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# The Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, 1958 with Amendment of 2010 and Centrally Protected Monuments and Sites in Mathura and Hathras Districts of the Agra Circle of the Archaeological Survey of India: An Analysis

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**Abstract:** This paper tries to throw some important light on the protected monuments and sites situated in Mathura and Hathras districts of Uttar Pradesh and coming under the jurisdiction of the Agra Circle of the Archaeological Survey of India. The paper examines their present status and the applicability of the various provisions of the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act 1958 with Amendment of 2010. The paper tries to identify the issues, the reasons and also suggests some remedies. Most of the archaeological sites and lesser important monuments under Central protection require a change in the existing provisions of AMASR Act to make it people friendly.

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**Keywords:** Mathura, Hathras, Agra, Archaeological Survey of India, AMASR Act, Protected Monuments, Sites

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## Introduction

The Ancient Monuments Preservation Act, 1904 may be considered the first significant, important legislation to provide for the preservation of ancient monuments in India (including territories of present day Pakistan and Bangladesh) brought up by the then British Indian Government under the leadership of Lord Curzon as the Governor General. Irrespective of his derogatory policies, he needs to be commended for bringing out this important legislation for the protection of Indian heritage. This remains a fact that maximum number of monuments and sites in India were declared to be of importance through this Act only. Post-independence the Government of independent India declared the monuments protected through the 1904 Act as monuments of national importance through the Declaration of National Importance Act, 1951 (Act LXXI of 1951).

In District Mathura, a total number of 43 monuments and archaeological sites were declared to be of National importance as per the list maintained by ASI till 1990 (some

of the previously notified monuments and sites were already removed from this list). Out of these 43 monuments and sites, 41 were declared to be of National importance through the Ancient Monuments Preservation Act, 1904 between 1905 and 1942 by the British Indian Government and only 2 additions were made to this list by the Indian Government post-independence under the provisions of AMASR Act, 1958. In the Old Aligarh district, a total number of 21 monuments and sites were declared to be of National importance, out of which 14 now fall in the delimited boundaries of the Aligarh district and 7 in the newly created Hathras district. Possibly, no new addition of monument and site to the Central list has been made post-independence. In fact, if we take a look at the list of Centrally protected monuments and sites under the jurisdiction of the Agra Circle of the Archaeological Survey of India (which includes the recently formed Meerut Circle and parts of area under the jurisdiction of the Lucknow Circle at present), it is observed that out of total number of 267 monuments and sites, 13 monuments and sites have been added post-independence.

These are: Barah Khamba in Agra, Jhun Jhun Katora in Agra, Haveli of Agha Khan in Agra, Hathi Khana in Agra, Ancient mound at Kasuri in Baghpat, Mound at Alamgirpur in Baghpat and the latest addition the site of Sinauli in Baghpat, Archaeological site at Gulistanpur in Gautam Buddha Nagar, Talib Khan's Tomb in Amroha, Tomb of Abdul Ghafur Shah in Amroha, Tomb of grandson of Addul Ghafur Shah in Amroha, Ancient Mound at Ading in Mathura and Hathi Tila in Mathura. The 30 districts of Uttar Pradesh in the erstwhile Agra Circle included: Agra, Aligarh, Auraiya, Bagpat, Bareilly, Bijnor, Budaon, Bulandshahr, Etah, Etawah, Farrukhabad, Firozabad, Gautam Buddha Nagar, Ghaziabad, Hapur, Hathras, Jyotiba Phule Nagar (Amroha), Kannauj, Kasganj, Mathura, Mainpuri, Meerut, Moradabad, Muzaffarnagar, Pilibhit, Rampur, Saharanpur, Sambhal, Shahjahanpur and Shamli. Few of the districts did not have even a single entry of the monuments and sites of National importance. It is quite clear that only few additions have been made to the list which existed pre-independence. Now, it would be quite important to study the present status of centrally protected monuments and sites which the British Indian government declared as protected and the ASI is looking after post-independence. The complete list of monuments and sites lying in Districts Mathura and Hathras are given in Table 1.

Out of the listed 43 listed monuments and sites in Mathura district, 11 are medieval Kos minars. One of these situated on the Circular Road in Mathura (possibly situated in the Army Cantonment area in the backside of Dholi Pyau) is non-existent whereas few are in comparatively bad state of existence due to being surrounded by recent constructions and are hardly visible from accessible points. The one situated on the road to Govardhan near Bhuteshwar (Figure 1) is a good case for study. Till about 1990, the area was not that much inhabited but the property rates had increased manifold. The Kos minar was covered under a boundary wall by private property owner(s) and new constructions came up all around in spite of provisions of the AMASR Amended Act 2010, particularly the Prayag Hospital which the author witnessed as being enlarged at 1 meter distance from the protected monument in 2013.

Table 1: List of monuments and sites in Mathura and Hathras

Sl. No.	Name of the monument and site	Location	Preliminary Notification	Final Notification
<b>Mathura District</b>				
1	An ancient site	Bajna	UP 1465/1133 M: 25-11-1920	UP 1669-M/1133: 27-12-1920
2	A pillar with Sanskrit inscription dated in S. 1666 in the flanking towers at the Bhanokhar tank	Barsana	UP 1465/1133 M: 25-11-1920	UP 1669-M/1133: 27-12-1920
3	Mound near Bhadar village	Bhadar	UP 1136-M/367-19: 12-05-1923	UP 1570-M-367-09: 08-08-1923
4	Temple of Gobind Dev with all its walls and gateways	Vrindaban	UP 1412-M: 18-11-1920	-
5	Temple of Jugal Kishore with all its walls and gateways	Vrindaban	UP 1412-M: 18-11-1920	-
6	Temple of Madan Mohan with all its walls and gateways	Vrindaban	UP 1412-M: 18-11-1920	-
7	The temple of Radha Ballabh	Vrindaban	UP 2128-M/341: --08-1909	Up 1232 -M/341: 06-07-1910
8	Akbari Sarai	Chhata	-	UP 452-M/357: 05-03-1915
9	Kos Minar	Mile 19 Furlong 1, Chhatta	UP 1412-M: 18-11-1920	UP 1645-M/1133: 22-12-1920
10	Kos Minar	Mile 24 Furlong 3, Chhatta	UP 1412-M: 18-11-1920	UP 1645-M/1133: 22-12-1920
11	Kos Minar	Mile 26, Furlong 7, Chhatta	UP 1412-M: 18-11-1920	UP 1645-M/1133: 22-12-1920
12	Kos Minar	Mile 29 Furlong 4, Chhatta	UP 1412-M: 18-11-1920	UP 1645-M/1133: 22-12-1920
13	Two mounds situated between the Chaurasi Jain temple and the village Ganesra. The second mound is known as Singer Tila	Ganesra	UP 573-MS/110-MS-1927: 06/10-07-1928	UP 706-MS/110-MS-1927: 27-08-1928
14	Kos Minar	Gohari	Edlands F.-04-01(2)/42-F' dil: 26-01-1942	Edlands F.-04-01(2)/42-F' dil: 23-09-1942
15	A mound measuring 100' x 530', its centre occupied by a small brick platform 19' x 7'	Jaisinghpura	UP 573-MS/110-MS-1927: 06/10-07-1928	UP 706-MS/110-MS-1927: 27-08-1928
16	Fortified Sarai at Kosi with all its walls and gateways	Kosi	UP 1412-M: 18-11-1920	UP 1645-M/1133: 22-12-1920

17	A small mound containing what appears to be a ruined brick stupa, and covered with fragments of sculptures ranging from the Kushana to the medieval period. The mound is locally known as chavar and is situated about 200 yards to the west of the village	Kosi	UP 1465/1133 M: 25-11-1920	UP 1669-M/1133: 27-12-1920
18	A long Mound to the north of the Kund, which has yielded many sculptured railing pillars.	Kota	UP 1465/1133 M: 25-11-1920	UP 1669-M/1133: 27-12-1920
19	A high mound marking the old fort situated inside the town	Mahaban	UP 1465/1133 M: 25-11-1920	UP 1669-M/1133: 27-12-1920
20	Ancient site at a distance of 1 mile from Mat village containing fragments of images	Mat	UP 573-MS/110- MS-1927: 06/10-07-1928	UP 706-MS/110- MS-1927:27-08- 1928
21	Ancient sculptures, carvings, images, bas-reliefs, inscriptions, stones, and like objects	Mathura district	UP 573-MS/110- MS-1927: 06/10-07-1928	UP 706-MS/110- MS-1927:27-08- 1928
22	Gayatri mound just outside the Bharatpur Gate of the city	Mathura	UP 1465/1133 M: 25-11-1920	UP 1669-M/1133: 27-12-1920
23	Girdharpur, a very large site, half a mile north of Pali Khara mound. There are four distinct mound on this site , three of which have been partially excavated, namely one by Mr. Growse, two by R.B. Pandit Radha Krishna	Mathura	UP 1465/1133 M: 25-11-1920	UP 1669-M/1133: 27-12-1920
24	Gopal khera, situated to the north of Mathura junction railway station	Mathura	UP 1465/1133 M: 25-11-1920	UP 1669-M/1133: 27-12-1920
25	The mound known as Kankali Tila, area 3.78 acres, situated at the corner of the Agra-Delhi and Muttra- Gobardhan roads, the jail and the chaubara mounds.	Mathura	UP 573-MS/110- MS-1927: 06/10-07-1928	UP 766-MS/110- MS-1927:27-08- 1928
26	Kos Minar	On the circular road, Mathura	UP 1412-M: 18-11-1920	UP 1645-M/1133-M: 20-12-1920
27	Pali Khera mound at Muttra	Mathura	UP 573-MS/110- MS-1927: 06/10-07-1928	UP 706-MS/110- MS-1927:27-08- 1928

28	The portions of Katra Mound which are not in the possession of nazul tenants, on which formerly stood a temple of Keshavadeva which was dismantled and the site utilised for the mosque of Aurangzeb	Mathura	UP 1465/1133 M: 25-11-1920	UP 1669-M/1133: 27-12-1920
29	Sati Burj supposed to commemorate the <i>sati</i> of the widow of Raja Biharmal of Jaipur, erected by her son Raja Bhagwandas in A.D. 1570	Mathura	UP 1465/1133 M: 25-11-1920	UP 1669-M/1133: 27-12-1920
30	A site of ancient pokhar (puskarini) about 3 miles from Muttra on the road to Govardhan, containing four inscribed monolithic stairways	Mathura	UP 1465/1133 M: 25-11-1920	UP 1669-M/1133: 27-12-1920
31	Ahalyaganj Tila	Mathura- Brindaban road	UP 1136-M/367- 19: 12-05-1913	UP 1570-M/367- 09: 08-07-1913
32	Chamunda Tila on the Muttra- Brindaban road	Mathura- Brindaban road	UP 1136-M/367- 19: 12-05-1913	UP 1570-M/367- 09: 08-07-1913
33	Kos Minar	Mile 3, Furlong 5. 175 from the boundary on Mathura- Delhi road	UP 1412-M: 18-11-1920	UP 1648-M/1133: 27-12-1920
34	Kos Minar	Mile 11, Furlong 5 (west of Chamah village) on Mathura- Delhi road	UP 1412-M: 18-11-1920	UP 1648-M/1133: 27-12-1920
35	Kos Minar	opposite to mile 13, Furlong 1 from road on Mathura- Delhi road	UP 1412-M: 18-11-1920	UP 1645-M/1133: 27-12-1920
36	Kos Minaar	Mile 116, 400 yards from road on Mathura- Delhi road	UP 1412-M: 18-11-1920	UP 1645-M/1133: 27-12-1920

