from* the past (Thomas 1995: 356), and should be questioned for the Indian context. Menon (1994) has forcibly argued for the recognition of indigenous traditions of conservation, as well as the need to preserve

not only monuments but the tradition of the master mason in Indian conservation practices. Shaw's (forthcoming) critique of Indian conservation practices is even stronger, and derives from an understanding of the continually evolving nature of India's sacred landscape (also Shaw 1999). As Shaw states:

the very nature of conservation has often helped to artificially halt cultural continuity and fix religious identity at places of antiquarian interest. This is largely due to an unreflexive archaeology which views material culture as a passive fossil, firmly relegated to the distant past, rather than recognising the dialectical participation of the past in the present. (ibid.)

The colonial and ongoing Western influence on Indian policies concerning the management of the Indian past (Chakrabarti, in press) certainly introduces problems of conflicting interpretations and goals. However, if, as Chakrabarti argues (ibid.), 'the archaeological leadership in modern India has neither the technical resources nor the will to take care of the immense problems of archaeological research and heritage management' and 'collaboration with international archaeological scholarship ... is necessary from the point of view of India's own interest', then such problems cannot be sidestepped by omitting Western involvement (see also Chakrabarti 1999). An atmosphere of critical reassessment, in which both India and the West participate fully, seems the only route to a workable solution.

REVISING ETHNOARCHAEOLOGY: NEW PERSPECTIVES ON PEOPLE AND THINGS

If we look further at how various biases have affected the study of the Indian past, the use of ethnographic analogies offers yet another example of inherited frameworks for interpretation that seem to require revision. One aspect of a more encompassing post-processual critique of ethnoarchaeology in Indian archaeology can be located at least partially in studies in history and anthropology that have examined the ongoing effects of perspectives on the Indian 'Other' developed and refined during the colonial period (see Pels 1997 for a review). Post-colonial critics such as B.S. Cohn have highlighted Eurocentric views (which we can see reflected in the writings of archaeologists like Piggot 1950), prevalent under British colonial rule, of a static India whose occupants could be, and were, studied to provide insights into a past from which dynamic Europe had long ago moved on. Haimendorf (1948) expressed this view quite clearly in his reference to the 'elder, more static cultures' that could still be found in parts of India, which he believed had been pushed into 'remote areas uncongenial to civilization' (quoted in Dhavalikar 1994). According to him there could be 'no doubt that the so-called aboriginals inhabiting such refuge areas represent comparatively old and primitive culture types' (ibid: 31). That such a view persists is evident in the way that so many archaeologists studying the Indian past continue to see India as a 'veritable ethnographic museum' (ibid.) of archaeological analogues that can be pillaged for the production of convenient and often naive interpretations. Static views of the rural, hunter-gatherer, nomadic and/or pastoral groups targeted for study by today's ethnoarchaeologists persist (see Dhavalikar

1994; Paddayya 1978-9; Rao 1965; Singh 1985), with the only significant change being that biases traditionally imposed by the West on India as a whole are now increasingly being applied by members of mainstream Indian society to more marginal groups (see Deliege 1981; Mehta 1995: 3).

Archaeologists studying the South Asian past are not alone in assuming cultural isolation amongst apparently primitive groups. Increasingly, however, and especially in the forum of African ethnoarchaeology, the pristine nature of technologically simple groups is being questioned, based on the discovery of evidence contradicting such assumptions (see Trigger 1989: 334-7). Signs of unease with simplistic parallels drawn between past and present also occur in the ethnoarchaeological literature of India. Paddayya (1978-9), for example, has acknowledged that so-called 'primitive' societies in India have undergone change. Unfortunately, Paddayya's concern with recent change alone, in the form of modern development destroying our pristine Stone Age analogues, leaves intact the notion of Indian backwaters inhabited by peoples virtually unchanged for millennia. This understanding has been aptly criticized by Varma, who argues that 'the self-sufficiency of prehistoric societies or the evolution of culture in isolation are concepts which need rethinking' (Varma 1996: 5).

The tendency to draw direct historical links between contemporary and prehistoric groups, which naturally follows from a perception of staticity, has drawn criticism from both Hooja (1996) and Sinopoli (1991). The fact that historical and contemporary records document counter-intuitive changes from, for example, tribal to upper-caste (see Chattopadhyaya 1997; Srinivas 1998) and settled to nomadic (see Robbins 1998) as a result of complex social and economic transformations cautions against the assumption of an absence of change amongst marginal groups in India. As Zagarell (1997) has shown, archaeology itself is able to provide evidence for change amongst so-called isolated societies in the past. His analysis of archaeological data from the Nilgiri Hills and the Moyar Ditch has demonstrated evidence for extensive, long-term relationships between the apparently isolated societies of the upper hills and the surrounding state and complex societies. The illustration of more such examples can only help to bring home the point that contemporary marginal societies in South Asia 'do not provide a blueprint of the past' (Sinopoli 1991: 178), nor can they be assumed in the absence of sufficient evidence to be the direct descendants of past groups.

