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Sahib's *Nautch Girl*: Colonial Archaeology and the Identity Formation of A Bronze Girl Statue From Mohenjodaro

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Abstract

The paper studies the process of identity formation of the Harappanartifacts (mainly, bronze girl statue from Mohenjodaro) under the colonial archaeologists. John Marshall and his fellow archaeologists popularized the term nautch girl or dancing girl for the bronze girl statue by connecting it to the public dancer-prostitutes and devadasis. They attributed this statue the identity of a dark-skin aboriginal (negro) girl of kulli or baluchi ethnicity. The nude body of the bronze girl statue captured the imagination of the colonial archaeologists, who applied the theories of racial differences, inverted growth in Indian art, and the feminine Hinduism for the study of the Harappanartifacts including terracotta female figurines, male stone images and the bronze girl statue. The paper argues that the bronze girl statue was culturally reconstructed in the writings of the European scholars, who also showed the possibilities of using the later date Sanskrit Hindu literature for the study of the Harappan civilization.

Key words: John Marshall, Mohenjodaro, dancing girl, *nautch* girl, *devadasi*

Introduction

In the year 2016, a writ petition was filed by barrister JavedIqbal Jaffrey in the Lahore High Court with a request to issue direction to the federal government of Pakistan to bring back the famous 'Dancing girl' bronze statue from India. Since this bronze girl statue had been discovered from Mohenjo-daro in 1926, Pakistan was held to be the real owner of this five thousand years old Harappanartifact. In Jaffrey's words, this statue retains the same historic significance for Pakistan that Leonardo da Vinci's Mona Lisa in Europe has. The same views are endorsed by Jamal Shah (director general of the Pakistan National Museum of Arts), Qasim Ali Qasim (director of the provincial archaeology department), and several others in Pakistan. In response to this Pakistani claim, Vansant Shinde (then Vice-chancellor of Deccan College, Pune) questioned Pakistan's exclusive claim over the Harappan civilization. Since this civilization was considered a common heritage of South Asia, in the

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1950s after the partition the archaeological remains and artifacts of the Harappan civilization had been divided equally between India and Pakistan. Resultantly, India had gained proprietary

rights on the dancing girl statue and Pakistan obtained the same rights on the Priest king statue.[2]

Bronze Girl Statue from Mohenjodaro

(National Museum, New Delhi)

This controversy on the ownership of the bronze girl statue shows the importance of the Harappanartifacts in the national politics of India and Pakistan even today. In the official history of both, India and Pakistan the Harappan civilization (also known as the Indus civilization or the Indus-Sarasvati civilization) is considered the first civilizational step towards the formation of their respective national identities.[3] In their respective histories, this bronze girl statue has consistently been labelled as the statue of 'Dancing Girl' - an identity that was first suggested by John Marshall[4], the director general of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI, from 1902 to 1928). After him, this identity was accepted by scholars in India and abroad without raising any doubt. In the absence of any deciphered Harappan written record, not only the identity of the bronze girl statue but also its 'use'/ 'purpose' could not be deduced conclusively from the available archaeological evidences. To address this ontological issue, John Marshall situated the Harappanartifacts within India's Hindu tradition and used

later date Sanskrit literature for the study of the Harappan civilization. Having assumed a connection between the bronze girl statue and the profession of *nautch* girls/*devadasis*, Marshall and his fellow archaeologists in the ASI invented an identity of a 'dancing girl' for the bronze girl statue.

In the present paper this very process of identity formation is mapped out to underline the ways colonial perceptions and biases had have influenced John Marshall's inferences about the Harappan civilization. It is argued that this bronze girl statue, like several other Harappan archaeological artifacts, was culturally reconstructed by attributing an identity of a dancing girl to it in the second quarter of the twentieth century.

Bronze female statue as a cultural artifact

In this paper, the 'cultural biographical' method of Richard H. Davis is adopted for the study of the bronze girl statue from Mohenjodaro. The image – either religious or secular, is studied as a culturally constructed entity that in different spatial and temporal contexts tends to acquire culturally specific meanings through the human agencies. In other words, both meaning and social value of an image remains subjected to the changes under different circumstances. Therefore, Richard H. Davis considers them as 'social beings, whose identities are not fixed once and for all at the moment of fabrication, but are repeatedly made and remade through interactions with humans.' The 'identity' (or 'meaning' of the image) formulates 'through the relationship of image with a viewer, who brings his or her community's own interpretative strategies to bear within the encounter.'[5] The identity formation is suggested to be based on the ways interpretative community encounters and perceives the visual object and subsequently it produces supposedly authoritative knowledge about it.