37	Kos Minar	In the beginning of Dig road on Mathura-Dig road	UP 1412-M: 18-11-1920	UP 1645-M/1133: 27-12-1920
38	Ancient Site 1 mile west of Mora village and 6 miles west of Mathura	Mora	UP 573-MS/110-MS-1927: 06/10-07-1928	UP 706-MS/110-MS-1927:27-08-1928
39	An extensive site containing a high mound about 100' square, apparently a fort with ramparts and corner turrets	Shahpur Ghosana	UP 573-MS/110-MS-1927: 06/10-07-1928	UP 706-MS/110-MS-1927:27-08-1928
40	Mound at mauza Sonauth Janubi near Nagla Jhinga on the Muttra-Bharatpur road	Sonauth Janubi	UP 1136-M/367-19: 12-05-1913	UP 1570-M/367-09: 08-07-1913
41	Ancient Mound	Adinga	-	S.O. No. 1409: 06-06-1989
42	Ancient mound near Kishori Raman College	Kesopur Manoharpur	2137 15-08-1987	-
43	Queen Victoria Memorial with all its walls and gateways	In Mathura city	UP 1412-M: 18-11-1920	
<b>Hathras District</b>				
1	Monument near Killah railway station	Hathras	UP 1412-M: 18-11-1920	UP 1645-M/1133: 22-12-1920
2	Remains of an old Hindu temple inside the remains of Dayaram's fort	Hathras	UP 1465/1133 M: 25-11-1920	UP 1669-M/1133: 27-12-1920
3	A small circular mound 100' x 80'	Lakhnu	UP 1465/1133 M: 25-11-1920	UP 1669-M/1133: 27-12-1920
4	A Mound about ½ of a mile to the south west from town	Lakhnu	UP 1465/1133 M: 25-11-1920	UP 1669-M/1133: 27-12-1920
5	Monument of Major Robert Nairn	Pipalgaon	UP 1412-M: 18-11-1920	UP 1645-M/1133: 22-12-1920
6	Monument sacred to the memory of Samuel Anderson Nichterlein	Sasni	UP 1412-M: 18-11-1920	UP 1645-M/1133: 22-12-1920
7	A large and conspicuous mound called Gohana Khera an old Buddhist establishment, a short distance to the east of the town	Sasni	UP 1465/1133-M: 25-11-1920	UP 1669-M/1133: 27-12-1920

Now, another hospital building has come up on the other side of the vacant land at 1 meter distance. The ASI would have issued show cause and demolition notices but nothing substantive happened on ground. At the time of declaration of these Kos minars as monuments of National importance, possibly the area surrounding them was public land but due to increasing land prices, land sharks were able to occupy the

surrounding areas and that's why a Kos minar situated near Semri village on NH-2 (Figure 2) was surrounded from all sides by the boundary of an educational institution, though, it was openly visible from all sides prior to that. The author remembers observing the construction activities from moving trains on Mathura-Delhi route that took place sometime around 2010. When a volunteer brought the information of construction to a senior ASI official, certain changes were made in the boundary wall. It is really a matter of debate whether to consider Kos minars as monuments of National importance or not. Definitely, these are important heritage landmarks and require protection by the government but no rules of 100 m prohibited area and 200 m regulated area will work in such cases. One option can be the National Highway Authority of India is given the responsibility of maintaining the Kos minars. If we take the example of Kos minar situated near Bhuteshwar, it would be draconian for the nearby residents to push them in 100 m prohibited and 200 m regulated area limits. When the Kos minar has already lost visibility from all sides except a small approach, the first aim of the government should be to make it visible to the public from the road to Govardhan to the extent possible by removing the privately owned boundary wall and then protecting this much area which gives access and visibility to the monument. No further AMASR regulations should be applicable on the site.



Figure 1: Kos Minar near Bhuteshwar situated on the road to Deeg

This land of the monument should be arranged by the Mathura-Vrindavan Municipal Corporation and should be handed over to the ASI for maintenance of garden and iron fencing. In the case of Semri Kos minar, even the 100 m prohibited and 200 m regulated area would have been of no use. The most important factor for this Kos minar was its visibility from the highway but that is already partly lost and even if the AMASR Act stops any further constructions, its visibility would be lost as it is situated at a fair distance from the NH 2 in a sunken ground. It would not be a good idea to block development of the entire area for the sake of a Kos minar, of which the visibility is



already partly lost due to construction of high walls in the surrounding area. In the case of this Kos minar too, an approach to the monument should be provided by the government along with the maximum possible visibility. The existing provisions of AMASR Act would not be of much use at this site. For all the Kos minars, the government should devise a strategy by which these are visible to the maximum extent possible to the travelers moving on the highways and have approach to reach from the highway. These Kos minars should have totally different rules and regulations in contrast to important monuments and sites of National importance.



Figure 2: Kos Minar situated near Semri (Nari-Semri) village on N.H. 2.



Figure 3: General view of the Govindnagar Mound, Mathura



Figure 4: View of Bhuteshwar mound, Mathura during destruction





Figure 5: General view of archaeological mound, Bajna

Before talking about each and every ASI protected monument and site in Mathura district except the Kos minars, firstly we should have a look at the site of Govindnagar (Figure 3) which is protected by the Uttar Pradesh State Archaeology Department. The story of the devastation of the site and the smuggling of the antiquities is described by Dr Ramesh Chandra Sharma (1984: 92-95) wherein he informs that the whole area under the Govindnagar Housing Society produced a large number of Kushan period sculptures. In spite of Dr Sharma's repeated requests to the topmost bosses of the then Government, he was not able to get the site declared as of national importance. Later, a small part was excavated by the ASI and the Uttar Pradesh State Archaeology Department took a small portion of the vast site under its protection. Whether all that which was declared protected has still survived or not, is not known but I must bring to the notice of the readers a few important points: the surrounding area of the site along with parts of the protected mound is occupied by recently constructed houses and on the east is the Mathura-Delhi railway track. Opposite the railway track, there is some public/government land and then houses of Jagannathpuri locality. The Indian Railways has in the recent years constructed third and fourth lines in the vicinity of the protected archaeological site. Imagine, if this site would have been an ASI protected site, then, the Indian Railways would have been forced to seek the permission of Central Government for construction of new railway tracks and as per the existing provisions of AMASR Amended Act 2010, the permission in the prohibited area would have been straightaway declined, the Indian Railways would have failed in the construction of third and fourth railway tracks and the country would have been forced to pay a huge price for blockage to the utmost necessary infrastructure development and rising costs due to delayed execution for the draconian provisions of AMASR Amended Act 2010. Another fallout of this Govindnagar mound being Uttar Pradesh Government protected site was the complete destruction of the Bhuteshwar mound situated to the south of this protected mound (Figure 4) as the Uttar Pradesh Water Works Department constructed its building at the site. May be due to the strict provisions of the AMASR Amended Act 2010, this would not have been possible, in

case the Govindnagar mound was a declared site of National importance. Here, it is important to mention here that the Bhuteshwar mound was an important but unprotected archaeological mound and was majorly destroyed at the time of construction of Delhi-Agra railway track in around 1900s and later on during the construction of the Bhuteshwar Railway Station. But, what was left of the important site was never taken into protection by the Government and the remaining parts of the mound were left either to be encroached upon or to be destroyed. In such a scenario, the destruction of the remaining part of the ancient mound by construction of the Water Works office must not sound that much painful as it would have been in case the other parts of the ancient mound were surviving. Let's have a detailed look at each of the centrally protected monument and site in District Mathura:

**Ancient site, Bajna:** This archaeological site (Figure 5) came into prominence due to finding of a large number of Buddhist railing pillars and other architectural members. At that time, the site was spread over a large area and was comparatively high. In those days, Bajna, situated about 6 km north-west of Mathura was an insignificant village and the site was situated outside the village habitation amidst the agricultural fields. The site was possibly left unattended for many decades and only after 2000, a boundary wall was constructed by the ASI. A look at the boundary wall clearly indicates that much of the mound existed outside it, but due to certain technical problems related to the ownership of the concerned fields and the government apathy at the time of demarcation, only a limited area could be brought under fencing. In between, there were many unproven reports of illegal diggings at the site and the smuggling of important sculptures of the Kushan period from there. Certain gangs were active in Mathura which only worked for illegal digs to steal ancient sculptures. At present, the area has become commercially costly due to rapid urbanisation of Mathura city and construction of houses is taking place at least on two sides of the mound. The provisions of AMASR Amended Act 2010 are not that much useful at this site. First issue is that we have already lost a huge chunk of site from what the British Indian government had protected for us. Secondly, this is an archaeological site which was unscientifically dug up by the early archaeologists and then by smugglers, though difficult to prove. The best possible solution for this site is that it should be scientifically excavated now and the archaeological remains are exposed and protected for future. The site may become a place of attraction for tourists, at least those interested in Buddhist archaeology. Even the area which is outside the ASI boundary should be excavated, if found suitable. No construction activity should be allowed in those areas which are still free of buildings, for at least 100 meters or else a high boundary may be constructed at the site after the excavations and then there may not be any further need for restrictions on construction activities. The government must occupy the additional land if archaeological remains are found there.

**A pillar with Sanskrit inscription dated in S. 1666 in the flanking towers at the Bhanokhar tank, Barsana:** The British Indian government must be thanked that they declared protection of a pillar containing a Sanskrit inscription of *circa* sixteenth

century (Figure 6) as that of national importance. Anyways, this pillar lies on the periphery of an old tank and is intact till now. As an archaeologist and an Indian, I believe that only this pillar along with the old tank is saved for posterity. There shall be no restrictions imposed as per provisions of AMASR Amended Act 2010 for this pillar. The old tank itself has its religious sanctity and is important as a water body, so, if there are any restrictions to be imposed, these should be for the protection of the tank and should be imposed by the administration which is responsible for the safeguard of old water bodies.



Figure 6: General view of a pillar containing an inscription, Barsana



Figure 7: General view of the archaeological mound, Bhadar

**Mound near Bhadar village, Bhadar:** In all probability, some important Buddhist sculpture(s) were reported from this mound (Figure 7) because of which the British Indian government declared it as to be of national importance. Truly speaking, for so many years, I considered Bhadar village situated near Ral as to be the ASI protected site. That Bhadar (near Ral) village is an extensive mound with deep antiquity and has produced some important Kushan period sculptures. Anyhow, I got to know about the



location of ASI protected Bhadar village only recently. This Bhadar mound is a small mound situated in the interiors near villages Sonsa and Shahpur, both significant for some Kushan period sculptural findings. Since this protected site is situated in the interiors with some difficult access, it can be assumed that it would not have got much destroyed with the passage of time, though there are still some illegal constructions atop the mound. The farmers from the surrounding fields have destroyed the mound to a great extent in pretension of levelling the soil. The mound had not been provided with a boundary wall till 2020. In fact, archaeological sites should not be provided with rubble masonry wall fencing but only barbed wire fencing as digging foundations for stone walls is harmful to the archaeological sites. At this mound, the land use in the surrounding area of about 100 meters may be restricted to the status quo, i.e., as agricultural fields. Restricted or fully fledged excavations should be taken up at the site to ascertain the nature of underlying structure and if found worthy of exposure, these should be exposed after conserving them.



