

Felicitating & Legendary Archeologist

Prof. B.B. Lal



Editors

B.R. Mani
Rajesh Lal
Neera Mishra
Vinay Kumar

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PREFACE

Rajesh Lal

It is with immense pride that I, as the eldest son of Professor Braj Basi Lal, write this Preface.

I acknowledge at the outset that the credit for this Felicitation Volume goes to the well-known publisher, Shri Praveen Mittal. He was keen on it, and guess what! He found an exceptionally great companion to put his idea into action when he found in Ms. Neera Misra, a person who is result-oriented and so pushy that she can move a bulldozer with her thoughts! So, full credit to both of them.

It will be well to recall that the first Felicitation Volume to honour Prof Lal was titled 'Facets of Indian Civilisation: Recent Perspectives', edited by the Late Mr. Jagatpati Joshi, *et.al.* and it was published in 1997. Since then, Prof Lal has published 14 books. At present, he is writing on the 'Evolution of Civilisation in the Ganga Valley', which he hopes to finish by 2019. It is, therefore, necessary to cover this twenty-year period with another Felicitation Volume. Notwithstanding the books written, I really couldn't think of anyone who has spent seventy years without a break, either excavating, researching, writing and last but not in the least, *dreaming about archaeology*, age 96 years being a matter of body, not that of mind!

His writings in the last two decades have covered a vast array of topics. Let me try and list out their major themes.

His book, "*The R̥gvedic People: Invaders? Immigrants? or Indigenous?*", is an **all-encompassing volume** that takes one through the evolution of civilisation in the Sarasvati valley where the majority of sites of Harappan civilisation lie. The journey starts from Bhirrana in the fifth millennium BCE and covers the evolutionary aspects till the decay of the civilisation at the beginning of the second millennium BCE. It establishes that the *R̥gveda* could not have been written in 1200 BCE but has to be of a time when the river Sarasvati was a 'mighty flowing river'. Writing of the *R̥gveda* is now taken to be at the beginning of the third millennium BCE with some *mandals* having

been written even earlier. Also see his, “*How Deep are the Roots of Indian Civilisation: Archaeology Answers*”.

These books tell us, logically and dispassionately, that the R̥gvedic people were the authors of the Harappan Civilisation. The ‘googly’ of the ‘Aryans’ entering India from an area of ‘cold climate’, which had trees like birch, Scotch pine, oak, etc., was torpedoed by Prof Lal when he wrote in his book, ‘*The Homeland of Aryans*’, that none of these trees were mentioned in the *R̥gveda*.

Needless to say that the issue of the Aryans ‘if not invaders then must be immigrants’ and that too ‘pastoral cattle breeders’ is dismissed.

The historicity of the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata* are discussed over a book each.

A book that brings to our knowledge that our culture is almost five thousand years old *and is still in continuity* is the book, ‘*The Sarasvati Flows On*’. It tells us of the prevalence of *yoga, sindūra, swāstika, namaste, etc.*, during the Harappan Civilisation, not forgetting some bed-time folk tales.

‘*Kauśāmbī Revisited*’ sets some records straight on the antiquity of the site and interpretation of some of its structures since the time it was excavated decades ago. ‘*Testing Ancient Indian Traditions against the Touchstone of Archaeology*’ (both books were published in 2017), narrates about ten examples of archaeological finds with respect to what has been written in the *Purāṇas*. Establishing this link between the ‘finds’ and the ‘scripture’ is non-negotiable insofar as Prof Lal is concerned.

The Felicitation Volume has been planned in three volumes. Volume 1 comprises listing of Prof Lal’s writings that include titles of seminal papers written and books that he has written with a brief note on each book. Another section consists of review by well-known archaeologists worldwide of his articles and books. Then there is a section that introduces the reader to leading events in his life, these are mostly excerpts from his book about himself, “*Piecing Together: Memoirs of an Archaeologist*”. The volume also contains a section called ‘Reminiscences’, which, of course, is a collection of personal interactions of others with Prof Lal and yet another section consisting of photographs.

Volumes 2 and 3 are papers from thirty-eight scholars who have contributed towards the Felicitation Volume. I want to make a point at this juncture. I recall Prof Lal mentioning more than a couple of years ago at a seminar that our young and upcoming archaeologists at assistant professor level or those who are doing their doctorate, notwithstanding their respective thesis, must learn to continue to research further and get into the habit of writing. I am glad to say that we have such contributors in the two volumes, 2 and 3.

My own feeling, as a son of Prof Lal combined with being an editor of his Felicitation Volume, is that of immense happiness and total satisfaction, and the reason, of course, is that we have been able to update his work and given the recognition that he so richly deserves.

I do hope that the readers will benefit from the papers presented and continue to debate the debatable issues.

