



2nd Suryya Kumar Bhuyan Memorial Lecture

THE IDEA OF ANCIENT INDIA

by

Prof. Upinder Singh,
University of Delhi

Time: 5 pm

Date: April 22, 2016

Venue: Conference Center, Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Guwahati

Abstract

How ancient is ancient India? What are some of the recent discoveries and approaches in the field of ancient Indian history? How do popular ideas of ancient India differ from the historian's perspective? This lecture will address such questions by focusing on a few specific themes. These include the contribution of archaeology and science towards identifying the earliest humans in the subcontinent, the continuing mysteries presented by the enigmatic Indus civilization, and the recent evidence of early writing from South India. Specific questions that will be answered include: Are the epics myth or history? Why is asking about 'the position of women' in ancient India a badly-framed question? Were our ancestors peace-loving folk who lived in a nonviolent world? Did they exist in an idyll of perfect religious harmony? The lecture will argue that it is necessary to have an analytical approach towards such issues. It will also argue that in order to understand ancient India it is necessary to move beyond India in order to discover the connected histories that bind the subcontinent with the wider world.

Biographical Note

Upinder Singh is currently Professor and Head of the Department of History, University of Delhi. After studying in St. Stephen's College and the University of Delhi, she obtained her PhD from McGill University, Montreal. She taught in S. Stephen's College from 1981 to 2004. In 2009, she was awarded the Infosys Prize in Social Sciences – History by the Infosys Science Foundation. Her authored works include *The Discovery of Ancient India: Early Archaeologists and the Beginnings of Archaeology* (2004); and *A History of Ancient and Early Medieval India: From the Stone Age to the Twelfth Century* (2008). She has edited *Delhi: Ancient History* (2006); *Ancient India: New Research* (co-edited with Nayanjot Lahiri, 2009); *Rethinking Early Medieval India* (2011). She has also written a book for children, *Mysteries of the Past: Archaeological Sites in India* (2002). Her most recent book is *The Idea of Ancient India: Essays on Religion, Politics and Archaeology* (New Delhi, Sage, 2016).