The metaphor 'cloister' is used by SumitGuha for the group of scholars, which forms the institutions of knowledge production (for instance, Indic *matha* or *vihara*, the Sufi *dargah*, the college temple priests, English universities, etc.) in different temporal and spatial contexts. The 'cloister' refers to a 'protected space separated from the regular life of society,' and in the context of the British Raj, it refers to multiple colonial institutions that produced knowledge about India's past.[6] Here it is noticeable that the human sense perception (in our case perceptions of an interpretative community) about the objects of study is culturally organized and 'the medium in which it is accomplished is determined not only by nature but by historical circumstances as well.'[7] Therefore, if the historical circumstances, within which an interpretative community has encountered and perceived the visual object, are mapped out,

then the changes in meanings and identities of the visual object can be explained to write a cultural biography of it.

In this paper, the ASI, as a cloister of knowledge producers, is argued to have formed an integral part of the colonial interpretative communities. In the nineteenth and the early twentieth century, the colonial archaeologists (Alexander Cunningham, John Marshall, Ernest Mackay, Stuart Piggott, Mortimer Wheeler and others) employed theoretically defined as well as socially acquired frames of assumptions (theories/models) to deduce meanings and identities from variety of visual objects.[8] Since the frames of assumptions and interpretative strategies that they adopted had been institutionalized through modern education system, these could be learnt, shared, improved, contested, and, if need be, rejected by members of the colonial interpretative communities. The theories, such as oriental despotism, race science, self-sufficient village economy, insular Indian society, and so forth were widely accepted by the colonial scholars, who used these with or without modifications for the study of India's past.[9] The colonial archaeologists of the twentieth century produced the knowledge about the Harappan civilization and the colonial state legitimized the colonial reading of the Harappanartifacts through its centralized archaeological institutions as well as education system. Resultantly, the Harappan civilization was casted in a mould that fitted well in the colonial perception of the orient.

In the 1920s the professional archaeologists of ASI brought into light the archaeological artifacts of diverse types and forms of the Harappan civilization through excavations at the sites of Harappa and Mohenjodaro.[10] Several of the artifacts were easily identified due to a remarkable commonality in their intended purpose ('utility') that they shared with the similar artifacts of the historical period. Accordingly, these artifacts were put in the category of utensils, ornaments, weapons, carpentry tools, seals and so forth. Several terracotta and bronze human figurines too reached into the hands of the colonial archaeologists, who attributed specific sex, gender and intended purposes to these. These Harappanartifacts including terracotta and bronze images therefore were culturally reconstructed by classifying in different analytical categories. Through the process of de-contextualization these were brought under the analytical lenses of the archaeologists for reimagining their past social-values. Subsequently, select pieces from these were re-contextualized by putting on display in museums for public gazing. In our case, the bronze girl statue from Mohenjodaro underwent a similar process of de-contextualization and re-contextualization, and it through an encounter with the colonial archaeologists acquired a culturally constructed identity of a dancing girl.

A bronze girl: found and named

The colonial archaeology gave new meanings to pre-modern artifacts and monuments through the production of state sanctioned historical narratives. As the British authority expanded across South Asia, the colonial official-cum-archaeologists launched extensive surveys in systematic manner of relevant sites and antiquities to generate information regarding India's past to help the British government in the exploitation of India's resources. A well maintained distinction between the inferior natives and superior Sahibs was drawn through the historical narratives and in these narratives the archaeological remains of pre-modern India were transformed into an object of inquiry. With the turn of the century, Lord Curzon (the Viceroy of India, from 1899-1905) inaugurated the policy of conservation and preservation of India's monuments and antiquities to project the British Raj as more enlightened and benevolent. To carry forward this policy, Curzon revived the post of director general of the ASI and ensured the appointment of John Hubert Marshall at this post.[11] At the young age of 26, Marshall assumed the charge in February 1902 and directed the energies as well as resources of the ASI in the conservation and restoration of pre-modern monuments, sites and artifacts of India. However, his major achievement as director general of ASI was the discovery of the five thousand years old Harappan civilization in the valley of Indus.

