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GRT

DEBALA MITRA : ONE OF THE EXCEPTIONAL VOICE IN SUBALTERN



Samima Nasrin

ABSTRACT

Subaltern studies deals with the inferior and subordinated classes. Women are also an important part of it. They have been somehow deprived of the rights in ruling in the half sky. They are debarred by many ways like superstition, gender-stereotyping etc. Debala Mitra step out to an inconvenience area in her career and performed successfully as well as made instances to the successors in breaking the social generalization in work place .

KEYWORDS :Subaltern, Archaeology, Third World, Colonial, Women.

INTRODUCTION:

Debala Mitra one of the most outstanding archaeologist in post-independent India , was born on 14th December , 1925 in a small village in the district of Khulna, presently Bangladesh. She came from a very humble background, a middle class kayastha family and was married to a young college teacher even before her matriculation examination was over. However she stood first in the Presidency division



of Bengal among the girls student and got star marks and five letters (History, Sanskrit, Geography, Mathematics and Hygene) in 1940. She again got first division in Intermediate of Arts and stood 19th in order of merit . She got general Scholarship , Ashutosh Mukherjee scholarship star marks and letters in Sanskrit , She Graduated from Ashutosh college in 1944. She completed her M.A in 1946 in Ancient India History and Culture from University of Calcutta and stood first class second in order of merit and got silver medal . She secured Rai Radhika Prasanna Mukherjee gold medal , Harasundari Silver Medal , English prize and Jyotsna Pathak memorial prize on the studies of different examinations She attended the French language course at Alliance Françoise and language school at Paris .She studied Art of

Combodia at l'cole du Louvre , Paris , 1962-1963. She was awarded Dr. B.C Law Gold Medal by the Asiatic Society for outstanding contribution in the field of Architecture , Art and Iconography . She won Griffith prize in 1963 . Much later in 1975 she was awarded Doctor of Philosophy from University of Calcutta for a thesis on Temples of Telkupi (Purulia District , W.B). She joined Archaeology Survey of India in December 1952 and served in different capacities in different parts of India as well as rose to become the first woman to be appointed as the Director General of A.S.I and retired on thirty first December 1983. She participated in archaeology excavation at Rupar (Punjab), Nohar and Sothi (Rajasthan), Maski (Karnataka) and TamluK (West Bengal) and conducted independent excavation at Jaugada, Udaygiry, Khandagiri , Ratnagiri all in Orissa;Tiloura-kota and Kodan in Nepal carried out exploration in parts of north-eastern part of India including Arunachal Pradesh . She was also trained in the field of conservation including preservation. She worked an temples of Konark and excavated remains and monuments of Ratnagiri, stone temple of Bhubaneswar, rock-cut caves at Udaygiri all in Orisa, mosque of Murshd Quli Khan at Murshidabad, mosque and tombs at Gaur and Pandua in W.B ; Temples at Bishnupur in Monipur ,temples at Udaipur in Tripura and temples & monuments at Sibsagar , Joyasagar , Gaurisagar and Garhagaon, all in Assam , damage by earthquakes, She acted as Chairman of National Committee for Lumbini Development Project and Chairman of National committee for ICOMOS and member of several committees. She was a member of Central Advisory Board of Archaeology Asiatic Society and National Council for Science Museums. Taking advantage of the French scholarship for the study of art of Cambodia , she visited monuments and museums at various parts of France. She also visited sites in Rome, Athens , Delphi, London , Amsterdam, Berlin & Cairo and important monuments in Burma, Bangladesh ,Indonesia, Srilanka and Nepal as well as attended various international meetings and symposia held in different countries like Bangladesh, Indonesia , Srilanka , Nepal , U.S.A as a representative of the government of India and acquired intimate knowledge of the restoration work at Borobudur .She acted as UNESCO consultant on cultural triangle in Srilanka .She also participated in the international symposium on the development and chronology of the Buddhist and Hindu sculptures in early medieval art held in Berlin may , 1986. Her specialized areas were Ancient Indian History, Archaeology, Buddhist art , Architecture and Iconography of India , south-east Asian art and architecture of eastern India , archaeology excavation of historical sites and conservation of sites and monument in brick, stone and other materials as well as management of cultural heritage 1

