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Research Journal

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Research Journal*

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# Indian Streams Research Journal



## A CASE STUDY ON DEBALA MITRA WHO BROKE GENDER STEREOTYPING IN WORK PLACE.



Samima Nasrin

### ABSTRACT

There is a stereotyping in choosing one's profession by ones' biological body. For this, women prefer to be teacher, nurse or doctor rather than in joining defense. But there are always exceptional cases. Debala Mitra enlisted herself unconsciously among that group. Her passion in Ancient History, Culture and Archaeology led to be the first female Director General in Archaeological Survey of India. There is no such instance in any other country in the world where a lady ruled such a male dominated profession like archaeology.

**KEYWORDS** :stereotyping, archaeology, Director General, Archaeological Survey of India, male dominating, dilemma.

### INTRODUCTION

Women are for their reproductive body and motherhood always known for sincerity, sacrifice and soft heart. The society also recognized that men are devoid of such things and so it engaged women in their respective households in nourishing child and looking after family members. Gandhiji also believed in the 'natural



division of labour' and physical weakness of women<sup>1</sup>. But he praised for their self-reliant power and believed in transformation of their weakness into power. He did not want to break the social division and redescribed it by engaging them in spinning in wheel, boycotting in excellence. But that image was broken by Netaji and he organized Queen Jhansi Regiment within Indian National Army. Although he gave chance to women to parade on the road in Kolkata under Cornell Latika Ghosh for experiment, but he was hesitated in giving a confronting event to the Queen Jhansi Regiment<sup>2</sup>. Women participated previously in Swadeshi Movement also where they helped the male revolutionist by supplying arms, or giving hiding place etc. Sometimes they acted as destructive activist. Though the seclusion was not

avoidable. As we see that Sarala Devi Chowdhurani accused in depress that National Congress wanted the women in breaking the law only and not in making the law.<sup>3</sup>

Fine arts and literature were quite popular topics of female education in Ancient India. In the Vatsyana's work we see that town and city girls were expected to be well versed in music, dancing painting, garland making, decorating etc. There was a cunning observation in a legend in the Satapatha Brahmana that women can be easily won over by song and dance as gods unlike the Asuras sang and played in lyre before Vak (goddess of speech) and won her heart and defeated their competitions.<sup>4</sup> Women were encouraged in acquiring skill in spinning and weaving. There were often mentioned of Upadhyayani and Upadhyay in Sanskrit language. Panini who belonged to the second century BCE, identified the former one as the wife of teacher as well as the later one as a female teacher.<sup>5</sup> When Upanayana prohibited to girls, they engaged themselves in the secular and literary education. There are evidences of seven poetesses in Gatha-Sopta-Sati of Hala. That type of examples are not so poor. Gynaecology was a favourite subject among the ladies in medical branch. A book on midwifery, written by Rusa (a lady doctor) was translated into Arabic in the 7th Century ACE. <sup>6</sup> Some of the ladies in ruling families were fairly good in military and administrative training. Queen Nayanika of Satavahana dynasty, Prabhavatigupta of the Vakataka dynasty, Sugandha and Didda of Kashmir etc showed their excellency in administration. Lady governors were common under the later Chalukyas of Kalyani. Vijayamahadevi used to swim in the Ganges with desire that she could do so during her pregnancy. That is why her son was called Gangadatta. <sup>7</sup> A commemorative tablet in Shikarpur Taluka still reminiscing the bravery of Hariyakka who faught for defending but could not alive in 1446 A.D. <sup>8</sup> Village women had to protect themselves in danger. Maratha and Rajput girls of royal class were famous for their military skill.

It is clear that there was a seclusion for women in particular work and it presents even today not only in India but also in the world. The maximum male dominated society cherish that type of stereotype like a woman could be a good teacher but not a debater etc as the society want to see them in a submissive character and not in a strong active character which shows musculanity. For this, the British Colonial India proved a lady doctor named Kadambini Ganguly in 1884 whereas to produce a lady archaeologist Debal Mitra, it had to wait for a long period. The British wanted to govern the territory and for this they had to know 'their India' by surveying and mapping. They did not map the real India. They mapped only that part what they wished to govern.<sup>9</sup> Imperialism and map-making interest find their psychological oneness. There was no map of South-east Asia down to the Second World War when the several colonies engaged in it. European maps of the subcontinent went through three distinct stages of evolution. At the first stage the maps consisted of the view of traditional 'Indies', from Indus to Indo-China. The second stage framed only the peninsula south of the river Krishna in the sixteenth century. In the seventeenth century, the focus passed on the Mughal empire and it was devoid of the peninsula. J.B.B.d' Anville, a French cartographer, published a map of the Indus inspired by geographical encyclopedia in 1752. It led to James Rennel's maps of India, Later on, British India presented triangulation by the Great Trignometrical Survey of India (GTS). These are all the mapping history. But the orientalist like James Prinsep emphasized on indology and established Asiatic Society in 1784 in Kolkata. After the two facts like when Alexander Cunningham became the Director General of Archaeological Survey of India in 1871 and started extensive survey over the whole country as well as in 1904, when Lord Curzon enacted the Ancient Monument Preservation Act, archaeology became a bureaucratic part rather than a part time activity. Museums were opened for public. Illegal trafficking was restricted. Sir John Marshall was appointed as Director General of A.S.I.(1902-1934) whose focus was mainly in Buddhist archaeology or specifically on second urbanization. Archaeological activity was

in back foot during Second World War. Leonard Woolley came for examining the archaeological work and proposed for problem oriented excavation. Mortimer Wheeler (1944-1948) then started pottery technique for understanding chronological activity.