In the 1920, excavations at Harappa in the Sahiwal district (now Pakistan Punjab) were started by Daya Ram Sahni, an official from the ASI. The next year, Rakhal Das Banerji began excavating Mohenjodaro in Larkana district of Sind (now in Pakistan). In these excavations identical seals were found and it was realized that these sites belonged to the same culture. On the 20th September 1924, the discovery of the Harappan civilization was announced in the *Illustrated London News*, which placed the artifacts from Harappa and Mohenjodaro in public domain. Soon scholars like Archibald Henry Sayce, C. J. Gadd and Sidney Smith – all involved in the excavations as well as study of the Mesopotamian and Egyptian civilizations, found close similarities between the seals found in the Near East and the Indus valley. Resultantly, the Harappan civilization, of which Harappa and Mohenjodaro were projected as twin capitals, was dated to the third millennium BCE.[12]

Among the several artifacts that were found in excavations was included a small bronze statue of a girl (measuring 10.8 cm x 5 cm) that was discovered in a Late-level house of Block 7 at Mohenjodaro. This bronze girl statue was identified as a representation of a female dancer. The statue is casted in bronze, using the lost wax process. It is a figure of a slander young girl, standing up-right, with her head slightly tilted backward. Her left leg is bent at the knee and right hand is placed on the back of her hip. The left hand is placed on the thigh of her left leg. As her left thumb and fingers form a circle, it appears that she once

held a small object, perhaps a baton of some sort. Her naked body is adorned with ornaments like necklace with large pendant beads. About twenty four or five bangles are on her left arm, and she wears two bangles at the wrist and two above the elbow of right arm. Her hairs are tied in a bun along the back of her head.[13] Currently on display in the National Museum at New Delhi, this statue along with other Harappanartifacts became the bone of fierce diplomatic contestation between India and Pakistan in the 1950s.

About 12,000 Harappan objects from Mohenjodaro were in Delhi on the eve of India's partition and these had been brought from the Lahore Museum to New Delhi by Mortimer Wheeler (director general of the ASI between 1944 and 1948) for an exhibition. Owing of partition, almost all of the Harappan sites including Mohenjodaro and Harappa went to Pakistan leaving with India only two minor sites (Rangpur in Gujarat and KotlaNihang Khan in East Punjab) of the first urban civilization of the Indian subcontinent. Since the Harappanartifacts had been found in the territory of Pakistan at Mohenjodaro, the Pakistani officials demanded all these artifacts back from India. But the Indian officials refused to entertain this demand and put forth an equal claim over the Harappan civilization by demanding a share in the artifacts of this civilization. Eventually both the nation-states, India and Pakistan agreed upon a 50/50 division of the Harappanartifacts found at Mohenjodaro and Chanhu-daro with the help of Mortimer Wheeler.[14] As a result of it, the statue of 'Dancing Girl' went to India and Pakistan obtained the ownership of the statue of 'Priest King'. However, it is usually believed that the Indian officials when refused to hand over both the statues- dancing girl and priest king, and offered the Pakistani officials to choose either of it, then the Pakistani officials chose the priest king to avoid any possible backlash at home that a figure of naked teenager could have invoked from religious quarters.[15] Here the 'nudity' of a teenager girl impacted the decision of the Pakistani officials, who considered its sexuality a threat to their moral beliefs.

Interpreting the Harappan past

In the excavations at both Harappa and Mohenjodaro variety of objects and artifacts were found. A large number of terracotta female nude or semi-nude figurines, 'wearing a band or girdle about her loins with elaborate head-dress and collar, and occasionally with ornamental cheek cones and a long necklace', turned up in excavations. The Harappan people were mentioned to have used these figurines of Mother or Nature Goddess either as votive offerings or cult images for household shrines. The origin of the Mother or Nature goddess cult was situated within the matriarchal Harappan society of the non-Aryans. Even a long

continuity of the Mother or Nature goddess cult was suggested by drawing a parallel between the Harappan goddesses and the Gramadevatas of the twentieth century Indian villages. The remarkable resemblance to one another, and frequency of their occurrence in all parts of the excavated sites were the main reasons for the identification of terracotta female figurines as sacred images. The nudity was one of the common features of these terracotta female figurines that the colonial archaeologists particularly have highlighted in their writings on the Harappan civilization.[16] In the colonial discourse on the Harappan civilization, these terracotta female figurines were transformed into an object of inquiry to deduce inferences regarding their gender, sexuality, race and social relevance. But the approach of the colonial archaeologists to the Harappanartifacts is notoriously problematic mainly because of the predilection for assumptions and the biases of their own cultural filters.[17]

