

The Conspiracy with A Historian

—Dr. J.P. Mishra

The author is Superintendent of Police, Special Vigilance Unit, Bihar

I just recall the fate of great Indian archaeologist R.D. Banerjee who also became the victim of the circumstances and was discredited with his discoveries of Indus Valley Civilisation. He was indicted instead on false pretext of theft. The presiding officer had detected the foul game and came down heavily on the administration. It was the luck of RD which saved him but everybody is not lucky to that extent.

There is a lot of expenditure on satellite related programmes and explorations by the Oil Companies. The job of the archaeologist is even more difficult. By and large they proceed on wisdom. They don't have any clue about hidden treasure of mankind and where it was buried. Once it comes before the world, there is a wild race to take the credit even by forgetting the man who discovered the glorious past what to speak of his supporters. The time has now come to analyse this fact. Who was knowing at one point of time about the hidden treasury of golden past in Mohenja-daro and Harrapa which changed the course of history and brought the Indian civilization at par with Egypt and Mesopotamia. The man behind this discovery was none other than Rakhal Das Bandopadhyay popularly known as R.D. Banerji one of the greatest archaeologist of own time which at least the historian in general and all Indian in particular should never forget. It is also high time to ensure that his credit remains with him only and not transferred to the pocket of anybody. The smell of conspiracy is already on record. What he did during his life time, his achievement is to be reckoned with and not condemned. It is owing to the treachery and administrative intricacies false cases have been spoiling the life of many genius of the country. There is a class of people who cry for recognition, lobby for it and feel elevated after getting it even after a lot of controversy. The personality of RD was something different. He was above reward and recognition. Any reward and recognition would have got worldwide recognition once conferred to this great archaeologist.

The job of an archaeologist becomes more difficult because his endeavour is required to be supported by financial assistance and state protection. Archaeological Survey of India has been doing this job with credibility. The department is protecting the prestigious heritage of the country. The man who ought to be honoured was not only condemned, he had to face humiliation and criminal trial for a crime which he would have never imagined. Just imagine what happened in 1912. For his commendable work in keeping to Indian Museum upto the mark, the officer who was to be honoured on this occasion also included the name of RD but his name did not figure by mistake. RD took up the matter with Sir John in protest and ultimately his name was cleared. This in now high time to expose the ugly face of few persons with vested interest who fraudulently discredited R.D. Banarjee and succeeded in making Marshall a villain instead. If we go with entire investigation and scrutinise the evidence on record the personality of Marshall will emerge as a Villain despite his strong commitments for RD at the initial stage. It is a matter of investigation rather why one time friendly Marshall was seen in a role of the villain. May be, because of the influence of detracts or out of

jealously at a later stage after the discovery of Mohen-Jo-daro. It is often said truth has two beautiful daughters – their names are Scepticism and faith. Scepticism is to examine the past and to make sure it was not full of lies, and faith to believe that the future would not be full of them. The facts surfaced hitherto are alarming because these are the result of truthful examination of the records and the truth is rarely pure and never simple. (Oscar Wilde) A lie travels half way around while the truth is putting on its shoes.

Even today credibility of ASI is at the lowest ebb and despite a battery of experts, recently they have acted and wasted money on the dictation of so called ‘Sadhu’ (a god man) that too in a democracy. If tomorrow such claims come from clergy of a church or a priest of a mosque only God will save the organisation. Unfortunately, this is the legacy of man like RD and it unveils the ugly face of the people in the helm of affairs in ASI.

R.D. Banerji, was an Indian historian and a native Indian pioneer in the fields of Indian archaeology, epigraphy and palaeography. He is mostly known as the discoverer of Mohenjo-daro, the principal site of the Harappa culture.

Bandyopadhyay was born of 12 April 1885 in Berahmpore of Murshidabad district of Bengal. He passed his entrance examination from the Krishnath College in Berhampore in 1900. Soon he married Kanchanmala (1891-1931), the daughter of Narendranath Mukhopadhyaya. He passed his F.A. examination in 1903 and graduated from Presidency College, Kolkata with Honours in History in 1907. He obtained his M.A. in History from the Calcutta University in 1910.

Bandyopadhyaya joined the Indian museum in Calcutta as an Assistant to the Archaeological Survey of India as Assistant Superintendent in 1911, and was promoted to the rank of Superintending Archaeologist of the Western Circle in 1917. In 1924, he was transferred to the Eastern Circle and took part in the excavations at Paharpur. He took voluntary retirement in 1926. After teaching at the University of Calcutta, he later joined the Banaras Hindu University in 1928 and held the post till his premature death on 23 May 1930.

Bandyopadhyay's first major independent professional work was in the fields of paleography and epigraphy. He won the Jubilee Research Prize of the Calcutta University for The Origin of the Bengali Script published in 1919 (and reprinted in 1973). Rakhaldas was the first to study the proto-Bangla script, the original form of Bangla script. He wrote the classic historical works on medieval Indian coins, and the standard works on the iconography of Indian art, in particular Gupta sculpture and architecture. His best known work was Eastern Indian Medieval School of Sculpture, published posthumously in 1933.

