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“Glorious role of Women in the Marxist Political and Socio-Cultural Movements of Bengal : 1940s- 1950s”

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Abstract:- Both elite and subaltern women of Bengal played an astonishingly power-packed role in the Progressive Marxist politico-cultural movement of Bengal (1940s- 1950s). That particular era, traumatised by World War II, famine, communal riots, Partition of India, refugee crisis, emboldened by the Tebhaga Movement, the Food Movement and the Movement against hike in tramfare and enriched by activities of Y.C.I., the Anti-Fascist Association of Writers and Artists as well as I.P.T.A., was marked by women's empowerment. Women's membership in the Communist Party started in 1936 and former revolutionary Latika Das was its first one. Women Party members were enrolled in every district in 1941-42. Manikuntala Sen was a significant leader of the Mahila Atmaraksha Samiti. Another spirited woman Reba Raychowdhury was a steadfast pillar of the Central Cultural Troupe of Communist Party. Nilima Sen, Gita Mukherjee, Sandhya Chatterjee, Suhasini Sen, Amiya Sen, Bela Lahiri, Preeti Lahiri, Pankaj Lahiri, Pratima Banerjee, Kanak Mukherjee, Renu Chakraborty and Nibedita Nag were elite women leaders active in Anti-Fascist propaganda, service for famine-stricken people, vibrant cultural programmes, Mahila Atmaraksha Samiti and Naarisheba Sangha, Bandimukti Movement etc.

Underprivileged rural womenfolk emerged as such a prominent force during the Tebhaga Movement that Bhawani Sen stated – ‘*Krishakbirangana, mahila bakta o pracharabhijankarirabanggramermahilara, jar aeiTebhagasangrameprayashoipurushdernetritto ditto, Banglar samajjivane eknotunrenaissaringitbaho.*’ Actually women like Dipashwari, Bimala Maji, Rasimoni, Ahalya, Uttami, Batasi, Sarojini, Bhandani and Rohini Barmani challenged both the exploitative economic system and also the conventional patriarchal structure of which a predominant part was sexual exploitation.

In this article both urban and rustic women's glorious role will be evaluated for paving the path of further research on contribution of Krishak Sabha and Mahila Atmaraksha Samiti.

Keywords :- Empowerment, Women, Progressive, Revolutionary upsurge, Marxist aesthetics.

Introduction:- Significant role of women in both urban and rural sphere should be highlighted for this particular era 1940s- 1950s. From 1936, women started to work as

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members of the Communist Party of India. Latika Das, who was closely associated with revolutionary party of Dhaka, was the first member of Communist Party in 1936. Kanak Dasgupta was the first student party member in 1937. Shanti Sarkar, Kalyani Mukhopadhyay, Preeti Lahiri, Gita Raychowdhury, Renu Chakraborty, Bela Chattopadhyay, Indusudha Ghosh, Suhasini Ganguly, Kalpana Dutta, Juiphul Basu, Manikuntala Sen, Bimala Maji, Shanti Pradhan, Manorama Guha and several others were important party members who contributed a lot in various activities of Mahila Samiti from 1936-1942/1943. Kolkata, Hooghly, Howrah, Barishal, Khulna, 24 Parganas, Mymansingh, Dhaka, Faridpur, Chittagong, Kumilla, Burdwan, Medinipur, Birbhum, Bankura, Jalpaiguri, Dinajpur, Pabna, Rajshahi, Surmavally, Rangpur had been strong forts of the women who were dedicated for the Communist Party.

Manikuntala Sen and Reba Raychowdhury were two extraordinary examples of glorious womenfolk, devoted to the Communist Party of India from Bengal. During 1937-38, Manikuntala joined party's student front as an outcome of the communication with Biswanath Mukherjee. Manikuntala was quite eloquent leader in 1941 and participated in anti-war propaganda during World War II as well as in formation of the famous Mahila Atmaraksha Samiti. She gave leadership in *bhukhamichhil* which went to Bidhansabha during devastating famine of 1943 and contemporary Chief Minister Fazlul Haque was compelled under circumstances to agree with their demand for adequate food supply on the spot. She was not only a capable organizer but also an eminent artist who took part as Panchanani (character having striking similarity with immortal freedom fighter Matangini Hazra) in renowned drama entitled Nabanna produced under supervision of Gananatya. This skill of artistic excellence was utilised for political activities when Manikuntala was interrogated by local hoodlums supported by opponent party of the Communist Party in 1948 while visiting Barakamalapura taking help of camouflage as wife of a young party cadre, and the courageous woman worked for the organization of Kharagpur rail workers in disguise with the name Bina for a long time. After imprisonment she maintained her undaunted spirit and participated in protest through fasting of 51 days. From 1952 upto 1962, she was an active member of the State Legislative Assembly from Kalighat and took significant part in formation of Ganatantrik Mahila Federation.

