

February 15, 2000

## ASI chief Ajay Shankar dead

*A Correspondent* in Pune



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Ajay Shankar, the director-general of the Archaeological Survey of India and senior IAS officer, died in a road accident last night while on his way to Shirdi in Maharashtra.

He is survived by his wife and two sons.

Ajay Shankar was an affable officer who dispelled many myths about the difficulties of a bureaucrat ruling a specialised establishment like the ASI. He converted the traditionally closed ASI into a friendly organisation, provided administrative support and guidance to several important excavations and took steps to improve the upkeep of Indian monuments.

Recently, he was very excited by the discovery of a massive 11th century Jain city under Fatehpur Sikri near Agra.

A member of the 1965 IAS batch belonging to the Madhya Pradesh cadre, Shankar had held several important assignments in both central and state government. He had completed about three years at the ASI, where he pushed through several reforms including steps to protect Taj Mahal.

His wife, Gita, is a teacher. His eldest son is a filmmaker, and the elder is an Indian Management Institute graduate.

He had gone to Pune and Nasik on an official trip along with a few senior ASI officials. After finishing their assignments, they set off for Shirdi.

At about 9 pm, the car he was travelling in collided with a tractor trolley near Nashik. Shankar was rushed to the Sai Baba Mandir sanatorium in Shirdi where he was declared dead on arrival. All the other passengers survived the crash.

Shankar's body is being taken to New Delhi and the cremation will take place at the electric crematorium at 12 pm tomorrow. Shankar, who was responsible for setting up several museums in the country and the Dilli Haat, now a major landmark in the capital, belonged to the 1966 batch of the Madhya Pradesh IAS cadre.

He had several publications to his credit -- on theatre, ancient history and museumology -- which were presented at major international conferences conducted by bodies like the United Nations Educational, Social and Cultural Organisation.

He was instrumental in setting up the National Conservation Laboratory for Cultural Property at Lucknow, the National Museum

of Man at Bhopal, the Museum of the Sahariya Tribe at Sheopur and art museums in Datia, Chanderi, Bhind, Morena and Sheopur.

At Gwalior he converted the historical ceremonial tank, Baija Tal, into a cultural complex with a floating stage which received national and international tourism attention.

As ASI director-general, he took up the work of conserving monuments and excavations, including Dholavira, on a large scale.

Shankar was a consultant with the United Nations Development Programme and Industrial Development Organization, and was former chairman of the Central Cottage Industries Corporation of India and the Council of Handicrafts Development Corporation.

With inputs from *UNI*

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