That type of activities especially the discovery of Indus Civilization which was mainly urban in nature fed nutrition to the nationalist who were eager to refute the orientalic despotism theory and many other scandals spread by the British imperialist. But it is hard to relate nationalism with archaeology. Though it played an unconscious role in 'glories of ancient India'. As we see, when Ashutosh Mukherjee was vice-chancellor of University of Calcutta, he led to establish of A.I.H.C. The Struggle for independence was gaining its inspiration from India's ancient part.

Debala Mitra was a product of her time. Though belonging to the subaltern class, the journey was not so easy. Debala Mitra (14th December 1929 to 2nd December, 2003) came from a very humble background in the Khulna district, Bangladesh. She belonged to middle class Kayastha family as we must remember that Hindu renaissance occurred in Bengal at first among Brahmin, Baidya and Kayastha families. Her marriage was happened with a young college teacher, but that seemed not to be a barrier in front of her. She stood first among the girls' students of Bengal Presidency in the matriculation examination with star marks including five letters in 1940. She stood 19th in the order of merit in Intermediate of Arts. She got Ashutosh Mukherjee scholarship. She graduated from Ashutosh College (1944) and completed M.A. in Ancient Indian History and culture from University of Calcutta (1946) with silver medal. She also gained Rai Radhika Prasanna Mukherje gold medal, Harasundari silver medal English prize and Jyotsna Pathak memorial prize in different examinations. She did not stop and went on developing her skills in language as well as in academics. She attended the French language courses at Allies Francoise as well as language school at Besacon and Paris. She also studied Art of Cambodia at l'cole de Louvre (Paris, 1962-1963). She had an outstanding contribution in the field of Art, Architecture and Iconography and for this, she was awarded with Dr. B. C. Law gold medal by the Asiatic Society. She also won Griffith prize in 1963. Her Ph.D thesis was on Temple of Telkupi (Purulia District, W.B.) and was awarded Doctor of Philosophy from University of Calcutta in 1975. This outstanding student joined Archaeological Survey of India in December, 1952 and rose to become the first woman to be appointed and rose to become the first Director General of A.S.I. and retired on 31st December, 1983. After participating in archaeological excavation in Rupar, Nohar, Sothi, Maski and Tamluk; her zeal for work encouraged her in conducting independent excavations at Jaugada, Udaygiri, Khandagiri, Ratnagiri, Tilaurakot, Kodan as well as in exploring in north-east India. She had training in conservation including preservation and that type of work was done in mosques of Murshid Quli Khan at Murshidabad, mosques and tombs at Gaur and Panduas in West Bengal, temples at Bishnupur in Manipur, temples damaged by earthquakes in Assam etc. Taking advantage of French scholarship, she went on visiting monuments and museums in France. She also visited many sites well known for art and architecture in Rome, Athens, Delphi, London, Amsterdam, Barlin, Cairo, Burma, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Srilanka and Nepal. She was chairman of National Committee for Lumbini Development Project as well as of National Committee for ICOMOS and was member of several committees. She also pleased to have membership of Central Advisory Board of Archaeology, Asiatic Society and National Council for Science Museum. She was presented in various international meetings and symposia held in different countries as a representative of the Government of India. She was a consultant on the cultural triangle in Srilanka. She attended in the international symposium on the 'Development and Chronology of the Buddhist and Hindu Sculptures in Early Medieval Art held in Berlin, May, 1986.

Though archaeology was a male dominated profession and it is still so as the excavation, exploration etc. need for a continuous filed work which demand energy and definitely it is not cosy



task. In an addition, working women had to face the identity dilemma as well as normative dilemmas which are accultured into them by family and social expectations. A working mother often had to feel guilty that she was not a good mother and had become a carrier person which her male counterpart had never gone through. Normative dilemmas pressured her on returning home earlier than her husband as well as returning before dinner time in a joint family. At that time, if she imposed her own desire, then she was temporarily sanctioned by the family but if she gave in, she must left compromised role overload dilemmas increased feelings of doubt, anxiety and guilt in women.<sup>12</sup> A women's choice of occupation mostly depends on socialization process. A gender-typed occupation which is linked with gender-role stereotype, largely dominated by one gender. The women who choose non-traditional carriers, basically owned a working mother.<sup>13</sup> But Debala Mitra had not such type of background and it was not unnatural in that period. Though, she successfully balanced and blended Cunningham's approach with Wheelarian method. Her own training in University of Calcutta and in French institution helped her in framing her own path. She wrote many books and many articles (more than hundred). Among the list of her book 'Buddhist Monuments' situated like a polar star. However, as long as the traditional power and hierarchical relationship between the sexes remain same, stereotype will continue<sup>14</sup>. But women like Debala Mitra will continue in making history to step out and break the traditional generalization for their successors in owning the half sky.

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