Reba Raychowdhury from Rangpur, sister of Binay Ray, famous singer and able organizer under umbrella of Gananatya Sangha, became ardent supporter of the Communist Party and in spite of vehement opposition from her father as well as elder sister, participated in party's student movement and women's forums. During 1943, Reba took part in providing helping hand for famine-stricken, impoverished people of Dompara and gave leadership of the procession which went to the bungalow of magistrate with several demands on behalf of the masses. She with other brave women gheraoed rice godowns in Badarganj and Rangpur and distributed rice among the needy poor population. After getting membership of Communist Party, she was forced to leave her parental house due to her father's steadfast opposition towards her leftist political activities but she obtained full-fledged support from elder brother Binay Ray. Reba reached Bombay in 1944 with her brother and joined Central Cultural Troupe under supervision of P.C. Joshi. Reba got excellent acknowledgement for her singing of 'Suno Hindke Rahenewalo' from eminent personalities namely Sarojini Naidu and Bijaylakshmi Pandit. She got training in dancing also for inspiration of Shanti

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Bardhan and participated in Central ballet troupe which covered all over India for its shows in 1945-1946. In 1947 she returned in Calcutta and herself became a capable trainer of dance forms which she experienced in Bombay. She took part in helping refugees after partition of India, participated as artist in several dramas like Nayanpur, Rahumukto, Debigarjan etc; took part as member of party's cultural front during the Tebhaga Movement, movement for release of political prisoners also and kept fast during imprisonment as part and parcel of continuous protest.

The remarkable female activists of the Communist Party had been able to mobilize women in the Tebhaga Movement under the supervision of the Mahila AtmaRaksha Samiti and they utilised their large support base in the tough struggle for creating a dignified life-space of the destitute refugee women of Bengal. Women marched shoulder to shoulder with their refugee male counterparts in workers' struggle supported by the leftist oppositional politics which radicalized Bengal. In West Bengal the historic fortitude and exemplary resilience of refugee- women overcoming trauma of displacement, assault and abject poverty completely altered the ideal image of the Bengali bhadramahila and reformulated social structure also.

Rural women's historic struggle in the Tebhaga Movement of rebellious peasantry was praised by Bhabani Sen who opined that women leadership in Tebhaga challenging both economic exploitation and patriarchal hegemony as well as sexual harassment in multiple layers besides domestic violence, was indeed symbol of a new renaissance in Bengal. Dipashwari, Joymoni, Bimala Maji, Bhandani and Rohini Barmani, Rasimoni, Saralabala Pal, Phuleshwari, Budhmoni, Ahalya, Uttami, Batasi, Sarojini were significant names in history of that agricultural revolution. Ila Mitra's leadership empowered Santal women of Nachol of Nababganj area during the Tebhaga Movement of 1948-49 and as a result, Ila Mitra had to withstand barbaric custodial violence for the revengeful attitude of contemporary Muslim League government of Pakistan.

In this article, I will try my best to uphold a complete picture of women's participation and empowered role in socio-cultural welfare under the political banner of the Communist Party from 1940s to 1950s.

Emergence of empowered Progressive women : Early stage-

Women started to work as member of the Communist Party from 1936 and Latika Das, Sudha Ray, Kanak Dasgupta, Kalyani Mukhopadhyay, Renu Chakravorty, Amiya Santra, Madhuri Ghosh, Bela Chattopadhyay, Reba Raychowdhury, Sandhya Chatterjee, Preeti Lahiri, Juiphul Basu, Manikuntala Sen, Gita Raychowdhury were some significant names of women activists of the early years.