INTRODUCTION

Neera Misra

Though this is the second, but it is a much deserved and needed Felicitation Volume Set in honor of Shri Braj Basi Lal. Popularly known as Professor B.B. Lal, he is one of the most accomplished archaeologists of post-Independence India. I was questioned by the great archaeologist himself that when in 1997, a Felicitation Volume set was already published, edited by the well-known Shri J.P. Joshi, why another volume? His humility about his own deep and varied contribution to the study and propagation of ancient Indian History and Civilization was evident in his question.

I think the answer lies less in what I may say but more in the remarkable work done by Prof B.B. Lal post-1997. The passionate field archaeologist in him actually came into his own, and revealed his depth of knowledge, his insight, analytical skills and his great desire to create a wider interest in how archaeology is a good tool to know the past, provided it is intelligently blended with good grasp of Textual understanding of ancient India. Some of his most significant books were published post 1997, covering various topics of national identity, through archaeological interpretation of, in simple lucid language that is appealing to both the archaeologist and the general student of ancient Indian history and culture. A person who takes to learning the computer at age 85, and swims through his brain, extracting years of stored information of his vast explorations and excavations since 1946 onwards, a person who reads and keeps himself updated in the latest work happening in his field of work, and starts commanding the keys of his computer to print his understanding of ancient India, surely deserves to be felicitated again and again.

At an age when most persons are living retired lives merely reading, walking and playing with their grandchildren, he not only does research and writing, but adds much more value by devoting hours to typing the chapters of his own books. Personalities like Prof B.B. Lal are the *Rşis* of modern India, devoting their life for research that benefits society, and yet fulfilling their social and family obligations with equal finesse and pleasure. It is true that behind every successful man there is a woman, and his beloved wife 'Jiya' was the pillar of strength, partner in progress during his

painstaking journey of explorations of rich and glorious past and the centuries old cultural continuity of 'Āryāvarta' and 'Bhārata Varṣa'. I refer to this doyen of Indian Archaeology as 'Rṣi' because he has also imbibed the 'Vedic saṅskar' of Bhārata in his children, and we see this beautifully reflected in his family, the sons, daughters-in-laws and grandchildren. The role of Rṣis in ancient times was not just imparting knowledge but preparing the children for a meaningful life of bonding with one another, with family, humanity, nature and the superior spiritual forces. It is definitely Prof B.B. Lal's contribution to carry forward this tradition. These are the simple but in today's fractured society, very important, reasons that we feel we must felicitate the person that is Professor B.B. Lal.

The proposal for this Felicitation set came in 2015 from our young senior citizen publisher Shri Praveen Mittal while we were working on our book on *Indus-Sarasvatī Civilization vis-a-vis the Ṛgveda*. After initial discussions with Professor Lal, we sent out invitations for articles and reminiscences. We started receiving articles in 2015 itself but many being pre-occupied took their time and it took us almost two years of continuous work to put these three volumes together in this final form. Much of the credit goes to Air Vice Marshal Rajesh Lal (Retd.), the eldest son of Professor B.B. Lal, whose labor of love we see in the compilation of the journey of an archaeologist, his articles and books, all so well put together. The colleagues and friends in journey have so lovingly contributed with their wonderful articles. We are indeed honored to have such a wide variety of articles coming from persons from two generations of old and new upcoming scholars. All this makes this Felicitation volume a rich 'samhita' of archaeology, art and culture of Bhārata. It is a delight to learn about so many aspects covered in these pages of tribute to one who himself devoted his life to solve many riddles of our past history.

We sincerely hope these articles will be of great value and benefit to all Indians and even to the international community that craves for knowledge about our nation. We are happy that our humble efforts to honor Professor Lal through this volume, which is full of life of past and present, will provide a great learning experience to all.

EDITORIAL

BR Mani

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1. Gurudeva, Professor R.D. Ranade
2. Professor Lal's parents, the late Shri Ramcharan Lal and Shrimati Saryu Devi.
3. 1961. On the occasion of 1961 International Conference on Asian Archaeology, on a visit to Surajkund. Front row (L to R): HD Sankalia, Jean Marie Casal, BB Lal, KN Puri, Hanna Rydh.
Middle row (L to R): BK Thapar, MN Deshpande, VD Krishnaswamy, SP Gupta.
Back row (L to R): VK Mishra, SR Rao, Bannerji, Debala Mitra, Ballabh Saran.
4. 1961. On the occasion of 1961 International Conference on Asian Archaeology. From left to right: BB Lal, FR Allchin, FE Zeuner, VD Krishnaswamy, HD Sankalia and?
5. London, 1973. Participants in an International Symposium on Undeciphered Languages. Sir Mortimer Wheeler (middle row, extreme left), Prof. B.B. Lal (on left of Sir Mortimer), Sir Max Mallowan (middle row, center), Sir Harold Bailey (Chairman, front row, middle).
6. The taught and the teacher: Professor B.B. Lal and Sir Mortimer Wheeler, on the occasion of the latter's visit to the excavations at Purana Qila, New Delhi.
7. A Ghosh, Von Lohausan, BB Lal
8. Prof. Lal leading the India archaeological team to Nubia, Egypt in response to a call from UNESCO. Above is the boat where the Indian team stayed. Below, Prof. Lal and Mrs. Lal host the Indian ambassador to Egypt and his wife on board.
9. Prof Lal, when he was Director, School of Archaeology
10. Prof Lal and Mrs. Lal in early 1960's. Mr. MN Deshpande, who was to later become his 'समधी', is on the left.
11. At the Taj, when he was the Superintendent, Agra Circle, 1956