Figure 8: General view of Govind Dev Temple, Vrindavan

**Temple of Gobind Deva with all its walls and gateways, Vrindavan:** This is one of the most marvelous structures (Figure 8) of medieval India. We must thank the British Indian government for declaring this important temple as being centrally protected, certainly the most deserving case. The only problem with this protected temple is the level of encroachments surrounding it that have mushroomed in the last 100 years. The temple is situated atop the most significant archaeological mound of Vrindavan, the

Goma Tila which once marked the ancient settlement on the banks of river Yamuna before the river shifted its course about a km away. There are stories that inform that this temple was seven storied before being demolished by Aurangzeb. Post-abandonment, the idols were shifted to Jaipur where the Govindadeva Temple forms the most popular religious spot of the Pink city. Some idols were placed in the Vrindavan Temple later on and the worship had begun before the temple was taken into protection by the British Indian government.



Figure 9: General view of Jugal Kishore Temple, Vrindavan





Figure 10: General view of Madan Mohan Temple, Vrindavan

There has never been an attempt by the Government post-independence to provide this magnificent temple its lost glory. Anyhow, the temple structure seems to be fairly conserved due to conservation attempts of the ASI under the British rule and slightly afterwards. But the new houses which have come up in close proximity of this temple are distasteful to the sanctity of this temple. Can anybody think of bringing the idols back from Jaipur to this temple, to which they actually belonged? The conservation



manual of the ASI does not permit to revive a monument by making any additional changes and because of that a partly abandoned temple shall always remain abandoned for the pilgrims. This is a temple where the government should think of removing the surrounding structures for a distance of 100 meters in all directions and develop this monument as one of the most iconic monuments of India. The displaced population may be provided some alternative place to settle in case they have valid papers of property ownership. Proper lighting should be provided outside and inside the temple and its importance as one of the most important places of Gaudiya sect with the contributions of Shrila Rupa Gosvami must be highlighted. There shall be no need to put any further restrictions outside the 100 meters radius.

**Temple of Jugal Kishore with all its walls and gateways, Vrindavan:** This small but beautiful temple building of seventeenth century (Figure 9) is situated near Keshi Ghat on the river Yamuna. The temple was abandoned due to atrocities of Aurangzeb and the idols were shifted to a temple in Panna (Bundelkhand) that has become the most famous temple of the town. This abandoned temple of Vrindavan was never revived and after coming into possession of the ASI, even the main temple entrance was locked at some point of time. This seems to be due to lack of watch and ward staff in the ASI. Anyways, the temple in spite of being situated in close vicinity of the Yamuna is highly encroached upon from all sides. The temple building is quite significant with beautiful sculptures carved on its facade and is situated atop an ancient mound, though not as high as the Madan Mohan and Govind Dev Temple mounds. This temple building also seems that much important that 100 meters surrounding area of it should be made free of constructions. The temple should again be brought to partly worship as are the Madan Mohan and Govind Dev temples since an abandoned structure becomes neglected in a pilgrimage town like Vrindavan and in certain cases it becomes more difficult to preserve them.

**Temple of Madan Mohan with all its walls and gateways, Vrindavan:** This is another landmark monument (Figure 10) of Braj region situated on a lofty mound known as Dwadash Aditya Tila at the Kalidah Ghat on the Yamuna, though; the river has shifted some meters away. The temple was constructed almost simultaneously with the Govindadeva temple during the last decades of sixteenth century. At one point of time, this area formed the most important landscape of the ancient Vrindavan, particularly of the Gaudiya sampradaya. About 250 m away was the famous Banke Bihari Temple, about 400 m away was the Radha Ballabh Temple and on the back side of Madan Mohan Temple were the *samadhis* of famous *Gosvamins*. Detailed information about the importance of this temple mound can be collected from a published write-up (Gupta 2020: 171-188). Suffice to mention here that the site requires some investigative excavations and scientific surveys to understand the nature of underlying structures. The temple site itself is encroached by the residing *pujari* of the temple who also partly has the only access to certain parts of the old temple. Being situated in the proximity of the most famous temple of Vrindavan, the Banke Bihari Temple, the surrounding area of this temple is highly encroached upon. Instead of making provisions under AMASR

Amended Act 2010 for unnecessary sites, the area surrounding 100 meters of this temple should be taken into its possession by the government and the site after scientific studies in the area should be developed as one of the most iconic monuments of the entire northern India. All the later constructions on the site including the residence of the *pujari* must be removed. Some alternative arrangements may be made for the displaced populace.



Figure 11: General view of Radha Vallabh Temple, Vrindavan



Figure 12: General view of an old entrance, Akbari Sarai, Chhata

**The temple of Radha Ballabh, Vrindavan:** This is one of the most important old cum present day popular temples (Figure 11) of Vrindavan. Unlike the other ASI protected temples of Vrindavan, temple of Radha Vallabh is a popular living temple. Only the old temple structure is with the ASI that was abandoned at some stage, definitely before the temple was declared protected by the British Indian government and may be since the time its spire was demolished, in all probability on the orders of Aurangzeb. This red sandstone built three storied imposing temple structure was constructed in early seventeenth century and the idols were installed by the founder of the Radhavallabha sect Sri Hita Harivamsa, a contemporary and friend of Svami Haridasa. The present day temple is built adjacent to the ancient structure. The temple is situated in a densely populated area, most of the surrounding constructions might be quite early in date. Since this is an important ancient shrine, it needs to be taken care of. For that purpose, approach to the ancient temple may be widened and some houses may be shifted to provide it better access and visibility. There is no need of marking 100 meters prohibited and 200 meters regulated area then.

Another important temple of Vrindavan requires mention here. The temple is Gopinath Mandir which was constructed by a powerful chieftain Rayasila in the first half of seventeenth century. During the time of Muslim atrocities, the idol was shifted to a temple in Jaipur where it is still worshipped as a popular deity. After the abandonment of the old temple, a new temple was constructed adjacent to this temple and new idols were enshrined there. This temple is a popular temple now-a-days with some brilliant paintings work on the walls and ceiling of an adjacent temple haveli. The abandoned temple lost its glory and was taken into protection of the ASI along with above-mentioned four temples, but sometime around 1970 the protection responsibility of Gopinath Temple was handed over to the Uttar Pradesh Archaeology Department for some reasons which are not known to the present author. Unfortunately, this old temple is in the worst state of preservation as the main structure is used by powerful locals to tie cattle and as storage for fodder. The locals are in a way happy that they are



not bound by the provisions of AMASR Amended Act 2010 as are the people in the vicinity of other ASI protected temples. In fact, this temple, from which the market derives its name Gopinath Bazaar, must be brought under protection of the Central government and the old temple should be developed as an iconic monument of Vrindavan by removing the nearby structures and shifting the populace to some other area. The exercise may be difficult as the temple is located in a densely populated area. Only few meters area may be cleared on either side along the road. No other restrictions would possibly require to be imposed on the inhabitants under the AMASR Amended Rules 2010. It may also be useful if some symbolic worship is initiated inside the abandoned temple structure.

**Akbari Sarai, Chhata:** Chhata is an extensive ancient archaeological mound on which a fortified square shaped sarai (Figure 12) was constructed during the Mughal period. As per historical records, the work at the site was initiated by Shershah Suri and was completed by Akbar. Sarai was developed as a fortified settlement as it lies on the ancient highway linking Lahore, Delhi and Agra. Local red sandstone has profusely been used in the sarai. There was a time in my early life when I saw the major part of town of Chhata being situated inside this sarai only. Now, the town is spread much outside the fortified sarai. In my view provisions of AMASR Amended Act 2010 are not much useful in case of such protected monuments. Firstly, the whole fortification wall of the old sarai should be traced, repaired and renovated. Secondly, government should take a call whether it wants to declare the area situated inside the fortification walls as protected or not. I feel that there is no need to declare the area situated inside as protected as it is occupied for centuries and there are no major structures surviving which were built along with the fortification of the sarai. If after proper survey, any of those structures is found surviving, it must be taken into protection by the government and repaired and renovated. If it is occupied, the occupants should be shifted to some other area. It would be almost impossible for the administration to shift the entire populace from inside the sarai, so, only those occupants may be asked to shift who have some important structural part of old sarai under their possession. When the sarai is already encroached upon from every side in spite of the existence of AMASR Act, only 50 meters area from the outer walls of the fortification may be made free of constructions and then restrictions may be imposed on the height of buildings as having only one storey up to 200 meters distance. I would further add that instead of proposing any such restrictions, it would be better if a team of archaeologists, historians, town planners and district administration visits the site and makes provisions based on the need, importance and feasibility assessing all on the ground.

**Two mounds situated between the Chaurasi Jain temple and the village Ganesra.**  
**The second mound is known as Singer Tila, Ganesra:** I must admit that when I was exploring this whole area around 2005, I only knew that Ganeshra is an ASI protected site and during explorations in the village, I observed that the whole village was part of ancient settlement and had undulating ground due to occupation and destruction of the mounds. I could not locate any specific ASI protected mound but thought that the

entire village was protected. In fact Sir John Marshall has mentioned that there were three distinct mounds in the village Ganeshra (*ASI AR 1915: 128*) and these mounds were quite distinct and large sites as evident from the perusal of few old photographs (Figure 13). In present state of my knowledge, I know that out of the two mounds declared protected at Ganeshra village, the one (out of three mounds as mentioned by Marshall) situated inside the village is almost completely destroyed and partly occupied but now it is difficult to point out at any archaeological deposit. Only a marginal fragment of the larger mound of about few meters (Figure 14) has survived which would soon disappear or might have disappeared in between. Moreover, a heavy deposit of cow-dung waste gives this space some height otherwise archaeological deposit is almost lost. Either this small area is put under excavation to search for any ancient remains or else the government should reconsider its protected status.



Figure 13: An old archival photograph showing one of the Ganeshra mounds  
(Courtesy ASI)

The other notified mound at Ganeshra (Figure 15) now comes under the precincts of the Police colony near the Ganeshra Sports stadium. To be true, this mound, though, destroyed to great extent, could partly survive just because of the fact that police colony was constructed there. Otherwise, being situated in an area where land sharks are so active, I am sure that it would not have survived. We must thank the British Indian government for its declaration as protected. The nature of mound is quite interesting and is much different from the Ganeshra site. In fact, the nature of this site is very similar to the nearby site of Vishwa Lakshmi Nagar – Triveni mound which Vinay had explored and described (Gupta 2009: 31). In fact, for this Vishwa Lakshmi

Nagar site, I would like to add that it could survive because it is possibly Category A land of Indian Army, which is even outside the control of Cantonment Board, Mathura. Because of being Army land, land sharks could not dare to destroy the mound and encroach upon the land. Sadly, the mound has been destroyed up to an extent by the Army itself as the Army is probably not aware of its importance as an archaeological site. Many archaeological sites got destroyed inside the Army area as these were neither reported earlier nor declared protected (Gupta 2009). After reading Cunningham's report (1873: 19) again and again, I am sure that this Vishwa Lakshmi Nagar site is the third mound of the Chaurasi group of mounds which Cunningham reported as being situated 1200 feet to the south-west of Jambu Svami temple mound (Mound 1 of Chaurasi group). Mound 2 of the Chaurasi group is completely non-existent now. ASI should write to the Defence Ministry to declare this Army Tila (Chaurasi mound no. 3) as ASI protected and should also excavate the site and expose the structures underneath. As far as the applicability of the provisions of AMASR Act at the protected site inside the Police colony is concerned, I don't think that is required. The protection of the remnant mound itself would be more useful than troubling the nearby residents in the name of Act.