Since all the early Chalcolithic cultures spread over a vast region between the Mediterranean and the Ganga valley, were considered to be matriarchal, the Mother goddess cult was assumed to be central in the Harappan civilization.[18] This idea of the matriarchal character of the Chalcolithic cultures was based on the belief that the human societies have progressed from the matriarchal stage to the male dominated patriarchal stage.[19] John Marshall underlined the Indianness of the Harappan faith by arguing a continuity in the pre-Aryan Mother goddess worship, Shiva cult, and practice of Yoga from the third millennium BCE to the modern times. He rejected the views of earlier scholars that painted the pre-Aryans as untutored savages. Instead, he argued to locate the origin of the Hinduism in the soil of the highly civilized Harappan civilization.[20] Subsequently, Stella Kramrisch identified the nude images of females as a symbol of the primitive beliefs of the Harappan people; but the male figures in stone, in her view, expressed an attitude of concentration with yoga-glance. Having being devoid of nudity, the Harappan male figures displayed fixation of mind.[21] Later Mortimer Wheeler expressed similar views and connected the terracotta figurines of nude females with the domestic Mother goddess cult. Contrary to it, seated male figures (possibly, Shiva) of the stone statuary were suggested to be associated with a hieratic cult of the pre-Aryan Harappan society.[22] In this way, female nudity was suggested to be a feature of lower primeval beliefs, which were comparatively lesser in stature to the belief that gave preference to mind over body. The Harappan religion thus lacked homogeneity and like Hinduism comprised variety of ritual practices and beliefs. This approach to the Harappan religion fitted well in the colonial characterization of the Hinduism as a jungle or a sponge.[23]

Contrary to the discovery of hundreds of terracotta female figurines (identified as mother goddesses), only one bronze statue of supposedly a dancing girl was found in excavations, and it made it a unique art object for the colonial archaeologists. The bronze girl statue

was discovered by Daya Ram Sahni during the 1926-27 field seasons, and it is described by John Marshall in the following words:

> "The only other sculpture in the round from Mohenjo-daro that claims notice here is the bronze dancing-girl… This is a small figurine of rather rough workmanship with disproportionately long arms and legs. Almost, indeed, it is a caricature, but, like a good caricature, it gives a vivid impression of the young aboriginal nautch girl, her hand on hip in half-impudent posture, and legs slightly forward, as she beats time to the music with her feet. Small, too, as this figurine is, the modeling of the back, hips, and buttocks is quite effective, and in spite of obvious defects shows sound observation on the part of the artist."[24]

John Marshall highlighted the three key characteristics of this image: nudity, aboriginality and professional affiliation ('dancing'). In a same way, some of the stone male statues from Mohenjodaro attracted his attention. Since the script of the Harappan civilization had not been deciphered, the responsibility of identifying and naming these Harappanartifacts – bronze image and stone statues, fell on the shoulders of John Marshall. He attributed to these Harappanartifacts certain specific meanings that they perhaps had never intended to have. He utilized the Greco-Roman sculptural art as a 'standard of assessment' to study the pre-historic remains from Mohenjodaro. The lack of ornamentation in architecture, realistic and natural depiction of animals on seals, and anatomical perfection in human figurines distinguished, according to him, the Harappan art from the Indian art of the historical period. In fact, a close similarity between the Harappan and the Greek art was suggested by John Marshall; he argued 'a certain kinship between the two, both in the "monumental" treatment of the figures as a whole and in the perfection of their anatomical details.'[25]

John Marshall believed in the superiority of the Greco-Roman art, and accepted the theory of an inverted development (or progressive degeneration) of Indian art. The colonial archaeologists and art historians considered the Buddhist art due to a remarkable Greek-Roman (Hellenistic) influence, best in comparison with the Hindu art of the subsequent period. It was believed that the artistic standards in sculptural and architectural fields were diluted gradually due to the intermixing of the Aryan and the non-Aryan races[26], and the proliferation of the nude as well as copulating female figures in the context of Hindu temples displayed the artistic decay. The nude female body thus was seen as a signifier of obscenity, indecency, and immorality. In fact, naked female figurines of Yakshis and Shalabhanjikas found at Buddhist and Hindu sacred shrines/monuments had invariably been labeled by the western scholars, for instance, James Fergusson, H. Coussens, Alexander Cunningham, J.

