



DEPARTMENT OF ARCHAEOLOGY

POLICY NOTE FOR THE YEAR 2011-2012

INTRODUCTION

Most of the people have some interest in the past and are always curious about the traces left by their predecessors. To the common man, 'Archaeology' tends to be identified with 'digging'. The Greek word *Archaïos* means ancient while *logos* refers to its feature i.e., Science. It studies the story of man's past through his material remains; it helps to understand culture, know history and preserve heritage and it contributes immensely to tourism. Archaeology presents another method of approach to history; it is a study of human cultures through the material remains. Even for the period for which written records are available, archaeology provides useful supplementary evidence and serves to fill in the gaps. Archaeology is a continuous search, a discovery; it is an endless journey where everything is tentative, not final. Archaeology, as we have known, always relies heavily on the tools and materials left behind by our ancestors.

DEPARTMENT OF ARCHAEOLOGY

The Department of Archaeology was started in the year 1961 by the Government of Tamil Nadu, with the prime intention of "Conservation and Preservation" of ancient monuments and to conduct excavations at historical sites. Later on, its activities were expanded to cover copying and deciphering of stone inscriptions and documenting and publishing them; chemical preservation

of art objects and Registration of antiquities etc. A library exclusively for scholars is also functioning at the headquarters at Chennai. The excavated antiquities are displayed in the 14 archaeological site museums.

CONSERVATION

The State Government have declared so far 85 ancient and historical Monuments including religious and secular buildings as “Protected Monuments”. 25 Monuments have been taken care of for Rs.428.35 lakhs under the 11th Finance Commission Grants (2001- 2005). Under the 12th Finance Commission Grants (2006-2010), a sum of Rs.780 lakhs was allotted for structural conservation of 40 Monuments and a sum of Rs. 300 lakhs was especially sanctioned for the conservation of Thirumalai Nayakkar Palace at Madurai. All these works have been completed. Documentation of the Monuments has also been carried out under 12th Finance Commission Grants and their general details were also published.

To create awareness among the various related departments, tourists and general public about the conservation of Monuments, archaeological sites and objects of heritage value, the Tourism and Culture Department, Government of Tamil Nadu had organized one-day seminar on 4.8.2009 on “Protecting Monuments for posterity.” Also, the Government have appointed the Principal Secretary and Commissioner of Archaeology as the “*Competent Authority*” under the Ancient Monuments Archaeological Sites and Remains (Amendment & Validation) Act, 2010 as Coordinator for Tamil Nadu to protect the nationally important protected Monuments of Archaeological Survey of India.

NATIONAL MISSION ON MONUMENTS AND ANTIQUITIES

A National Mission has been started by the Archaeological Survey of India, in order to preserve and conserve the Monuments and Archaeological Antiquities. Under this Mission, the State Archaeology, Museums and Hindu

Religious and Charitable Endowment Departments are carrying out documentation of Antiquities and monuments in the State. A special group consisting of One Expert and Two Data Entry Operators has been appointed and the works are being carried out in the department. The implementation of this Mission will certainly cater to the needs of future generation to understand the history of Monuments and Antiquities in much better manner.

EXCAVATION AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL MUSEUM

One of the major activities of the department is to carry out archaeological excavations in historically important sites in the State. So far, the department has conducted excavations at 34 sites, of which 33 excavation reports have been brought in the book form. The excavated artifacts are preserved and exhibited to enable the scholars, researchers and the public to view in the 14 archaeological site museums situated in various districts of the State. The excavation work at Rajakkalmangalam in Nanguneri Taluk, Tirunelveli District at a cost of Rs.2.00 lakhs was completed and the preparation of excavation report is in progress. Similarly, excavation of Thalaichankadu, Tranquebar Taluk of Nagapattinam District is in progress at a cost of Rs.2.00 lakhs.

EPIGRAPHY

One of the primary functions of the department is to copy, decipher, edit and publish the inscriptions. There are 25,000 inscriptions in Tamil Nadu, out of which 23,500 spreading over in 25 districts have been copied. Presently, the campaigns are going on in the districts of Thiruvannamalai, Salem, Sivagangai and Tirunelveli. This scheme will be started in other districts soon. During the year 2004-2005, "intensive campaign" was launched to copy the inscriptions and under this, 15,000 inscriptions have been copied and out of this, 14,000 inscriptions were deciphered by the Department Epigraphists. Similarly, 5796

inscriptions were published in 40 volumes and 5,000 estampages have been digitalized.

An Institute of Epigraphy has been functioning at Chennai head office since 1974. It conducts one year Post-Graduate Diploma Course in 'Epigraphy and Archaeology' for eight students. A sum of Rs.2000/- is paid as stipend to each student every month. Under the scheme, 200 students have received Post-Graduate Diplomas.

The Department of Archaeology and the Central Classical Tamil Language Institute have jointly conducted a Workshop on "Epigraphy and Archaeology" at Thirumalai Nayakkar Mahal, Madurai from 3.1.2011 to 12.1.2011 for 70 college lecturers and students at a cost of Rs.2.50 lakhs.