Figure 14: Present day view of the so called surviving Ganeshra mound



Figure 15: General view of another Ganeshra mound





Figure 16: General view of Kankor Tila or Jaisinghpura mound, Mathura

**A mound measuring 100' x 530', its centre occupied by a small brick platform 19' x 7', Jaisinghpura:** Of all the ASI protected sites in Mathura district, this one may have been termed as the better preserved (Figure 16) except for the unfortunate tree plantation. Though, this does not guarantee that the mound was not illegally excavated by the smugglers in the past to take possession of precious antiquities or the area in between the railway track and the present day fencing was not left out while fencing the site. The site is locally known as Kankor Tila and lies in the Bengali Basti mohalla, quite distant from Jaisinghpura locality. Possibly during the time of declaration, this whole area was not under habitation and the last habitation of Mathura city was Jaisinghpura (itself an archaeological site), that's why the mound was notified as being situated in Jaisinghpura. Cunningham (1885: 37) provided the location of the site as being 1 mile distant from old Mathura on the Vrindavan road and citing F.S. Growse has mentioned the finding of various sculptures from Chamunda Devi Temple situated near great Jaisinghpura mound, raising doubt whether he was talking of Chamunda Tila/ Jaisinghpura mohalla situated close to Chamunda Mata temple or the Kankor Tila which is about 2 km north of Chamunda Mata temple. Growse (1882: 135) definitely meant by Jaysinh-pura Khera overlooking the Sarasvati Sangam the mound of Jaisinghpura-Ganesh Tila/ Chamunda Tila and not the Kankor Tila. Sir John Marshall is surely talking about the ASI protected site when he provides the location of the Jaisinghpura site as being situated 3 miles from Mathura in the direction of Vrindavan (ASI AR 1915: 130). There is possibility that the site was partly exposed during the laying of railway track to Vrindavan bringing to light many Buddhist architectural findings, or else site came to prominence only after some small excavation was made at the site by Pandit Radha Krishna in 1910-11 (ASI AR 1915: 130-131) bringing to light important Buddhist antiquities of the Kushan and Gupta periods. That must have been the reason for declaring the site as protected by the British Indian government in 1927. On the eastern side, the site was once restricted by the railway track but now new houses have come up in between the railway track and the present day fencing. The present limits of the protected site have been iron fenced from all sides. The site is the

best available Buddhist archaeological site in the entire district and must be excavated to expose the religious structures lying underneath. On all sides outside the fence, houses have come up in spite of regulations imposed by the AMASR Act. In my opinion, there should be no prohibitions on construction outside the fenced area, once the extent of ancient site is confirmed after excavations. This will also help in the relaying of Mathura-Vrindavan railway track in coming future, otherwise the unnecessary provisions of AMASR Act marking 100 meters as prohibited area would deeply hamper the development in the region. More importantly, the local administration must provide a better approach to reach the site as at present the approach road is not proper.

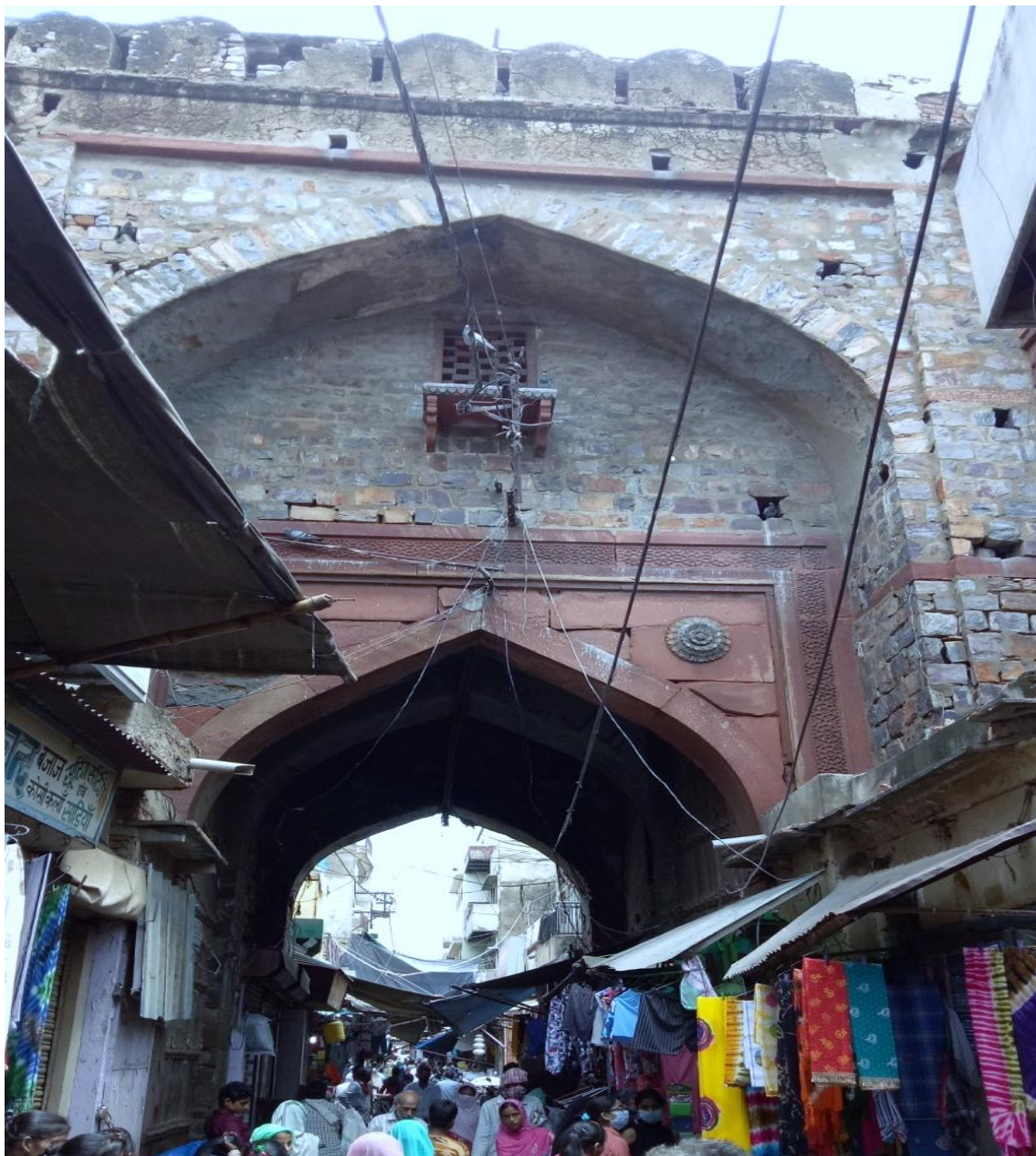


Figure 17: Some remnant structure at the Fortified Sarai, Kosi



**Fortified Sarai at Kosi with all its walls and gateways, Kosi:** This was another Mughal period sarai (Figure 17) located on the ancient royal highway linking Delhi and Agra. Kosi is itself an extensive mound but unlike Chhata, the sarai at Kosi was built on a plain area adjacent to the ancient mound. It is plausible that the sarai at Kosi was well preserved at the time of its notification as a protected monument. But with the passage of time, the sarai has almost completely diminished in spite of its status of being a protected monument. The reason for this situation may be the commercial usage of the whole area as Kosi was an important town settlement and the market was located all along the sarai and also due to lack of vigil by the concerned departments. At present, only a gateway, some part of wall and a couple of cupolas of the fortification survive. When structure itself is not present, what is the meaning of considering the whole area situated once inside the then existing sarai as protected? In my opinion, only those structures which have survived till now should be preserved for posterity and no provisions of AMASR Act should apply on construction activities all around. There is no point in considering a totally lost structure as a protected monument of national importance and harassing the residents. Here, I would further add that the ASI is protecting the Lohagarh Fort, Bharatpur but only the fortification wall is under its protection and the structures and area inside is not under its protection. If the same principle is applied in the case of Kosi, the inhabitants living inside the sarai can take a sigh of relief.



Figure 18: The destroyed mound Chavar, Chhoti Kosi



Figure 19: General view of destroyed mound, Kota

**A small mound containing what appears to be a ruined brick stupa, and covered with fragments of sculptures ranging from the Kushan to the medieval period. The mound is locally known as chavar and is situated about 200 yards to the west of the village, Kosi:** To be true, for many years I mistook the ancient mound of Kosi town (Kosikalan) as the one protected by the ASI. The mound which is actually under protection of ASI is the one situated outside the Kosi (khurd) village on the road to Bharatpur from Mathura. I had explored this site way back in 2005 and observed that some religious structure (not definitely Buddhist) existed there on a religious spot outside the extensive habitation mound of Kosi village (Figure 18). There was no signboard of ASI and none of villagers told me that there was some ASI protected site in the village. Anyways, by then after observing the site, I was able to conclude that some religious structure must have existed to the south-west of ancient village which was destroyed by digging all around on a massive scale. Kushan period brick alignments were visible on the surface of destroyed site. I strongly doubt that the mound was levelled at the behest of the smugglers to loot the ancient sculptures with connivance of some locals. Though, the site is almost completely lost, it would be better to put some trial trench there to ascertain the possibility of finding some ancient remains there. After some trial excavation only, the ASI should decide whether to consider this destroyed site a centrally protected site or not. I don't see any utility of applying provisions of AMASR Act there at the site.

**A long Mound to the north of the Kund, which has yielded many sculptured railing pillars, Kota:** A large cache of Buddhist railing pillars (sixteen in number) found from this site (Figure 19) was reported by General Cunningham (1885: 49-52). Due to its archaeological importance, the British Indian government considered it a fit case for protection under the then existing Act. Kota mound is located almost adjacent to NH 2 to the north of a large tank. The location of mound as per notification is clear but shockingly during explorations at the site, no archaeological remains could be located in the specified area which lies to the north of the tank. It is suggested that a trial excavation is taken up at the site to confirm whether it contains archaeological remains or not. As per the notification it was a long mound but at present the surface is almost flat without evidence of ancient remains, thus indicating that the mound is totally destroyed. Once archaeological remains are found in trial excavation, a decision about the status of the site should be taken. In my opinion, the mound was destroyed much before 2005 when I first visited the site. In all probability, the mound was destroyed in connivance of smugglers and land mafia many decades ago. It is quite understandable that the provisions of AMASR Act 2010 should not be applied at Kota site because the existence of the protected site is itself in serious doubt.