Ph. Vogel and A. Foucher, as debased or grossly indecent due to their erotic and sensuous character. The colonial scholars usually held all the figurines of 'Voluptuous women, copulating couples, gods signified by phallic symbols and goddesses by vaginal symbols' as obscene and a symbol of moral decadence. The Indian art, lacking robust rationality, had therefore been identified in the European writings as internally feminine opposite of the rational as well as masculine European mind.[27]

Following the writings of his predecessors (Alexander Cunningham, James Fergusson and others), Marshall identified the foreign influences as a driving force in the development of Indian art under the Mauryan kings. According to him, the Indian art in the Mauryan age displayed remarkable Persian and Greek influence, and same was the case with the post Mauryan artistic developments. The techniques and forms of foreign backgrounds had been adopted by Indian artists for giving a shape to their indigenous Buddhist and Hindu themes. Even the artistic growth in the golden age of the Gupta rule was held to be caused by the foreign (Persian, Roman and Chinese) influences. After the Guptas, gradually an era of artistic decadence set in due to the Mohammadan invasions in the medieval times.[28] Owing of his strong belief in the European superiority, Marshall in spite of a long periodic gap between the Harappans and the Greeks employed the standards of the Greek art to judge the Harappanartifacts. Yet, to highlight the Indianness of the Harappan human images, he consistently used the Hindu imagery and concepts of the historical period. Resultantly, the bronze girl statue, whereas became a nautch girl (dancing girl), the depiction of Shiva was found in youthful Nataraja form in one of the Harappan stone statues and in a similar manner, in the Pasupati form on a terracotta seal.[29]

John Marshall is the earliest colonial archaeologist, who showed the possibilities to find meanings of the Harappan art objects in the Hindu social and religious traditions. In his view, the Indian art in spite of having the foreign impacts on techniques and forms was thematically Indian. It exhibited the people's faith, their spiritual beliefs, their deep as well as intuitive sympathy with nature (in the Shunga-Satavahana phase) and conscious intellect, subconscious aesthetic sense, and constraints of reason (in the Gupta period). In his analysis of Indian art objects, Marshall maintained a distinction between the outer form and style (showing the foreign impact) and the inner meaning of the art objects (showing Indian mind, belief and themes).[30] He relied on the Sanskrit Hindu traditions to speculate the inner meanings as well as identities of the Harappan figurines (both animal and human), and this approach of Marshall corresponded well to the theoretical frameworks of the leading art historians of the early twentieth century. Unlike the nineteenth century European scholars, who had mainly focused on the outer forms and styles, E. B. Havell and Ananda K. Coomaraswamy

shifted the focus on the inner meanings of the Indian art objects. They laid an emphasis on the use of Sanskrit literature to find the inherent meaning of the art objects and artist's purpose. Their works on Indian art popularized the idea that 'Indian art was the visual embodiment of Indian philosophy'[31] at a time, when John Marshall ran the ASI as its director general.

Following John Marshall, scholars and archaeologists in India and Europe designated the bronze girl statue from Mohenjodaro as dancing girl. Ernest Mackay further elaborated Marshall's inferences by connecting this bronze girl statue with the ritual dancers, known as *devadasis*, of the Indian temples:

> "In connection with the subject of ritual dancing, allusion must be made to the wonderful bronze figure of a dancing-girl… The dancer, who from her features is obviously an aboriginal type, may represent the predecessor of the dancing-girls (Devadasis) who are attached to many temples in modern India. The status of these girls is considered quite an honourable one, as in many cases they are either married to the god to whose temple they belong, or are regarded as handmaidens of a goddess. It is interesting to think that this bronze figure may represent very probably a temple-dancer of Mohenjo-daro".[32]