Bandyopadhyay wrote two textbooks for Calcutta University, namely, History of India (1924) and A Junior History of India (1928). His The Age of the Imperial Guptas (1933) is a collection of lectures delivered by him in 1924. His standard two-volume Bangalar Itihas (History of Bengal) in Bengali (1914 and 1917) was one of the first attempts at writing a scientific history of Bengal. He also wrote two volumes on the history of Orissa, titled History of Orissa from the Earliest Times to the British Period (1930 and 1931).

His other significant non-fiction works include, Prachin Mudra (1915), The Palas of Bengal (1915), The Temple of Siva at Bhumara (1924), The Paleography of Hati Gumpha and

Nanaghat Inscriptions (1924), Bas Reliefs of Badami (1928) and The Haihayas of Tripuri and their Monuments (1931).

Except three novels, Pakshantar (1924), Byatikram (1924) and Anukram (1931), rest of his literary works in Bengali language were historical fictions. The setting of his Pashaner Katha (1914) is Kushana period. His three other novels, namely, Dhruva, Karuna (1917) and Shashanka (1914) are set in the different phases of the Gupta period. His Dharmapala (1915) narrates the story of the Pala emperor Dharmapala. Mayukh (1916) describes the Portuguese atrocities in Bengal during the reign of Shahjahan Asim (1924) narrates the condition of Bengal during the reign of Farrukhsiyar. His last novel, Lutf-Ulla is set in Delhi at the time of the invasion by Nadir Shah. His another fictional work, Hemkana (incomplete) was published in Prabasi magazine from 1911-12. A number of his novels were translated into other Indian languages.

Bandyopadhyay is most famous for the discovery of Mohenjodaro, the principal site of the Harappa culture dating from 3000 BC. His interpretations of this civilization were published in a number of articles and books: "An Indian City Five Thousand Years Ago" (Calcutta Municipal Gazette, November 1928); "Muhen-jodaro" (in Bangla, Basumati, 1331 BS); Prehistoric, Ancient and Hindu India (posthumously published, 1934) and Mahenjodaro - A Forgotten Report (1984).

History is the testimony that R.D. Banarjee was the pioneer of Indian Archaeology and was the man behind the great discovery of Mahanjodaro, the glorious civilization unknown to the mankind. He visited the site, proposed excavation and the resultant gain was before the mankind. He compiled the excavation in the form of literature and parts of it was published. Half of the materials which subsequently hit the archaeological world was credited in the name of John Marshall who never visited the site of Mohanjodaro as per records. Now it is for the readers to judge where does he stand.

To quote Mahatma Gandhi "When in despair, I remember that all through history the way of truth and love have always won, there have been tyrants and murderers, and for a time, they can seem invincible, but in the end, they always fall. Think it – always".

The envious eyes did not stop here. R.D. was compelled to sustain the litmus test of judiciary on the charges of criminal offences which was forcefully credited on his account by the conspirators. Prior to that the conspirators managed a memorandum of charges against him for wasteful expenditure on Kolkata Museum. There was no way out and he had to travel a long way before he was acquitted by the Ld. Court with a nasty remark against the prosecution. Alas, the judiciary showed the door to the conspirators with this unexpected decision. Had they not been caught on the wrong foot, it would have been a murder of a trial. In the absence of John Marshall from India J.F. Blackiston, his successor was in grip of the conspirator and he got a theft case registered against RD and further managed his suspension on this count. He even inspected the office of RD and stoop to lowest standard of fault finding by counting the nibs and even the pins which was simply unwarranted and unexpected of a public servant. The Magistrate had noted in the case that since the Mahanta of the temple requested the Dy. Commissioner, Jabalpur for return of the idol to the temple and in the said application made no change of theft against the accused....."

He further recorded “that since the accused is a public servant of Govt. of India and removable by the Govt. of India, prior sanction u/s 197 Cr.P.C is required and since the same was lacking cognizance could not be taken.

Section 378 & 379 IPC reads “ Whoever, intending to take dishonestly movable property out of the possession of any person without that person’s consent, moves that property in order to such taking, is said to commit theft.

Section 379 says “Whoever commits theft shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to three years, or with fine, or with both.

The Hon’ble Supreme Court has settled that in the absence of the person’s consent at the time of removing the movables and the presence of dishonest intention are the essential ingredients of theft- [K.N.Mehra Vs State of Rajashtan AIR 1957 SC 369: 1957 Cr LJ 552]

As against the settled law the acts and omissions of the officers were not only questionable who were bent upon spoiling the career of an honest archaeologist, it also goes to suggest the timid and dirty mind of the officers of British India. The way they functioned puts a question mark on their dignity and integrity.

This however, was not compensation to the poor victim and this question remained unanswered till date. Judicial system is only one of the systems in a sovereign country because we have a court of law and not a court of justice. We cannot blame it because it follows the evidence on records and not examine the villains who concocted the evidence to the extent of maligning a genuine person. The lawyers proceed on the basis of the briefs and are interested in winning the game at all cost. What happens now a days is not a hidden secret. If the laws could speak for themselves they would complain to the lawyer in first place (Lord Halifax).