**A high mound marking the old fort situated inside the town, Mahaban:** The site (Figure 20) once marked the fort of King Kulachandra who had bravely fought the Mahmud of Ghazni during his infamous attack on Mathura in 1017 ACE. A famous temple situated atop the mound was destroyed and converted into a mosque either during the reign of Alauddin Khalji or Aurangzeb (Cunningham 1885: 42-46). It was

only after the Indian independence that the Chaurasi/Assi Khambha masjid was again converted into a temple of Lord Krishna to whom it is believed to have been dedicated before the destruction as the spot was identified as that of Krishna's *chhathipalana*. Many carved pillars of the pre-Islamic temple have been used in this structure. The architecture of this temple (then a mosque) has been described in some detail by Cunningham (1885: 42-46). As far as my knowledge goes, this is one of four such monuments in the entire Braj region where such marks of devastation caused by Islamic invaders are observed. The other three are the Chaurasi Khambha mosque at Kaman, Bharatpur (Cunningham 1885: 54-60), Usha Mandir, Bayana and a medieval monument at Nohjhil, Mathura. At other such destroyed structures, ancient architectural fragments are not visible due to various reasons. In spite of the protected status of the whole mound, ASI has never interfered in the affairs of this temple irrespective of the fact that this is one of rare temples of this type in the wider region, quite comparable to the famous Quwat'ul Islam mosque at the Qutb complex, Delhi. There have been many reports of ill treatment of poor pilgrims at this temple by the *pandas* and many ancient pillars have been ruined or made inaccessible. Coming to the mound proper, I remember it being free of that many encroachments seventeen years back but today, it is highly encroached. The most important areas of the mound which have the earliest Painted Grey Ware cultural deposit are totally lost. The mound was so huge that even after so many encroachments it survives. The government needs to show a strong will to get this important mound free of encroachments and also take up excavations there. There is no point in applying provisions of AMASR Act 2010 there when the most important monument of Chaurasi Khambha temple is kept out of control of ASI. Moreover, the mound needs to be preserved for posterity; any structural activity outside the protected area may not be harmful to the protected site once a fair portion of the mound is made encroachment free. Besides, there is one old temple of Yogamaya atop the ruined fort, which should be taken into protection. A late medieval temple of Dwarkanath situated on a part of ancient mound, now appearing as a part of the *basti*, houses two antique Krishna idols and this temple requires urgent protection.

**Ancient site at a distance of 1 mile from Mat village containing fragments of images,**

**Mat:** This is one of the most famous archaeological sites (Figure 21) not just in Mathura but across the globe due to finding of a royal sanctuary of the great Kushans along with a tank. The site known as Tokri Tila was excavated by Pandit Radha Krishna in 1911-12 (*ASI AR 1915: 120-127*) and later on was declared as protected by the British Indian government. The site is situated about 800 m outside Mant town in the north-east direction. Till a decade back, the site had no threats as it was located amidst agricultural fields, but due to rapid development in the area with the coming up of Yamuna Expressway the surrounding area has become quite costlier, putting stress on the existence of the protected site. The site is comparatively small and stone boundary wall was built by ASI at the site some fifteen years ago, somehow obliterating the view of the site. When the site was excavated and all the sculptures and important findings were brought to the Government Museum, Mathura, what is the benefit in keeping the

same site as a tumulus? In fact, the site must be exposed scientifically and made open to public as an archaeological landmark. An area of 100 meters surrounding the site may be declared as a no-construction zone and a proper passage may be provided by the government to reach the site from Raya-Mant Road. Except for an area having 100 meters radius, the site should be kept out of the purview of the provisions of the AMASR Act. The excavated tank must have lied outside the elevated mound in a low lying area. In my opinion, this is for sure outside the demarcated area. This spot must be searched for and taken under protection.



Figure 20: An old view of mound at Mahavan during 1974 (courtesy ASI)



Figure 21: General view of Tokri Tila, Mant (before construction of boundary wall)





Figure 22: An archival photograph of now non-existent Gayatri mound, Mathura  
(Courtesy ASI)



Figure 23: A view of the remnant land which is being considered as Girdharpur mound, Mathura

**Ancient sculptures, carvings, images, bas-reliefs, inscriptions stones, and like objects, Mathura district:** This was a notification for which the British Indian government should be appreciated to the maximum extent. The then Indian government could understand and appreciate the finding of sculptures, inscriptions

and other antiquities from various spots of Mathura district from time to time, that's why it brought out such a notification which is not limited to a particular finding or spot. Its intention must have been to declare each and every object as mentioned in the notified category along with the find-spot to protect and preserve as far as possible. Perhaps later on, no one tried to understand the true spirit behind this notification and this became an almost meaningless notification.

**Gayatri mound just outside the Bharatpur Gate of the city, Mathura:** This protected site presents one of the most painful stories concerning the archaeological heritage of Mathura. During my earlier explorations, I could not locate this site accurately because the site did not exist. I was in doubt whether the site was outside the Bharatpur Gate where it was told or near the Gayatri Tapobhumi which actually had some mounds in the back side. Anyways, now I am sure that the site which was protected had to be located only outside Bharatpur Gate. Outside the entrance gate of Kishori Raman Degree College, there is a Gayatri Mata temple situated on a lofty but disturbed surface (Figure 22). Gayatri Tila had provided few Buddhist sculptures and architectural fragments as is clear from the study of find-spots of those sculptures in the Catalogue of Government Museum, Mathura and that led to the protection of the mound by the British Indian government. But, unfortunately, the mound was completely destroyed in the early decades post-independence, possibly during the construction of the Kishori Raman Degree and Inter College and other nearby building constructions. It is difficult to speculate on the reasons of its destruction then but it must have been due to the fact that the ownership of the land was not with the ASI.

**Girdharpur, a very large site, half a mile north of Pali Khera mound. There are four distinct mound on this site, three of which have been partially excavated, namely one by Mr. Growse, two by R.B. Pandit Radha Krishna, Mathura:** The archaeology of Mathura got enriched due to the presence of such mounds. During the pre-independence period, there were some sporadic diggings at this site which brought to light many important architectural relics of the past, mostly of the Buddhist affiliation of the Kushan period. The British Indian government was good enough to declare these mounds (four in numbers) to be of national importance but unfortunately the site was lost permanently afterwards. These four mounds were spread in a very wide area between the Govardhan Road (Shriji Dham Colony) to the Sonkh road in front of Pali-khera near Nagla Bhojpur. All the mounds were destroyed by the land mafias, the colonizers and possibly smuggler gangs. What is left now of the site is just a partial fragment so as to cover the existence of the site on paper. A small area of less than a bigha size (Figure 23) is what survives as a part of the mound which is also in danger of extinction. Now, when the sites are lost forever, what purpose the provisions of AMASR Act fulfill at such protected archaeological sites?

**Gopal Khera, situated to the north of Mathura junction railway station, Mathura:** This is a quite small site (Figure 24 & 25), now-a-days surrounded by houses from all four sides. Some important Buddhist antiquities would have been unearthed from this

site because of which the site was brought under government protection by the British Indian government. Till few decades back, this whole area was free of habitation, so the site must have been visible from the Mathura Junction railway station but due to rapid urbanisation, instead of forming a landmark, the site is to be located inside a colony. The archaeological site is very much disturbed, partly excavated illegally in the preceding decades and has a unique deposit on its surface as observed on *pajaya* mounds (Gupta 2008: 209-214). The site has been provided iron grill fencing by the ASI. When the site is already surrounded by houses from all sides, what is the utility of sending notices to people residing within a radius of 100 and then 200 meters from the site? I suggest that the provisions of AMASR Act should not be applied in case of such archaeological sites. It would be better if this site is excavated to ascertain the true nature of the site, the whole site would be covered in less than 3-4 trenches of 10 x 10 meters. From the perusal of old photographs of the site, it is clear that a lot of deposit of the site is already lost and the heavy plantation of trees at the site is a problem for any future excavation.



Figure 24: An archival photograph of Gopal Khera, Mathura (Courtesy ASI)

**The mound known as Kankali Tila, area 3.78 acres, situated at the corner of the Agra-Delhi and Muttra- Gobardhan roads, the Jail and the Chaubara mounds, Mathura:** This notification of a protected site may be termed as one of the worst declarations which were made by the British Indian government as the notification was quite wrong in its true sense. Kankali Tila, Jail mound and a group of mounds known as Chaubara were definitely few of the most important archaeological sites of ancient Mathura but location of all three was quite apart. Of all the three sites, the mound of Jail and the



Chaubara mounds were already very much destroyed during the British Indian government. Jail mound, also referred by Cunningham (1871: 239-241) is situated on the spot of present day Collectorate, i.e., the administrative headquarter of Mathura district and nothing as suggestive of an important archaeological site survives there. The mound was also known as Sarai Jamalpur and Damdama. The Chaubara mounds (Cunningham 1873: 16-18) were a group of about 12 or 14 mounds (Growse 1882: 122) which were partly destroyed during the laying of the Sonkh road. It is quite possible that many of the mounds of this group partly or fully survived till the mid-1980s when commercial activities grew up in this entire area due to coming up of present day NH 2 and the *anaj-mandi* of Mathura. Definitely, the concerned departments did nothing to protect these mounds. The notification needs to be rectified and the name of Jail and Chaubara mounds has to be removed from it.



Figure 25: General view of the present day Gopal Khera, Mathura



Figure 26: General view of the Kankali Tila, Mathura





Figure 27: General view of the present day Pali-Khera site, Mathura

Now, we come to the status of the Kankali Tila (Figure 26) which is still under protection of the ASI. Major parts of this mound are outside the control of the ASI for the presence of Kankali Devi temple and a *gausala*. There was no *gausala* few decades back and the temple of the *devi* was a small enclosure but due to encroachment desire of the temple people and the owner of the cattle-pan, more and more area of the mound has been taken over by them. Earlier, the mound was situated in isolation but now it is part of city and colonies have come up all around it. The mound was unscientifically excavated by Cunningham and Fuhrer (Smith 1904) and then ASI team during 1973-77 excavations unearthed a Kushan period tank at the site. The small tank used to get covered with the dirty drain water of the surrounding area and so the ASI constructed a stone wall all around which in itself appears like an eyesore, probably looking like an old structure in itself. Proper consultations should be made and archaeological wisdom should be used to solve such issues. The plantation of deep-rooted trees would pose problems in future excavations. As far as the applicability of the provisions of AMASR Act at this site is concerned, I don't think that it makes any sense. The site is already much encroached and surrounded from all sides that the provisions have become ineffective. If the government wants to excavate the site horizontally, then all the encroachments should be removed except the temple. There is a possibility that a major part of the ancient site has been encroached upon by the colonisers of Dwarkapuri colony, in case the old pillar (demarcation marker) buried outside the house of one Mr. Bhardwaj about 150 meters away from the present day demarcation in the eastern direction as observed in 2007 was fixed there only. The area of the mound as mentioned in the notification seems wrong because the area of the site is already much larger than that.

**Pali Khera mound at Muttra, Mathura:** Pali Khera site is described by Cunningham (1885: 47-48) as the find-spot of a number of important archaeological artefacts, mostly associated with some significant Buddhist establishment that was discovered by Growse (1882: 124). Pali Khera is one of the most important archaeological sites of

India for the finding of a good number of the earliest Brahmanical stone sculptures from inside two wells of the village along with a bacchanalian group and related Buddhist sculptures. Even during the Kushan period, it would have been difficult to differentiate Pali Khera from the sites of Mathura as it is in continuation of the group of mounds including Chaubara, Girdharpur, Mansa Tila and sites of Salempur and Maholi villages. The site of Pali Khera must have been an extensive site situated just at the corner of village at the junction of the road coming from the Sonkh road and the other one from Mansa Tila. The mound was heavily destroyed as during July 2003, a complete bowl of late PGW tradition was found from the destroyed site during explorations by Prof. Dilip Kumar Chakrabarti and his team (Gupta 2013: 53). The site was dug few meters deep from the ground level making it impossible to look like a mound. Only small but disturbed strips (Figure 27) survive on both sides of the village road which is now claimed by the ASI as its protected site. This area cannot be claimed as the main site because nothing much can be recovered from its excavations, though, it must be excavated now since we have already lost the site. Even after 2005, very deep diggings have taken place there at the site or just adjacent to it for building constructions and as per unconfirmed reports many sculptures of the Kushan period were stolen from there by the smugglers. I myself had observed some identifiable fragments of the Buddha statues kept there at an open shrine. A modern day temple is situated at the junction of the two village roads which marks the spot where Growse had recovered a number of pillars and capitals. I don't know whether such a destroyed site can be considered a centrally protected site or not, but, I would definitely suggest that excavations must be carried out there to ascertain the importance of the small area which might have formed part of once intact site and expose the buried structures. There may not be any need to impose provisions of existing AMASR Act at this site; at the most the land use in the surrounding area may be restricted to only agricultural use.