12. Prof. Lal with Mrs. Indira Gandhi, when the latter visited Śṛīṅgaverapura excavations, a part of Ramayana Sites project, 1977-86.
13. At Śṛīṅgaverapura, taking notes on Śṛīṅgaverapura tank.
14. Prof Lal showing the excavations carried out at Śṛīṅgaverapura to the then Prime Minister of India, Mrs. Indira Gandhi.
15. Mrs. Gandhi releasing the book, *Frontiers of Indus Civilisation*, edited by Professor Lal and others.
16. In 1997, the then Vice-President of India, Shri Krishna Kant felicitating Professor B.B. Lal and releasing a book, '*Facets of Indian Civilisation: Essays in Honour of Professor B.B. Lal*'.
17. In the year 2000, Professor Lal receives the award of *Padma Bhushan* from the then President of India, Dr. K.R. Narayanan.
18. Year 2011, the then Prime Minister of India honours Professor Lal on the occasion of 150 years of Indian Archaeology.
19. Gurudeva Sri Sri Ravi Shankar releasing Professor Lal's book, '*The Historicity of Mahabharata*'.
20. Award of D. Litt. to Prof Lal by the Deccan College, a Deemed University, in 2014. On the left is the Chancellor and in the center is Mr. Vasant Shinde, the Vice Chancellor.
21. Dr. Wakankar Award to Prof. Lal by the Govt. of Madhya Pradesh, 2013.
22. Fan following at Varanasi.
23. Fan following at IIC, Delhi.
24. 2014: At *Gyan Pravah*, Varanasi.
25. A function was held at residence to commemorate 50 years of the Institute of Archaeology, of which Professor Lal was the first Director.
26. Professor Lal inaugurating an exhibition on 'Archaeological Treasures of Cyprus Museum' at the National Museum at the invitation of the Republic of Cyprus: 2016.
27. Nov 2016: Professor Lal is felicitated by Gurudeva Sri Sri Ravishankar at the inaugural of seminar on 'Indraprastha Revisited'.
28. Nov 2016: At Purana Qila, the venue of exhibition on 'Indraprastha Festival', Professor Lal explains the conduct and findings of excavations that he carried out at Purana Qila in 1954-55.
29. During a Q & A session.
30. At Los Angeles

31. 2011. Visiting his ancestral house in Baidora, Jhansi, which he left in 1931, 80 years prior to this visit.
32. In 2011, Professor Lal and Mrs. Lal decided to ‘improve on their quality of life’, and decided to get both knee replacements, he at the age of 90 and she at 80! Surgeries of both were carried out in a space of five hours, one after the other.
33. Sharing a mocktail in Hawaii, 2009.
34. Family photo at Hawaii, 2009.
35. 2009: Snapshot prior to a cruise.
36. A relaxed ‘after breakfast’ sit out at Rae Bareilly. 2009.
37. Los Angeles, 2016, with daughters-in-law, Nishi (to his right), Bina (to his left), and Sushama (behind), and grandchildren Nikhil (extreme left), Anjali (second from right) and Nirupama (extreme right).
38. Los Angeles, 2016, with Professor Shiva Bajpai and his wife Cathy (between the two).
39. With daughters-in-law (L to R) Sushama, Bina and Nishi
40. With the youngest son, Rakesh
41. Family dinner on Professor Lal’s 95th birthday, at Vrajesh and Bina’s residence. Standing from L to R: Hemant, Sushama, Sheila, Nishi, Bina, Ritu, Nikhil, Rakesh, Vrajesh, Niraj, Stan, Anjali, Rajiv and Alice. Seated on top of the table: Prof Lal and on his right is Mark and then Rajesh in green pullover.
42. “But why aren’t there 95 candles?”

Vol. 2

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- 7.11. Menhirs, Village Sutiambe, Ranchi District.
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