It is strange a man like R.D. could have taken up crime when for a public servant there are many legal ways to become dishonest. Hunger makes a thief of a man and this is what which exactly happened with Marshall. Law is not justice and trial is not a scientific enquiry into truth. A trial is a resolution of a dispute. It cannot compensate the victim. Today R.D. is not with us but his work will speak volumes in his favour and he will always glitter in the annals of world archaeology in the years to come. Though Marshall was not behind this trial but it was a sequel to what happened to R.D. Banerjee, since the very beginning. It was John Marshall who first recognised the literary genius of RD and he was pressed into service in the Kolkata Museum. This was the beginning of politics. There was a move to plant Pandit Dayaram Sahani in place of R.D. Sir John was aware of his foes but ignored them and facilitated RD to carry forward his mission as genius of the department. When all the water of conspiracy came upto the brim, Marshall ensured RD’s posting in the western Circle where there a vast scope of displaying calibre. RD had come upto the expectation of Sir John when he had handled the situation of Kolkata museum in the absence of Sir John during the visit of dignitary and earned laurels for him. Subsequently when Sir John proceeded on leave, the conspirator again raised their heads from hibernation. RD was charged with the expensive expenditure during the visit of the dignitary and got a charge memo for that. The poor academician being not well versed with the administration and financial implication was again in the net of the cruel. In disgust he tendered his resignation for joining the post of a professor in Kolkata University. As misfortunate never comes alone, he had to face the

intricacies in the form of strong opposition from R.C. Mazumdar who was against his induction in Kolkata University. Remember, the man who had to face humiliation and criminal trial was a preferable choice of Pt. Madan Mohan Malaviya for Banaras Hindu University where he became HOD of the department was ignored and humiliated in his own place Kolkata.

The criminal case against RD was nothing else but a colourable exercise of power by the superior officers who used this platform against the ethics and the moral values. A case of 379 IPC, i.e. a theft case was registered against RD in Jabalpur on the allegation of stealing an idol from a local temple of Bheraghat at Jabalpur. It was in evidence that the deity was not found with the custodian i.e. the priest of the temple when he was questioned about this. His alibi was that it was taken away by RD may be for some official purpose and therefore the priest had not questioned the bonafide of RD. It was also on record that one of the associates of RD has given the information to RD regarding the missing Idol. If the version of the priest is taken for granted, it was a removal by consent. The question of theft therefore, does not arise. No mens rea can be attributed which is most important ingredient of a criminal case. When the mens rea i.e. criminal intent was missing, why this case? The Magistrate rightly threw the case in the dustbin.

Now the question arises as to why the case was registered and sent to court for trial? Obviously, only for tarnishing the image of RD and nothing else. These questions are required to be answered.

It is now high time to investigate and expose the persons, the so called scholars, who were bent down upon to ruin the career of

1922-23 was the turning point of the career of RD who while pursuing his work in Larkana Distt. In Sindh noticed a high mound which was being nebulated. RD decided to excavate the area and the site of Mohan-jo-daro was discovered which proved to be a revolutionary work. He sent his first report to Director General in 1920 giving the detail description of this discovery. It is a matter of record. This was an era of Sir John Marshall and the report of RD remained unpublished. Subsequently, the same material was published which was edited by Sir John Marshall and it appears that the credit of great archaeologist was hijacked in between. This is a question to be answered by the historian. In discovery of India, Pt. Jawahar Lal Nehru while quotes Marshall as an authentic source for this discovery, which as a matter of fact, is not true. Marshall may be a spokesman of ASI but could not be said to be a discoverer of the site.

A young man died at the tender age of 45 years. He was doing his job that too sincerely may be without the knowledge of administrative procedure. Was was his fault? Archaeological Survey of India is a deptt., of Govt. of India where scholars are required and not administrators as in other deptt., Here every individual and his work counts. It's not disputed that a young genius of ASI counted his last. His inner feelings are not known to us. It is not an example in isolation. The word 'Red-tapism' and colourable exercise of power have got identical sanction. In every deptt., it is prevalent, with some change in degree only. A number of dedicated people----- bureaucrats, scholars and administrator although capable are condemned and victimised. ASI is not an exception. In my long career in administration, I have noticed it, felt it and sometimes also remained helpless for want of evidence.

For the sake of getting the truth revealed and to arrive at a just conclusion, it would be appropriate to go deep into the matter by way of impartial analysis of the facts. There is no denying fact that RD was a genius and was having tremendous command over his subject. He was a born archaeologist what he discovered was a wonderful achievement. . It was because of his discovery the world was made to understand that Indian Civilization was not only one of the oldest but had continued to exist over the years despite resistance.

Today is the time to remember the great pioneer and proceder in the field of archaeology who contributed a lot in the field of history and archaeology. We have lost a genius who is no more with us but his works are there to tell and calibrate his personality as an unparallel scholar in the historical world.