**The portions of Katra Mound which are not in the possession of Nazul tenants, on which formerly stood a temple of Keshavadeva which was dismantled and the site utilised for the mosque of Aurangzeb, Mathura:** It must be considered the most important site of Mathura (Figure 28) and one of the most sacred ones of India as on this site stands the temple of Lord Krishna considering the spot to be his birth place. General Cunningham described this site in his first Survey report (1871: 233-238) and according to him the size of the Katra enclosure was 804 feet in length by 653 feet in breadth. General Cunningham informs that a Jama Masjid was erected in the midst of this Katra square on the orders of Aurangzeb after dismantling of the pre-existing magnificent temple of Kesava Deva or Keso Ray. He also informs (p. 238) that the Masjid had long been disused, owing to many dangerous cracks in both roof and the walls. He was very much excited about the finding of Buddhist sculptural works from the site of Katra and wanted to explore the area of the Masjid.

In 1954-55, the Northern Circle of ASI, Agra and the HQ office, Delhi took up an excavation at Katra 500 feet to the north of this Jami mosque. A brief of excavation is



published (*Indian Archaeology – 1954-55-A Review*: 15-16) but a detailed report never came out. Coming back to the Katra mound, it has been a contentious site even before its declaration as centrally protected by the British Indian government. Even after its declaration as a protected site, the British Indian government did nothing for the site, though; some small excavations were made at the site by Cunningham, Growse, Fuhrer and Pandit Radha Krishna (*ASI AR 1915*: 131-133). The status quo was maintained at this site post-independence. The mound of Katra was one of the largest mounds of Mathura and many early scholars considered it the site of ancient Mathura.

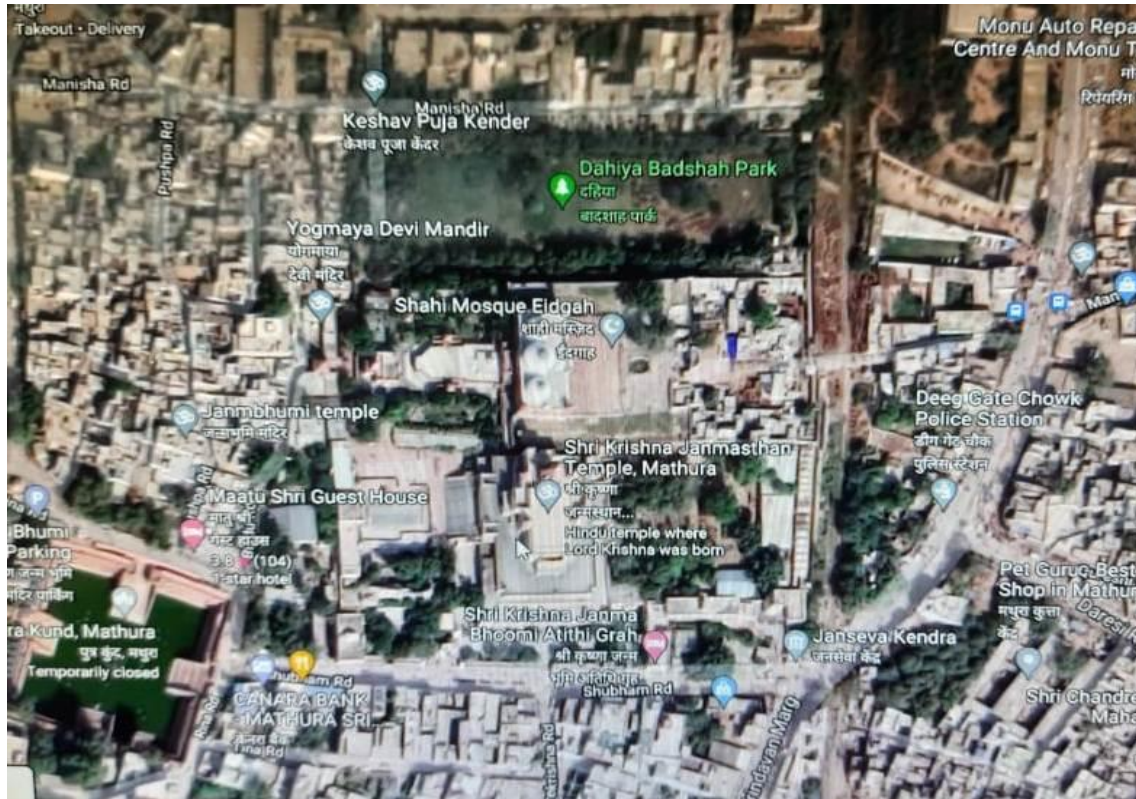


Figure 28: Google imagery of Katra mound, Mathura (courtesy google maps)

The Katra enclosure associated with the religious structures was a small part of the mound. The mound actually continued from Mallpura up to Mahavidya temple and from Deeg Gate to Govind Nagar, the Mathura-Vrindavan and Delhi-Mumbai railway tracks passing in between. The area notified by the British Indian Government should have included all this area of ancient mound which was almost free of habitation in those decades. A new temple was constructed at the site of Katra enclosure with the initiatives of Bharat Ratna Mahamana Pandit Madan Mohan Malviyaji, Seth Shri Hanuman Prasad Poddarji and other dignitaries but I have not come across any supportive or detrimental role played by the ASI during that construction. 38 sculptures were handed over by the Janmbhumi Trust to the Government Museum, Mathura in July 1954 which were unearthed as a result of levelling and digging of the Katra site for renovating the birthplace of Lord Krishna. Besides, some other objects found from Katra site were handed over to the Mathura Museum (Sharma 1984: 83).



Figure 29: Sati Burj, Mathura





Figure 30: Pushkarini (Shantanu Kund) at Satoha, Mathura

Unfortunately, the ASI, legal protector of the Katra mound possibly does not have any record of this activity. The land at the Katra mound was never owned by the ASI and the mandate which ASI had due to provisions of AMASR Act 1958 was very limited. Later on, due to increasing security concerns and encroachments from all around, possibly there was no space left at the site except a park situated adjacent to Keshav Dev temple. In the case of such a sensitive site, ASI may be able to take up any responsibility only under directions of the Hon'ble Courts. At present, I don't think



that the provisions of AMASR Act should be applicable on the surrounding area of this site as first of all its nature as a centrally protected site needs to be cleared and only then a high-powered team should decide what regulations need to be imposed on the population residing outside the Katra enclosure, but, at least the whole enclosure must be brought under government control and all illegal constructions must be demolished from there.

**The Sati Burj supposed to commemorate the *sati* of the widow of Raja Biharmal of Jaipur, erected by her son Raja Bhagwandas in A.D. 1570, Mathura:** This is tall tower (Figure 29) of about 50 feet height on the bank of river Yamuna near Vishram Ghat. This tower built of local red sandstone is the earliest surviving intact building in Mathura contemporary to the buildings of Fatehpur Sikri. We should be grateful to the British Indian government for declaring it as a centrally protected monument. The surrounding area of this tower except for the Yamuna side is full of buildings which are quite old constructions. The tower has a deserted look and is always closed. There is no watch and ward staff available for this monument. Since it is an important monument, though, unfortunately related to a wrong old practice of Sati, this needs to be developed as a landmark monument of Mathura by providing some lighting and if possible, a light and sound show towards the Yamuna ghats. I don't understand the utility of provisions of AMASR Act for this monument except for troubling the local populace, so, except for the protection and maintenance of the monument, no other interference should be made by the government.

**A site of ancient pokhar (puskharini) about 3 miles from Muttra on the road to Govardhan, containing four inscribed monolithic stairways, Mathura:** This site (Figure 30) lies to the right side of Mathura-Govardhan Road at village Satoha, 5 km distant from old city. In the centre of the tank is a lofty mound on which temple of Shantanu Bihari is situated. On four sides, a circular moat like tank is situated which has been completely renovated by Braj Vikas Trust. No ancient structure or the four inscribed monolithic stairways (as in the gazette notification) survive at the site. Either the whole complex containing the late medieval temple should be considered under ASI protection or else the renovated tank may be considered a fit case for deprotection. When the site has already lost its originality and the ancient stairways, it does not seem right to consider the site as a centrally protected monument, so, the provisions of AMASR Act should not be applicable here. There is no denying that local residents are also responsible along with the fellows of the Braj Vikas Trust and the ASI for the changed appearance of the ancient site but most of them might not be aware of the fallouts of renovation for the true character of an ancient site. There are few old buildings behind this pond, which require urgent protection and conservation. The district administration must be made responsible for the protection of heritage buildings which are about 150 years old and different in appearance than the modern buildings, otherwise all such heritage would be lost as neither ASI nor State Archaeology Department would do anything for their protection as it may be out of their work mandate.

**Ahalyaganj Tila, Mathura-Vrindavan Road:** The mound was situated in between Mathura and Vrindavan at Ahalyaganj village but at present the mound is non-existent. It was in all probability a Kushan period site and had produced some Buddhist sculptures. The site must have been destroyed before 1990. Due to non-existence of the archaeological site, provisions of AMASR Act should not be applied.

**Chamunda Tila on the Muttra-Brindaban road, Mathura:** Located on the left of Mathura-Vrindavan road, this large mound is totally encroached upon and partly destroyed (Figure 31), particularly to the south. It was a major mound of Mathura and that's why the British Indian government declared it as a centrally protected site. Some important sculptures have been found from this site as well as a heap of sculptures was found by F.S. Growse (1882: 135) from the Chamunda Mata temple. Even ASI team led by M.C. Joshi had taken up excavation at some spot of this site during the excavations at Mathura 1973-77 and had found Mauryan horizon in the lowest levels (Joshi 1989: 168). Major portion of the mound lies between Mathura-Vrindavan road and the railway track and partly to the west of railway track. Towards the north, the road to Chamunda Devi mandir defines the northern limits of the mound and the Mathura-Vrindavan road the eastern limits. The Saraswati drain would have formed the southern limit of the once extant mound. As per information gathered at the site, the whole mound was the property of some Mathura Chaubey who sold plots way back in 1980s. A major part of the mound was destroyed using JCB machines in around 2005. Unless a decision to remove encroachments is taken, the site does not seem fit for a centrally protected site's tag. Accordingly, a decision about the applicability of provisions of AMASR Act should also be taken.