The recognition that cultural isolation in South Asia is often more apparent than real need not be perceived as holding only negative implications for archaeology. If our ability to achieve quick and easy readings of archaeological data has been significantly reduced by this understanding, our potential for achieving a more nuanced view of the past has been substantially expanded. This is a fact that Sinopoli has recognized, noting that the elucidation of symbiotic links between marginal groups and mainstream agricultural society in South Asia both now and in the past holds 'considerable theoretical import' (ibid.: 180). South Asia offers an excellent opportunity for the ethnoarchaeological examination of the material culture correlates of forager-farmer interaction. The results of such studies would greatly benefit the larger archaeological community, given the

increased interest in this relationship engendered by suggestions that foragers and settled agriculturalists are likely to have interacted in prehistory in other regional contexts (*ibid.*). Hooja's study of the archaeological and ethnographic evidence for contact between hunter-gatherers and settled farmers in Rajasthan (see Hooja 1988, 1994, 1996), along with Murty's analysis of the symbiotic relationship between tribal and sedentary agricultural groups in southern India (Murty 1981, 1985) must be noted as important examples of such research, but more work is clearly needed. Furthermore, as Guha (1994) has recognised, it is also important to reassess notions of cultural boundaries that imply apparently clear-cut divisions between 'marginal' and 'mainstream' groups. In her critique of the concept of what constitutes 'Harappan' in the archaeological record, she argues that there is no clear reason for maintaining a view of Harappan identity that includes pastoralists but excludes hunter-gatherers, and suggests that such a differentiation has more to do with 'assumptions regarding what a civilized society should contain' (*ibid.*: 92) than anything else.

Revised views of the goals of ethnoarchaeology have also been derived from critical reassessments by archaeologists of the nature of the link between material culture and human behaviour. The potential for realizing the processual goal of establishing universal links between cultural cause and material effect has come under fire by post-processualists, who have argued that there is no direct, universal cross-cultural relationship between behaviour and material culture (Hodder 1991:14). This view is not seen as negating the possibility of using ethnoarchaeological data to interpret archaeological remains, however, but has rather led to the argument that contemporary and archaeological studies of material culture need to take into account their specific historical context (*ibid.*). This realization derives from studies that have revealed, for example, that material culture can be used to mask social inequality (e.g. McGuire 1992; Miller and Tilley 1984; Parker Pearson 1982), implying that it may be over-simplistic to assume cross-cultural indices of social structure. Studies of contemporary groups have also demonstrated that ideological concerns can impede on apparently functional considerations (e.g. Hodder 1982; Moore 1986), thus eliding behavioural realms that were viewed as separate by many processualists. While the post-processual view of material culture may make archaeological interpretation less straightforward, it does hold positive implications for archaeologists. As Miller (1985b) has argued in his ethnoarchaeological analysis of ceramic production and use in central India, recognition of the active and important role of material culture in structuring social interaction actually implies a greater potential for understanding past cultures through their material remains.

Miller's study offers an important example of the application of post-processual theory in South Asian ethnoarchaeology. By studying pottery production and use in one particular Indian setting, Miller was able to demonstrate that:

Pots are not facts with unproblematic, measurable variability explicable in terms of general laws. Pottery is a 'construct'; a part of the creation of a cultural environment in which to live out practical pursuits and interests, which is at the same time a way of interpreting the world by representing the world. (Miller 1985b: 13)

While Miller's work implicitly denies the potential for the formulation and application by archaeologists of generalisations concerning the material culture-human behaviour relationship (contra Binford 1977), it does not by any means argue that the study of variability in material culture remains is an unrewarding practice (see also Miller 1981). Miller was able to demonstrate several ways in which the pursuit of social strategies by individuals or groups can either catalyse or inhibit the generation of artefact variability. One such example is the creation of new pottery categories by higher caste groups, as a result of strategies of emulation by lower caste groups that have led to the so-called 'contamination' of a certain category of pot (Miller 1985b). Such examples certainly do not imply that the artefacts excavated by archaeologists cannot provide information on the past, but rather demonstrate that our current frameworks for interpretation, which continue to perceive a clear divide between the functional/technological and the social/ideological, may not be sufficient to the task (see Pfaffenberger 1992 and Robb 1998). This problem is recognized by Panja in her study of mobility strategies amongst the Dhangar community in Maharashtra (Panja 1996). Although the study focuses on the apparently functional realms of subsistence and settlement, other considerations are found to intrude on behaviour, such that the 'causes of mobility are ... diverse and varying and cultural and cognitive aspects play as important a role as functional ones' (ibid.: 71). Clearly South Asian ethnoarchaeology has much to contribute to the development of archaeological models for interpretation, and can simultaneously benefit from theoretical developments within the larger discipline.