Though western scholars accused Indians that they have no sense of history, it is amazing of getting evidence of having two educational centres in Takshashila and Benares in Ancient India which were renowned for centres of education of hoary antiquities² . But the tradition of archaeological research in the third world controlled and popularized from above³ . It is true that a few indigenous as well as foreign curious individuals like Partha Mitra ,Diego De Cuto, Jean Thevernot, Anquetill etc initiated to read the past through remains. It resulted the foundation of Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1784 by Sir William Jones along with Henry Thomas Colebroke and Nathaniel Helhed. The colonial period witnessed some great orientalist like James Prinsep, Charles Mason, Robert Bruce Foote etc . The Government needed an administrative map. When Alexander Cunningham became the Director General of Archaeological Survey of India in 1871, the department was entered to survey over the whole country. During Lord Curzan, ancient monument preservation Act (1904) was enacted. This act ended the time when archaeological study was merely a part time activity and now it become a bureaucratic part. Lord Curzan centralized the department. The act deal with the care of heritage building, presented excavation by authorized, illegal trafficking of antiquities. Museums became the public display area of ancient remains. Sir John Marshal appointed as Director general of Archaeological

survey of India in 1904. His main work was understanding of organizational details relating to the various circles like Bombay, Kolkata, Madras and North western India. His main focus was not Buddhist archaeology. Accomplished by a dozen of well accomplished officers, he tried to understand the urbanization process in Taxila, Rajgir, Bhita etc. By 1930, archaeological work became disorderly in nature due to the second world war. Leonard Woolley evaluated the work of A.S.I. He was critical to the work previously done and proposed to emphasis on problem oriented excavation. Before independence, Mortimer Wheeler (1944-1948) was appointed as the director general of A.S.I. He started pottery technique to understand chronological development. He emphasized on the age old problem of the Aryan and the Indo-Roman question i.e., understanding, south Indian archaeology.

Those major findings especially the discovery of Indus civilization and second urbanization process astonished the colonial ruler as well as the ruled one. It is not so easy task to define relationship between archaeology and nationalism in India. Definitely it played an unconscious role in the nationalistic image of the 'glories of ancient India' supported from the excavation of ancient cities like Sravasti, Rajgriha, Taxila etc. Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore wrote evocative poems on Buddhist India. 4

There was a gender division in imaging the colonial India as the ruler class is hero or inherited masculinity and they ruled on women or a coward nation. 5 But gradually the image of power of maternity dominated in the nationalistic intellectual mind. In the year 1875 Bankim Chandra Chattyopadhyaya wrote the famous Vandematarm song. In his novel 'Anandamath' he portrayed three images of mother of his motherland : 'mother as it was', 'mother as it is' and 'mother as it will be'. That was enough for inheriting eternal comparison of mother with country to the nationalistic approach. 6

But funny matter is that, women were in measurable condition in the colonial period either at home or in the outside. Though Partha Chatterjee thought that there was no impression of colonial rule inside the home 7 and it was a sovereign place. But Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak refuted that image and told that colonial woman oppressed doubly as their masters were suppressed by the colonial ruler and for this, they were oppressed indirectly.

Education is a standard point of measuring the modernization, liberty etc. In the ancient India, We find evidences of participating woman in sacrifice which denotes clearly intellectual partner with vedic literature and rituals. 8 During the Upanishad and epic times, the house wife was expected to offer oblation. So they had to possessed a working knowledge of the daily Vedic and Smarta rituals and had right to utter the related mantras. 9 Harita Dharmasutra divided the girls into two classes - Brahmadvins and Sadyodvahas. 10 When Buddha permitted ladies to admit them in church, it occurred a tremendous spread of education and philosophy among the ladies of the aristocratic and commercial communities. Among the Upadhyaya and upadhyayani, Patanjali identified the former one as a female teacher. But later days, the authorities instructed that only the male members of a family like father, brother or the uncle could be entrusted with the teaching of girls student and the fact is that the male members had not so time to teach them. The education of woman confined to the cultured families. In the age of the Smrities and Puranas, Yajnavalkya smriti opposed to Manusmriti and imposed that only pre-upanayana sanskaras were to be performed in case of the girls. Manu was in favour of the upanayana of girls. But no vedic mantras were used in this occasion, Manu granted this contradiction as he regarded it physical rather than vedic culture. 11 But following Yajnavalkya Smriti, very soon brides were found who were unable to recite the few vedic mantras that they were expected to chant it the time of marriage and for that type of illiteracy, groom or the priest was allowed to do so on her behalf. 12

Although the exercise of intelligence was in continue among the cultured family. Hala's Gatha Saptasati mentioned seven poetesses like Reva, Roha etc. Devi was a famous poetess in Gujrat. In Berar, Vijayanka's fame was followed by Kalidasa. Rajashekhara's wife was a good literary critic and poet.