Figure 31: General view of Chamunda Tila, Mathura

**Ancient Site 1 mile west of Mora village and 6 miles west of Mathura:** This is one of the most significant sites of India (Figure 32) as far as archaeology of early Hinduism is concerned. The site was excavated by Rai Bahadur Pt. Radha Krishna in 1911-12 (ASI-AR 1915: 127-128). The site yielded remains of a Vrishni temple and few important sculptures and early brick inscriptions. The importance of the sculptural findings of this site can be understood from a published article on Vrishnis (Gupta 2019: 69-90). After excavations, the site was perhaps again filled with soil and later on the British Indian government declared it a centrally protected site. The site lied amidst agricultural fields but in recent years some small village hamlet has developed near the site and a temple has been constructed on the periphery of the archaeological site. Whether the whole archaeological site is with ASI or not, can only be ascertained after excavations. The site must be excavated to expose the important temple ruins and after exposition, the site should be developed as a major centre of heritage attraction. The protected area of the site was not demarcated and fenced till 2020. In case the exposed structures at this site turn out to be significant, then only some restriction up to a radius of 100 meters should be applied at this site, otherwise the status quo of land use within 100 meters can be maintained.

**An extensive site containing a high mound about 100' square, apparently a fort with ramparts and corner turrets, Shahpur Ghosna, Mathura:** This site (Figure 33) situated about 6 km to the east of the Mathura on the Aligarh/Hathras road has suffered a lot of destruction due to coming up of Yamuna expressway in vicinity. The British Indian government was good enough to declare this ancient mound as a protected site, may be due to the fact that two-three Buddhist sculptures were found from this site. Anyways, based on the results of my explorations in the entire Braj region, I can easily say that this is one of the most promising archaeological sites in the entire region. The archaeological site was very extensive and a small part of it was destroyed due to the construction of Mathura-Kasganj railway track and also for the widening of the Mathura-Bareilly highway. At present, the site seems limited to the south of this highway. A huge part of the site was destroyed in 2009 for obtaining soil for the construction of Yamuna expressway and that destruction lasted for at least a month with the help of JCB machines working day and night. Somehow, the destruction could be stopped due to interference from top. An old ASI marker pillar was found lying on the periphery of the destroyed mound as can be seen in a previously published work (Gupta 2014). Sometime in the decade of 1990s, the ASI demarcated the mound and watching the boundary wall, one can easily say that it cannot mark the boundaries of the ancient mound. What were the exact reasons for that seems difficult to ascertain at present. The plantation of deep-rooted trees poses a huge challenge for future excavations. On one side of the mound, there was only a small mata shrine earlier but the pujari has encroached a big chunk by constructing new structures. As far as applicability of the present provisions of AMASR Act at this site is concerned, I don't think that there is any such requirement. Of course, the government should try to take into its possession the maximum portions of the site which may contain archaeological remains. Horizontal excavations should be undertaken at this site by the ASI.





Figure 32: General view of ancient site, Mora



Figure 33: General view of Shahpur-Ghosna mound



Figure 34: General view of Sonoth mound





Figure 35: General view of Aring mound including the questionable restored structure

**Mound at mauza Sonauth Janubi near Nagla Jhinga on the Muttra-Bharatpur road, Mathura:** This is a good archaeological mound (Figure 34) situated outside the village Sonoth in the back side of Nagla Jhinga's Mansa Mata temple, from where an inscribed Yakshi image under worship belonging to the Mauryan period was acquired by the Government Museum, Mathura. During the time of notification by the British Indian government, this mound was situated amidst agricultural fields quite distant from the village habitation. During the past decades, the farmers have cut away sizeable portions of the mound from all sides and some constructions have also come up near the site. The ASI has provided a stone boundary wall at the site in recent years. At this site, instead of applying existing provision of the AMASR Act, status quo may be maintained for a distance of 100 meters on all sides outside the protected limits of the site.

**Ancient mound, Adinga, Mathura:** This site (Figure 35) is one of the exceptional additions to the centrally protected sites list under the AMASR Act, 1958 by the Indian government. The mound was quite extensive and is located on one side of Mathura-Govardhan road near Govardhan. Since the site was situated in the densely inhabited town, encroachments on the mound were obvious. Many houses would have existed on the mound prior to its notification and many were constructed afterwards. This mound was also made a small fortified settlement by the Jats in the late medieval period, so the site is disturbed in its deposit. Some structure of late nineteenth century exists atop the mound which was in much dilapidated condition. Since the mound was protected, the ASI took up conservation work of this structure without considering the fact that the importance of the mound was related to the finding of some early pottery (Ochre Coloured Pottery along with PGW, BSW, BRW) from the site by Shri L.M. Wahal of the ASI in 1982-83 (1985: 99) and that structure was not that much important,

at least as per the notification. In fact this structure would be problematic if excavations are to be carried out at the site in future. Anyways, when I was doing explorations at the site in 2014, I realised a huge part of the mound was destroyed with the help of modern machines in the back side of the huge retaining wall constructed during the late medieval and early British period. That was the part of mound where early pottery would have been witnessed by the ASI official. The nature of mound is such that it is not possible to excavate it from everywhere. The lower layers have been destroyed in the back side and the other side has the village population residing there. Some other parts are also occupied by the village people. Since it is a significant archaeological site, all the houses should be removed from the site and the whole mound should be protected to carry out excavations in future. The government may provide alternative space to live to those affected who have legal documents of ownership. Except for the mound, there should not be any need to apply the existing provisions of the AMASR Act at the site. Of late, the ASI has provided some stone walled fencing at this site which may not go along with the actual archaeological deposit of the site but this may be due to ownership issues of land as per revenue records.

**Ancient mound near Kishori Raman College, Keshopur Manoharpur, Mathura:** This ancient mound is locally known as Hathi Tila (Figure 36) and is one of only two additions in the centrally protected sites list in Mathura district post-independence under the AMASR Act 1958. Only preliminary notification of the site is available which must have come on the recommendation of the archaeological team which made a small excavation at this site during Mathura excavations 1973-77 and found Mauryan pottery in the lowest deposits (Joshi 1989: *op. cit.*). The mound is part of much larger Keshopur Mahoharpur site. Much of the site has been destroyed by the locals who have made a burial ground across the road and also have cut the mound along the road. Even many burials have been dug out on top of the mound by them to claim ownership. Due to some mischievous populace, the mound could not be fenced. Thick *babool* vegetation has grown up on the mound which requires clearing. The whole mound needs to be better protected, fenced and excavated. The existing provisions of AMASR Act should not be applied in case of archaeological sites like this.

**Queen Victoria Memorial with all its walls and gateways, Mathura:** This monument was declared protected by the British Indian government but the concerned department could never trace it and even its name was removed from the list of protected monuments of the Agra Circle of ASI. On inquiry, it turned out that the road named Basantar Marg in the Mathura Cantonment area was earlier known as Queen Victoria road. This road passes via the British cemetery situated in front of the Kendriya Vidyalay No. 1 of Mathura. Majority of the British cemeteries in the western Uttar Pradesh were declared protected by the British government. So, in all probability this old British cemetery (Figure 37) adjacent to a church in the Mathura cantonment area is the protected monument which was some time named after Queen Victoria in her honour but this name for the cemetery was possibly not changed in the land records. Only the name of the road in the honour of Queen Victoria was inscribed in



the government records. This British period cemetery has a number of early cenotaphs which must be preserved. Moreover, the cemetery has a well-defined boundary wall which can be continued as it is after repairs. Growse (1882) in his map of Mathura has indicated this site as R.C. Chapel and Church. This identification of the cemetery as the declared monument is further supported by the name of British cemetery in Bulandshahr which is also named as Victoria Memorial Cemetery and is centrally protected. The ASI should write to the Defence Ministry to take over the cemetery site under its protection, though, the ownership of the land may rest with any of the government departments. Outside the boundary wall, there should be no need to apply the provisions of the AMASR Act.



Figure 36: General view of Hathi Tila, Mathura

**Monument near Killah Railway Station, Hathras:** This is the grave of some British official (Figure 38), in all probability, but of whom, it is not known. Even Blunt (1911) has not mentioned this grave, in spite of the fact that his is the most authentic work on the Christian tombs of the British period in India. Anyways, probably to honour some deceased officer, the British Indian government declared it a protected monument in 1920. This monument has nothing significant but an upright red sandstone slab is placed over the grave. The Hathras Qila Railway Station situated about 30 meters distant already existed when this monument was erected. The monument falls inside the premises of a British period veterinary dispensary. Some years back, ASI erected iron fencing surrounding this monument which does not cover more than 3 m by 3 m area.





Figure 37: General view of British Cemetery (Queen Victoria Memorial), Mathura Cantt

Now, this monument is important to understand the fallout of the wrong provisions of the AMASR Act. Firstly, the dispensary building itself in which this burial stone was located has become dilapidated and could not be repaired and reconstructed as such permission is not possible up to 100 meters distance all around. The main dispensary, a



State government institution, had to be shifted somewhere else and only one or two employees approaching their retirement were still attending their duties in this dilapidated building. The protected monument is encroached upon from all sides as dense population resides there. Even, if the Indian railways decide to upgrade the railway station, permission would not be granted due to the useless provision of AMASR Act prohibiting construction within 100 meters. When there is nothing to be encroached upon further, what is the utility of issuing notices to people residing as far as 300 meters in all directions from this monument. I really don't understand how come such a grave be considered monument of national importance and why my countrymen should suffer for the existence of the grave of some unknown British official. I do believe that the burial of each and every one should be respected in spite of the fact that it of our British adversary. Only that much area should be protected for that purpose where the burial lies and the monument is not harmed. No other prohibitions should be imposed upon the Indian citizens.



Figure 38: Monument near Qila Railway Station, Hathras





Figure 39: General view of mound of Dayaram's Fort, Hathras

**Remains of an old Hindu temple inside the remains of Dayaram's fort, Hathras:** This site is the most significant archaeological and historical landmark (Figure 39) in Hathras district. The remains of the Dayaram's fort constitute an extensive archaeological site with the earliest deposit datable to the Painted Grey Ware culture period. When I was exploring this site two decades back, I was sure that it was an ASI protected site. Anyways, my belief was shattered sometime back when I came to know that the ASI considers the approximately 150 years old living temple of Dauji Maharaj (Figure 40) as its notified monument and not the whole mound. In the decade of 2000, I had observed the destruction of a huge portion of the ancient mound possibly for building some stadium. A significant part of ancient mound is occupied by the district court and associated structures for decades. The mound is so extensive and lofty that even after so much destruction and encroachments, still it is a major site and comparably larger than most of the archaeological sites situated in Mathura district. During earlier explorations, it was observed that on either side of the ancient mound there were temples of goddess Pathwari mata (Gupta 2010: 75-82) and Hathrasi mata which had a significant number of ancient sculptures collected from various parts of the ancient mound. It was also told by the locals that maximum numbers of good sculptural pieces were stolen from both the temples many decades ago by the smugglers.





Figure 40: Dauji Temple, Dayaram's Fort, Hathras

As far as the language of notification by the British Indian government is concerned, it seems that it would have been better to call it either as ancient mound or Dayaram's fort, Hathras, rather they used a bit confusing usage of words, probably giving importance to various remains of ancient Hindu icons and architectural fragments which would have been available across the mound in those decades. But, subsequently, most of these icons were lost and shifted from the mound. The most popular temple of Dauji maharaj (Balarama) already existed at the time of notification and was some 50 years old structure then. There cannot be any chance of declaring a recent and living Hindu structure as a centrally protected monument by the British Indian government. Moreover, the notification mentions the remains of an old Hindu temple and the Dauji Maharaj temple had no remains, it was a completely newly built temple by the local raja of Hathras. This important mound as a whole must have been

brought under the protection of the ASI and if there was some issue, the concerned state authorities should have been approached as the ownership of the whole land of the old fort rests with the State government.