A PLACE FOR GENDER IN INDIAN ARCHAEOLOGY?

We now turn finally to the issue of gender in South Asian archaeology. A concern with gender has emerged simultaneously with post-processualism in archaeology (see Conkey and Gero 1997 for a comprehensive review). Like post-processualism, 'gender archaeology' does not consist of a cohesive whole, or any universal or monolithic paradigm, but rather constitutes a plural, sometimes outright contradictory front (ibid.). Like post-modernism, feminism has entered archaeology, as in other disciplines, as a critique of existing, dominant structures of knowing and seeing. It has variously concerned itself with the invisibility of women in the past; the issue of biological essentialism; assumptions concerning women's roles within society and in the evolution of culture; the social construction of gender; and gender bias in academics to name just a few of its foci.

To what degree has this concern with gender affected Indian archaeology? The short answer would appear to be 'very little'. However, when the field of concern is expanded such that the question becomes, to what degree has the interest in gender impacted on the study of the Indian past, the study of contemporary Indian society (which is simultaneously of course the source of analogies for reconstructing the past), and the study of disciplinary and societal politics (with which archaeology is now concerned), then gender emerges as a significant force. Looking to these other fields, it seems logical to predict that gender is

at the threshold of Indian archaeology, and it is only a matter of time before it is a concern of interest to archaeologists studying the Indian past.

Various Western and Indian scholars have examined the roles and status of women in historical India using a variety of sources of data, including textual, epigraphical and sculptural evidence. To take a small sample, such studies include Vajracharya's (1991) examination of women's changing status during the Licchavi period in Nepal, Sutherland's (1989, 1991) illustration of attitudes towards women in the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, and Roy's (1995) critical evaluation of the 'ideal' woman as depicted in the Vedas and the *Manusmṛti* (Roy also examines the use of this idealized and universalized past by modern-day communalist movements in India). It is interesting to note that the value of such texts in evaluating ancient women is critiqued by many scholars, who recognize that they are male-authored, and thus often represent a view of what women *should have been* rather than what they actually *were* (Sutherland 1991). As has been noted here already, archaeology presents an opportunity to redress this textual bias by providing alternative sources of evidence on the past.

Archaeologists interested in gender argue that it is not only views of women in the past that must be examined and revised, but also perceptions of women in the present. One of the reasons for this is that our understanding of the relationships between men and women in various contemporary societies is often (if not always) used as the basis, either implicitly or explicitly, for making interpretations about the archaeological record. Thus the recognition by such scholars as Beneria (1982) and Young et al. (1988) that women's labour tends to go unrecognized by anthropologists, government statisticians, development organizations and their own communities, is of relevance to both archaeologists and ethnoarchaeologists working in India. That such biases are upheld by ethnoarchaeologists studying contemporary Indian groups is clear from even a brief analysis of a recent key compilation of ethnoarchaeological studies in India. An analysis of the photographs accompanying the articles in *Living Traditions: Studies in the Ethnoarchaeology of South Asia* (B. Allchin [Ed.] 1994) reveals that men are shown four times as often as women, and are depicted carrying out a much wider range of activities that clearly emphasises their enterprise and creativity. In contrast, the depictions of women illustrate a very circumscribed range of activities, usually cooking.

That such ethnoarchaeological biases are perpetuated in Indian archaeology is demonstrated by Wright (1991), who has carried out an important study of Harappan pottery production that questions common assumptions about the gender division of labour. Wright has examined ethnographic data that reassess the role of women in pottery production in various regional contexts, and applied these conclusions to existing Harappan archaeological data. She concludes that the type of pottery production, as evidenced in the Harappan archaeological record, is likely to have involved a significant role for women. The type of production that can be hypothesized furthermore suggests substantial differences compared to supposedly universal models of state formation that assume certain basic shifts in social and economic relations during the development of the state, which fit the Mesopotamian evidence but seem to be at odds with the Harappan. Wright's