Some ladies were preferred to be gynecologist. A medical specialist named Rusa's work translated in Arabic in the 8th century A.D. Examining Vatsyana's work we find that, cultural ladies in towns and cities were expected to be well-known in vocal and instrumental music, dancing, painting, garland-making, decoration etc. We found evidence of women who were excellent in administrative work. Queen Nayanika of the Satavahana, Prabhavatigupta of the Vakataka dynasty, Sugandha and Didda in Kashmir were listed among them.

There prevailed some kinds of prejudice against female education both among the Mohammedan as well as Hindus in the medieval time. The muslim women of India like their co-religionists in medieval Damascus and Bagdad did not attain that type of the high education level. The Hindu society not completely against women education. In the Kavikankana Chandi we read the story of jealousy between the two co-wives of Dhanapati who was a rich merchant. Here we see that the elder wife wrote a forged letter which was easily detected by the younger wife which denotes that both were educated. Literacy was not totally absent among the lower class women as in the work of Kavikankana, Chandi, we find a follower's wife Phullara, while conversing with her husband Kalaketu, quoting profusely from the epic and puranas.¹³

Impressed with the work done by the missionaries and philanthropic British, several great Indians contributed in the opening of girl's school. Lord Dalhousie declared the important beneficial consequences in the introduction of education for the female girl children. This order later on confirmed by Wood in the Educational Dispatch of 1854. Most men disapproved of women education. Astonishingly the society was ready to ignore many failings in an educated woman but it was merciless to a single mistake to an educated woman.¹⁴ William Adam in his report on 'the state of Education in Bengal (1836)' mentioned a superstition that was cherished principally by the woman and not discouraged by the men that an educated woman became widow earlier.¹⁵ Saudamini Roy of Barisal shared her experience that being a quick learner she wrote something very advanced and did not please her teacher and he told her that education of women leads to destruction as pursuing education was a terrible sin and it would make her widow as well as warned her not to go to his pathshala again. Bal Gangadhar Tilak had also the similar thought. He told that a woman's intelligence does not rise higher than her foot, her rightful place was to serve her family. Tilak also wrote, "start with founding a high school for girls and it would soon lead to women running away from the home".¹⁶ Though the colonial period showed the sati prevention act (1829), widow re-marriage act (1853) but it never made happy to the conservative class. The age of consent Act (1891) hit the spot where masculinity solely exercised by the India. For later period, Gandhi advised to woman to deny to sell her birth right for a man of pottage.¹⁷ He started advertising Durga, Kali, Draupadi for woman power. The nationalism through self-reliant started during Bengal split. National Educational Committee founded. The nationalists were in search of glory in the past. When Ashutosh Mukherjee was vice-chancellor of University of Calcutta, he led the establishment of Ancient Indian History. Comparatively department of Anthropology started. Ashutosh museum of art established. Deccan college, Pune was established in 1937 and its father figure H.D Sankhalia was devoted in building regional histories.

Debala Mitra eventually chose A.I.H.C. But even a country like India where teachers appointed in the University in History department less than 20 percent are engaged in research related to the pre-nineteenth century.¹⁸ The problems are lack of historical as well as archaeological sources. The education during renaissance in Bengal mainly occupied by the Brahman, Vaidya and Kayastha families. Debala Mitra also belonged to that. She was trained initially in the dominant intellectual tradition of the Archaeological survey of India which was founded by Alexander Cunningham in the mid-nineteenth century by invoking the method of descriptive archaeology. This was redefined by Mortimer Wheeler

around the middle of the twentieth century when he introduced the idea of neatly worked out stratigraphic sequence in excavation. Debala Mitra inherited these intellectual legacies but her own training in the University of Calcutta and French institution in Paris helped her work. We observe a balanced blending of Cunningham's approach with Wheelerian method. It is astonishing that how a middle class woman of colonial period chose to be an archaeologist which is a male dominated profession still now. The woman of colonial period seldom expressed their interest, desire, dream. The term subaltern is used to the entire people that is subordinate and suppressed in terms of class, caste, age, gender in terms and office.¹⁹ At that case, Debala Mitra stood in her way as a star.

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Samima Nasrin

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