As far as the applicability of the provisions of the AMASR Act is concerned, obviously one can understand its futility as the site which needs protection is not being considered protected and what is being considered as protected, does not actually require central government's protection. Even when the whole mound is protected, there should not be any prohibitions on construction except for the protected limits of the ancient site. All the structures situated atop the mound except the Dauji Temple must be removed and shifted to some other area in Hathras.

**A circular mound 100' x 80', Lakhnu, Hathras:** Lakhnu is a well-known archaeological site due to finding of some Buddha sculptures of the Kushan period presently housed at the Government Museum, Mathura and museums abroad. Again, we have to thank the British Indian government to have declared the site as protected. The village Lakhnu is situated about 10 km distant from Hathras near the road to Jalesar and this site must have been an isolated small mound related to some Buddhist monastery or an art workshop. The site was destroyed many decades back as I could not locate this site way back in 2006. Here I would like to add that Vinay had reported Lakhnu as an early settlement dating back to the Painted Grey Ware culture period (Gupta 2013: 94) since early potteries are available on a lofty mound (Figure 41) erected for a late medieval fortification or haveli like the site of Mendhu located nearby, Shahpur Ghosna located in Mathura district and described above along with many other such sites in Braj region. The mound was in all probability destroyed by the smuggler gangs to loot the important sculptures. When the important site is already non-existent, there cannot be a question of applicability of the provisions of AMASR Act.

**A Mound about ½ of a mile to the south west from town, Lakhnu, Hathras:** This mound must have existed somewhere in the agricultural fields outside the village Lakhnu. The spot can be identified near the cremation ground but the mound is completely destroyed and the site non-existent. Here again, the provisions of AMASR Act should not be applicable.

**Monument of Major Robert Nairn, Pipalgaon, Hathras:** This is a grave of a British army official (Figure 42) situated amidst agricultural fields near National Highway linking Sikandararao with Etah. Firstly, the grave should not be a monument of national importance for India and secondly, this dilapidated small structure should not put restrictions on constructions in the surrounding area under the provisions of the AMASR Act.

**Monument sacred to the memory of Samuel Anderson Nichterlein, Sasni, Hathras:** This monument is again a grave of a British official (Figure 43) near Police Station, Sasni. The spot of grave is still identified but there is no monument there. This monument should be removed from the list of centrally protected monuments and the



unnecessary notices which are issued under the provisions of AMASR Act should stop in case these are issued.



Figure 41: Lofty mound (though not protected), Lakhnu, Hathras



Figure 42: Monument of Major Robert Nairn, Pipalgaon, Hathras



Figure 43: Monument sacred to the memory of Samuel Anderson Nichterlein, Sasni, Hathras



Figure 44: General view of Gohana Khera, Sasni, Hathras



**A large and conspicuous mound called Gohana Khera an old Buddhist establishment, a short distance to the east of the town, Sasni, Hathras:** This is an extensive mound (Figure 44) under protection of the ASI courtesy the British Indian government. The site is a usual archaeological mound marking an abandoned ancient city but the British Indian government in all probability declared it protected for the finding of some Buddhist remains. Till two decades back, the site was situated quite far from the town with negligible encroachments. But with increasing urbanisation, the site has suffered in the form of encroachments. The ASI has provided a stone boundary wall at the site. This is one of the best available archaeological sites in the entire region for large scale excavations. The site would definitely add to our existing knowledge of pre-Kushan and Kushan history as it was earlier suggested by Vinay (Gupta 2013: 92) that the town of Sasni derives its name from the word Sassanian (or Sasani).

## Conclusions

Overall review of the status and present conditions of the centrally protected monuments and sites in Mathura and Hathras districts presents a sorry picture and clearly indicates that certain organisations have not been able to fulfil their responsibilities to a larger extent, particularly post-independence till about 1995. It is almost unbelievable that the British Indian government which was largely tyrannical and anti-Indian declared about 50 monuments and archaeological sites as centrally protected in these two districts, to which the successive governments could only add two more sites. Even these two additions in Mathura district were not well planned. More importantly, but unfortunately, many of the sites which were declared protected by the British Indian government are either lost forever or are in a very bad state of existence. One must have to delve into the reasons for such a sorry state of affairs. The one and foremost is the fact that the British Indian government brought out notifications without properly defining the protected areas and in most cases without transferring the land ownership in the name of the ASI. The protection of most of such sites has been problematic and most of those sites which were not in State ownership have been lost. The British Indian government was autocratic, tyrannical and undemocratic because of which most of the protected monuments and sites could not be encroached upon. Actually, the encroachers had a fear in breaking the law but in the independent India, the democratic and political set up could not create any such fear in the heart of encroachers. Another fact has been the very wide extent of the erstwhile Northern Circle, Agra and the shortage of staff. Due to the fact that the Agra Circle was looking after the whole of Uttar Pradesh (including the today's Uttarakhand) and some other areas with limited staff strength, it would have been difficult to look after the remote sites and also because of the fact that the Agra Circle had the responsibility of maintaining the most important monuments in Agra namely the Taj Mahal, Agra Fort, Fatehpur Sikri, Itimad-ud-Daulah's Tomb, Akbar's Tomb, Sikandra and many others. Until the decade of 1970, people had a sense of belonging towards the ancient sites and heritage, because of which the sites whether protected or unprotected had survived without much care but with the increasing urbanisation and activeness of the



smuggling gangs, sites started to vanish. The Ancient Monuments, Archaeological Sites and Remains Act 1958 did not impart any executive powers to the ASI officials except for issuing notices to the defaulters and writing to the local administration. The local administration did not take any initiatives to remove the encroachments for reasons better known to them. The powerful mafia destroyed the Ganeshra mound sometime around 1995 but the local administration could not do anything against the culprits and the site was lost forever. The role of local ASI staff might also not be considered satisfactory. The problem is that the destruction of most of the sites is so old a happening that it is almost impossible to fix the responsibility now. Sometimes sites are protected on papers whereas on ground many of these do not exist. Another fault which may lie with the local administration and ASI is the lackadaisical attitude in getting all the protected sites surveyed and demarcated for many decades post-independence. Though with the initiatives of present government most of the monuments and sites have been demarcated, there still may be few centrally protected sites which are yet not demarcated. The attitude of local administration is also not supportive to demarcate ASI sites because it affects many residents living there, who are voters too. To improve things, the technical cadre of the ASI needs to be given more opportunities in the functioning of Circles, particularly in the running of sub-circle offices. The most detrimental thing that happened in the Mathura region was the participation of a particular peon of Northern Circle, Agra in the early archaeological excavations. He got to know the basics of archaeology and how valuable are the stone sculptures and other artefacts in the international market. That fellow is said to have left his job in ASI and then onwards, he took up illegal diggings as his business at many of the archaeological sites in Mathura and nearby districts to loot the ancient sculptures and then smuggle them out. These sites would have been government protected as well as unprotected. This fellow later on became the kingpin of antique smuggling racket of India and ran his business from south Delhi. Many of his misdeeds are exposed by Peter Watson (1998). This fellow might be held responsible for the maximum damage that has been caused to the archaeological sites of Mathura and Hathras districts between the years 1960 and 1990.

Another important aspect which comes to fore with this study is the spoliation of archaeological sites and monuments by plantation of deep-rooted trees. In fact, no gardening is required at the archaeological mounds (sites). At the most, only small grasses and shrubs can be grown to avoid soil erosion. Planting of trees at the sites is actually a crime from the perspective of sites. Even at the monuments, only those trees are to be planted which fit well with the ancient landscape of the monument. Proper archaeological or historical research is required to select certain trees or plants.

From the above study of protected archaeological sites in Mathura and Hathras districts, it is clear that the AMASR Act has not been much useful in the protection of the sites. In fact, as per the unconfirmed reports, the provisions of the AMASR Act are conducive for corrupt employees of various departments like the police, local administration etc. ASI staff is having a limited role in that, but the problem is that

nobody is willing to come forward to raise a complaint. It is ironical that due to the provisions of the Act no new government project like the metro or highways gets permission within the 100 meters of prohibited area but from the perusal of the notices or the demolition orders issued by the ASI, one can easily make out that the public is continuously making encroachments within the prohibited and regulated areas. Here I would also like to add that for the residents who are living near a monument or site for many generations, it is quite obvious that they would require to construct new toilets, repair the roofs, make provision for new windows etc., but all this becomes very difficult for the provisions of AMASR Act. Why a resident civilian should be forced to obtain a NOC or be served with demolition notice for such petty household issues. I would suggest that the provisions of prohibited and regulated area should only be applied for iconic monuments, and if necessary for iconic archaeological sites. The total number of iconic monuments and sites would not be more than 10% of total protected sites. In the Agra Circle, besides the three world heritage monuments, all other ticketed monuments along with the protected temples of Vrindavan may be considered iconic. As far as iconic archaeological site is concerned, I believe that it must have exposed excavated structures and at present none of the sites seem to qualify that criterion as none has exposed structures. Only sites like Dholavira, Lothal, Kalibangan, Rakhigarhi should have specific regulations outside the protected area. May be if in future the Mant and Mora sites are exposed, these could be considered iconic sites. Even if the National Monuments Authority categorises monuments and sites, maximum number of lowest grade sites which should include monuments like kos minars should not have prohibited area outside 10 meters radius or as per the situation on ground. The Central Government should reconsider the provisions of AMASR Act and make it more people friendly by involving them in the preservation of heritage. For the iconic monuments and sites, it should have stricter provisions where at most of the sites, shifting of locals and demolition of recent buildings is necessary to maintain the iconic status of the monuments and sites. Another important aspect related to ASI protected monuments in Mathura and Hathras districts is the restriction on establishment of brick kilns in a radius of 20 km from certain monuments coming under the limits of Taj Trapezium Zone (TTZ). The decision has been approved by the Hon'ble Supreme Court. Here it seems difficult to convince on how a kos minar which is already battling for its existence due to encroachments or poor structural condition would get adversely affected by a brick kiln situated at far distance up to 20 km. The restrictions on brick kilns or other similar activities within TTZ are reasonable but for restrictions within 20 km radius of lesser important monuments which are situated almost on the periphery of TTZ, the government may have a relook and approach the Hon'ble Supreme Court with logical reasons, if needed. The brick kilns in certain areas were important source of employment and revenue generation which have suffered. The inflation has also increased in this area due to increase in the cost of bricks.

Another important task which the government should carry out is to declare as many archaeological sites as protected as possible. For it, those sites may be considered first which are owned by the government or public bodies. For such sites, there would not

be any expenditure on purchase of land. All such newly declared sites should be kept out of the provisions of AMASR Act which define regulated and prohibited areas. Local public will raise minimum objections in declaration of such sites as centrally protected as they will not be affected in any way. Most of the mounds in Braj region have population residing over them. Only the areas which are free of habitation may be brought under protection instead of the entire mounds. Otherwise it will not be possible to take up newer sites for protection due to the stricter provisions of the existing AMASR Act. Other important sites which are not situated in a public land should also be considered even if fresh land acquisition by purchase is required. The archaeological surveys conducted by the ASI and other research scholars should be taken into account for identifying new sites for central protection. It is a fact that majority of archaeological mounds and monuments are situated in the land owned by gram panchayats or other public institutions.

## Disclaimer

The views expressed in this write-up are purely the personal thoughts of the author based on her knowledge of the region, her explorations in the region and her passion for the history and heritage. The article is being published posthumously. The views expressed have nothing to do with the policies and principles of the institutions with which she or her relatives might have some association with.

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