In this fictive account, Mulk Raj Ananda imagined a ‘Conversation’ between a Roman artist who traveled with his Ethiopian slave exploring the various ‘cities’ of the Deccan and the indigenous people against the setting of Nagarjunakonda. This place is characterized as a major urban settlement of the eastern coastal rim of the Deccan during the early centuries CE. Mulk Raj Ananda, a well-known modern Indian writer, has, however, built this account on considerable historical and archaeological research done on the spread of Buddhism and the rule of a dynasty called the Satavahanas over a major part of the Deccan that was concomitant with a period of active trade between its various ports and cities and the Mediterranean around the early centuries CE. There were some among these ‘cities’ ostensibly visited by the Romans and other foreigner traders that today remain “areas of silence” as there is hardly any literary source material for this region and the period under discussion for us to use and reflect upon. At a simple level we could draw on this quote to capture the social and religious milieu of early historic Deccan or perhaps, to highlight that many of the settlements located in the Deccan hinterland either have not been, or, have only recently been excavated and are therefore, in a sense, “areas of silence”.

1 Anand 1965 4–8.
It is legitimate, argues De Certeau,\textsuperscript{2} that since the “real” of the historical past is a consequence of representation, the “breadth of literary imagination” can best convincingly bring out the textures of history, its intricate patterns in symbols, actions, events and lived-in experiences of men and women in times gone by. In the present context, therefore, one is tempted to draw upon this fictive account to reconstruct the ‘reality’ of a city on the Deccan Plateau. But this would mean the replication of a nationalist constructed imagination of the mid-twentieth-century India when the above piece was written and when, flush with the newly achieved Indian Independence, archaeologists and historians were engaged in a ‘discovery’ or, one should say, a recovery of the classical monumentality of ancient Indian art and architecture. In the context of the Deccan, the monumentality of recovering Buddhist art galvanized the imagination of most government run departments of archaeology.\textsuperscript{3} Apart from describing a monument in all its architectural details, its location in a particular landscape, the archaeological artifact telling its own local story, the intangibles of how the Buddhist monks interacted and lived off the local inhabitants, the opening up of local spaces to traders of all hues and color, and the way local artists, craftsmen, technologists coped with all these changes, were hardly considered the themes that scientifically trained archaeologists were meant to focus on. In the present paper we broaden the discussion on defining a ‘city’ to these larger issues while simultaneously highlighting a difference in the fashioning of local built-in spaces. At the same time we address another issue, namely, the tension between objectified truth and reality. Inherent to an archaeologist’s task is to place in the present, through the most stringent scientific methods of exploration and excavation, what is true about the past and what is clearly tangible, visible and describable in the best objective way possible. Few archaeologists, however, address the question of whether this can lead to a comprehension of the reality of the past. This complicated relationship between what is visible and the contingent absences that arise out of the choices we make is critical to retrieving that reality.

The Deccan was and is a terrain difficult to travel across. Even today traveling across the Deccan Plateau one is confronted with a landscape that in parts is still marked with huge granite rock-formations of what is commonly called the Deccan Trap.\textsuperscript{4} These are considerably older than any human structural

\textsuperscript{2} De Certeau 1988 xv.
\textsuperscript{3} As for instance Sundara 1984 13, 18.
\textsuperscript{4} The Deccan Plateau’s famous granite formations of ‘molten magma’ were formed about 2500 million years ago. Society of Save Rocks, Hyderabad website http://www.saverocks.org/Geology.html (last accessed January 31, 2012).