PUBLICATION

An exclusive Departmental Press is functioning for bringing out books in Tamil and English. Books on Epigraphy, Monuments, Excavation Reports, District Archaeological Guide books, Museum Guide books and Temple Monographs have been published. So far, 240 books have been published by this department. A quarterly journal "Epigraphy" in Tamil is also published. So far 83 issues have been published. A special "Coffee Table book" was published by covering all the monuments protected by the State Department of Archaeology. It is found to be very useful to the tourist and scholars. Brochures on Monuments and Archaeological Museums of Thirumalai Nayakkar Mahal, Kamuthi Fort, Ramalingavilasam Palace were brought out through Tourism Department for creating awareness among the visitors and two brochures on Thiruindhalur Copper Plates and the Guide book on exhibition were also released.

PHOTOGRAPHY

The photographers of this department take photographs of various temples, sculptures, murals and antiquities. Whenever an excavation is undertaken, the stages of excavation and the details of excavated sites are well documented with adequate photographs. The conservation works of monuments are also photographed and documented.

CHEMICAL CONSERVATION

The chemical conservation section was established in Chennai and Madurai to chemically conserve the antiquities brought to light from excavations. Later, its facilities were extended to carry out chemical conservation works in 14 Archaeological site museums and to co-ordinate with structural conservation section in maintenance and conservation of 85 Monuments. Many chemical conservation works were carried out every year under Maintenance works and XII Finance Commission Grants. In the special exhibitions, 130 art objects were chemically treated and displayed.

REGISTRATION OF ANTIQUITES

The Central Government have enacted 'The Antiquities and Art Treasures Act - 1972 in order to curb the unauthorized transportation and smuggling of Art Treasures out of India. To enforce this act effectively, two Registering Offices at Chennai and Thiruchirappalli are functioning. The Central Government meets out the entire expenditure under this scheme, which is implemented in Tamil Nadu from the year 1974. Till date, 42,868 antiquities have been registered and certificates issued and 2,653 objects were identified as "non-antiquities". This section also helps the Idol Wing of the Bureau of Economic Offences in

identifying the stolen idols. It is a matter of great pride that Tamil Nadu stands first in the country in issuing registration certificates.

GOVERNMENT ORIENTAL MANUSCRIPTS LIBRARY AND RESEARCH CENTRE

Government Oriental Manuscripts Library and Research Centre is functioning in the campus of University of Madras under the control of this department. An excellent resource centre for undertaking researches leading to Ph.D. was started in 1869. More than 72,000 papers and palm leaf manuscripts dealing with Mathematics, Astronomy, Siddha, Ayurveda, Unani, Vedas, Agama, Architecture, Music, Fine Arts, History and many other subjects written in Tamil, Sanskrit, Marathi, Urdu, Arabic and Persian Languages are preserved in this Library. The Library has more than 460 publications in different languages.

MANUSCRIPT RESOURCE CENTRE

The National Mission for Manuscripts in New Delhi has planned to collect all the manuscripts available in India and has recognized the Government Oriental Manuscripts Library in Chennai under the control of the Department of Archaeology as “Manuscripts Resource Centre” for collecting the manuscripts in the state of Tamil Nadu and to list the manuscripts for conversion into disc form. These works are in progress. The National Mission for Manuscripts, New Delhi has allocated a sum of Rs. 15.00 lakhs for this purpose to the Government Oriental Manuscripts Library of which a sum of Rs.4.50 lakhs has been received as first installment. On completion, all details of the manuscripts will be available facilitating visualization of the details about ancient Tamil Civilization, Art, Culture, Grammar, Literature, Science and Technology etc.

MILLENNIUM CELEBRATION OF THANJAVUR BIG TEMPLE

In the special exhibition organized at the time of Millennium Celebration of the Big Temple at Thanjavur, the noteworthy display of exhibits included copper plates, bronzes and antiquities from excavations, inscriptions in original estampages and photographs. Most of displays pertain to the Chola period. On this occasion, two brochures and four important Re-print books on Big Temple and King Rajarajan were also released.

SCHEMES

During the year 2010-2011, under Part II Schemes, funds to the extent of Rs.67.07 lakhs were sanctioned under which all the works are completed.

CONCLUSION

Archaeology is a study of ancient remains through exploration and excavation. It helps us to reconstruct the history, culture and heritage of the region with authentic archaeological evidences. It is an interdisciplinary science dealing with various subjects, namely, anthropology, history, art history, classics, ethnology, geography, geology, linguistics, physics, chemistry, palaeo-ecology, paleontology, using modern trends like implementation of remote sensing techniques to unravel the hidden ancient structures for better understanding of the history and environmental changes. In this endeavor of preserving the heritage of Tamil Nadu, the Department of Archaeology has been successfully implementing various schemes that throw light on the socio-cultural conditions of ancient Tamils.

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