According to Mackay this bronze girl statue represents a dancing-girl and it 'is quite possible that, as in ancient Egypt, followers of this profession appeared without clothing in certain dances.'[33] Her bare body, exhibiting breasts and genitalia, and a confident posture without any display of shame, is the most highlighted feature in the European writings. For the colonial scholars, this bronze girl's naked but still a confident body had been for public display. The bronze girl statue found a newer interpretation in the writing of Stuart Piggott, who associated it with the Harappan slave trade and identified this bronze girl statue with the girls of Kulli culture of South Baluchistan. Piggott opined that:

> "…the bronze of the Dancing-Girl from Mohenjo-daro, so closely representing the type of hairdressing and adornment of the Kulli Culture of South Baluchistan, does at least suggest that the merchants returning along the southerly caravan routes may have brought with them girls whose exotic dancing and unsophisticated charms might be thought to tickle the fancy of the tired business men of Harappa or Mohenjo-daro."[34]

On the other hand, Mortimer Wheeler described this image in following words:

> "…the most remarkable of the authenticated Indus figurines, [is] the dancing-girl from Mohenjo-daro. Without the missing feet and ankles, this charming little statuette

> is 4½ ins. high; … The right hand rest on the hip; the left arm, covered almost entirely with bangles, hangs loosely, and the posture of the legs is easy. The head, provocatively titled, is a skillful impressionistic rendering of a prognathic "aboriginal" type, with large eyes, flat nose and bunched curly hair..."[35]

The naked body of dancing girl appeared 'pert and provocative' to Wheeler, who described her 'attitude' as 'one of assurance.'[36] In a same manner, he described her in a television interview as a little Baluchi girl of fifteen years of age, who was 'perfectly confident of herself and the world'.[37] Above all, an Indian archaeologist K. N. Dikshit even speculated the darker complexion of this dancing girl and lowly social status in the Indus society due to her Negroid race.[38] In different writings, this bronze girl statue was either associated with the Dasas of the *Rigveda* due to her negroid features[39] or identified with 'the model of Nrita, a female dancer with whom Usha is compared in the *Rigveda'*.[40] In one study, this bronze girl statue has also been attributed the identity of 'a sacred prostitute', who carried 'out her duties within the precincts of the temple of some mother goddess'.[41]

Sahib's *nautch* girl

The expression 'young aboriginal *nautch* girl' that John Marshall has used for the Harappan bronze girl statue shows his belief in the changeless and static nature of Indian society[42] that according to majority of the European scholars had remained the same from time immemorial. Thus, Marshall imagined a direct link between the bronze girl statue of the third millennium BCE and the *nautch* girls of the early twentieth century. The term *nautch*, an Anglicized word, is derived from a Sanskrit term *nritya* and Prakrit term *nachcha*, and it simply refers to a dance or dancing. The *nautch* girls, who are mentioned numerously in the writings of European officials, travellers and Christian missionaries of the eighteenth and nineteenth century as professional indigenous dancers, indeed fascinated most of their viewers. The programs of *nautch* girls were often organized on special occasions for special guests in their honour by Hindus, Muslims and Parsee elites. Initially, the Europeans found these dance programs extremely boring and repetitive, but gradually they developed a taste for it. The Europeans, particularly British soldiers and officials, who had left their families back home, spent considerable time of their life in India alone, and they often found comfort in the arms of the *nautch* girls. These *nautch* girls, who were considered the votaries of pleasure, became an important form of entertainment for them.[43]

In the category of *nautch* girls, colonial scholars usually also included the *devadasis*. From a historical point of view, *devadasis* first appeared in the *Arthashastra* of Kautilaya as

temple prostitutes and dancing girls. They are generally identified as 'a female in the services of gods or temple' and also as a courtesan employed as a dancer in a temple. They figure prominently in several early medieval and medieval writings of Hsuan Tsang (7th century CE), Alberuni (11th century CE) and AbdurRazaak (15th century CE). Not strictly a distinct caste, the profession of *devadasi* was in fact 'a way of life or professional ethic', and she was considered to be 'the vital link between the god, the temple, the priest and the street. Her domestic duties were for the god only'. However, she could be bodily consumed either by a temple brahmana priest or a wealthy patron, who would, ideally, then support the *devadasi* and her attendant musicians. But for the English officials she was 'just another form of nautch girl' involved in prostitution.[44] The image of the *nautch* girls and their craft perhaps was deeply instilled in the mind of John Marshall and his fellow archaeologists. Therefore, the bronze girl statue from Mohenjodaro, when reached into the hands of Marshall, he saw glimpse of a *nautch* girl in it. He detected in the slender and nude body frame of this bronze girl statue, a *nautch* girl's delicate limbs and artful gait. He gave a name – *dancing girl*- to this bronze girl statue, and resultantly, this Harappan bronze artifact was trapped in a colonial archaeologist's mental image. The bronze girl statue was assigned a professional identity of a dancer/temple dancer ('nautch girl', 'devadasi'), racial identity of a 'negroid' aboriginal person, and an ethnic identity of a 'kulli girl' or 'baluchi girl'. In this way, the colonial mind perceived an "*Other"* (different from the Aryans and their descendent fair skin Europeans) in this bronze girl statue.

Some scholars in recent decades have expressed their doubts –however, in a passing manner, on Marshall's inferences regarding the identification of this bronze girl statute ('Dancing girl'). Gregory L. Possehl says that even though we are not certain 'that she was a dancer,' she appears to have been 'good at what she did and she knew it.'[45] In a same way, Upinder Singh has expressed her doubts. She says that '…the 'dancing girl' may not have been dancing at all, and even if she was, she may not represent a professional dancer'.[46] In fact, the identification of the bronze girl statue as dancing girl is not at all supported by the material context of its discovery. This statue was discovered from House LV in Mohenjodaro and Daya Ram Sahni (then superintendent ASI) describes the material context, within which it had been found, in the following words:

> "House LV has come down in a much ruined condition… this structure must also have been entered from Ninth Lance, though there might have been another doorway opening into the lane on the west… Room 40, with a well-preserved brick pavement, may have been a bath. This pavement consists of a single layer of kiln-burnt bricks laid flat upon a substratum of alternating rows of burnt and sun-dried bricks… At

> one end of this paving is a little fireplace, by the side of which was lying one of the most interesting antiquities unearthed during the season. It is a bronze statuette of a naked, slender-limbed dancing girl cast in the round… The figure is characterized by negroid facial features, and executed with some primitive vigour."[47]

Daya Ram Sahani's identification of this bronze image with a dancing girl was based on the inference and opinion of John Marshall, who was not only the editor of the excavation report of Mohenjodaro but also had been the director-general of the ASI. The bronze girl image was discovered next to a fireplace in the room number 40 that had been a bath of House LV in Block 7 of the HR area. From the same room an artifact similar to a copper spoon with a tubular handle, and a copper statue of an elephant cast in the round are found. None of the European scholar took into account the material context of this statue's discovery before drawing his fanciful conclusions. If they had, then this Harappanartifact might not have been identified as a dancing girl at all. Based on the material context of its finding and in the absence of any textual evidence, this bronze female statue at best may tentatively be identified as a decorative piece of some kind. And it's any connection with professional dancing or *devadasi* tradition may be dismissed as an unsubstantiated inference of John Marshall.

Conclusion

In the British Raj, the European officials-cum-scholars constituted the interpretative communities that comprised diverse cloisters of knowledge producers (historians, archaeologists, geologists, and so forth). The institutions like schools, universities, archaeological survey, and such like formed the protected spaces, where the cloisters of knowledge producers functioned under the protection of the British government. They developed frames of assumptions and interpretative strategies based on philology, epigraphy, archaeology, and textual analysis to name a few, for the study of India's past as well as for the production of knowledge that legitimized the colonial authority in India. John Marshall as being a part of the colonial interpretative communities managed the cloister of the colonial archaeologists that discovered as well as interpreted the Harappan civilization. The racial conflicts, religion based periodization, oriental despotism and changeless Indian society were some of the predominant theories that the colonial archaeologists employed to study the Harappanartifacts. In the case of bronze girl statue from Mohenjodaro, Marshall and his fellow archaeologists constructed the professional identity of a dancer (*nauch* girl or *devadasi*) and racial identity of an 'aboriginal negro' for it. This statue in the European

writings thus became a cultural artifact that represented the racially different non-Aryan and dark-skin '*Other'* of the white skin Aryans and their fair skin European descendents.

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