In August- September of 1942, the Communist Party organized several meetings and processions in Munsiganj, Barishal, Dinajpur, Jashor and Rangpur etc. for saving the poor people from clutches of the black-marketeters. During that turbulent time women of Bengal had been motivated to observe atmarakshasaptaha and women raised demands for controlling food price, formation of shops of controlled price system through governmental endeavour, organizing mahila atmaraksha samitis in various districts, party's agenda-centric

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prabhat- pheri, exhibition of posters, ganasangeet, arrangement of women's meetings etc. On 8th May, 1943, Pradeshik Mahila Atmaraksha Samiti emerged and more than 100 representatives from 21 districts of Bengal assimilated here (From Chittagong, Medinipur, Rangpur, Sundarban etc. areas) . Selected President was Indira Debi Chowdhurani and Secretary was Ela Reed . Urban middle class family- oriented women here merged with the slum dwellers with the common aim of solving food crisis, overcoming the Fascist enemy, release of political prisoners from jails etc. Mahila Atmaraksha Samiti, according to Saroj Mukhopadhyay , became a massive organization of 22000 women only within a year after its formation. Its first working committee included President Indira Debi, Vice- President Mrs. D.M. Basu, Secretary Ela Reed, Assistant Secretary Amiya Debi and other vibrant members such as Manikuntala Sen etc. Food Movement organizing, dedicated efforts in sphere of handicrafts, helping common people in long lines for ration and kerosene ; raising demands for national unity, independence and bandimukti etc. were its main activities. Bengal's women were deeply motivated by the undaunted spirit of the womenfolk of China and reports published in the *Janajuddha* had shown that Bengal never witnessed such a large scale women's movement before this time. Women whole- timers of the Communist Party namely Bela Lahiri, Kanak Mukhopadhyay and Manikuntala Sen sacrificed a lot to make Mahila Atmaraksha Samiti the biggest female – centric association of Bengal. Eminent elite women namely Manjushri Chattopadhyay, Gita Mallick, Rani Mahalanabish, Mrs. D.M. Basu, Mrs. Sushobhan Sarkar, Sita Devi, Suchitra Mitra and Mrinalini Banerjee participated in various activities related to welfare/ all- round development of women during this era.

Mahila Atmaraksha Samiti became enriched through the participation of Nely Sengupta, Jyotirmoyi Ganguly, Mohini Devi, Prabhabati Devi Saraswati, Mohini Devi's daughter Aryabala Devi and Rani Mahalanabish . This organization used to publish monthly periodical entitled 'Ghare Baire ' . Renowned women writers namely Ashapura Devi, Asha Ganguly, Uma Devi, Meera Devi, Maitrayee Devi, Sita Devi, Indira Devi Chowdhurani and Prabhabati Devi Saraswati contributed in this journal. Its first editor was Manjushri Devi and Kanak Mukherjee later occupied this portfolio for a long time. Stories, essays , poems had been published by Tilottama Bhattacharyya, Uma Ganguly, Mukti Mitra and Kamala Mukherjee in this particular forum. Dr. Renuka Ray and Dr. Jyotsna Majumdar were regular authors of the section entitled ' Maa o Shiishu'. This ' Ghare Baire' was a remarkable journal completely managed by women who wrote for it, collected advertisements, distributed , checked quality of printing , organized shows for fund collection to mitigate the crisis of dearth of money and actually used to play multiple roles for its maintenance.

Canteen opening for famine- stricken , impoverished people, providing milk for children , Anti- Fascist propaganda, Bandimukti Movement organizing, maintaining safe shelter for women , formation of centres for education and occupation for women etc. were main activities of empowered leaders of contemporary Mahila Atmaraksha Samiti and thus they successfully upheld the flag of the Progressive leftist socio-cultural forum .

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Women and People's Relief Committee, Mahila AtmarakshaSamiti etc. :-

Nikhilbanga MahilaAtmaraksha Samiti/ BangiyaPradeshik Mahila Atmaraksha Samiti , which emerged in 1943, was divided after India's Partition in 1947. The section of West Bengal was entitled as Paschimbanga MahilaAtmaraksha Samiti. In 1959, according to the proposal of its 9th conference, it was entitled as Paschimbanga Mahila Samiti because the situation related to World War II had been changed and so there was no need of the word ' atmaraksha' in the name of contemporary women's organization. The new name continued for 10 years.

Due to the influence of the Communist Party's women volunteers , the organization could spread in 28 districts of undivided Bengal. Some women from the Muslim League, Hindu Mahasabha and Congress also co- operated with the leftist women's association. Study classes had been arranged in 1943 for political training of women workers by Comrade Bhabani Sen , Saroj Mukherjee and Biswanath Mukherjee , Bijoy Modak and Kamal Chattopadhyay. Mukta Kumar, Pushpo Ghosh, Sandhya Chatterjee, Aparna Palchowdhury, Asita Palchowdhury participated in those classes. Bhabani Sen , Somnath Lahiri, Saroj Mukherjee, Sudhin Ray, Bankim Mukherjee were extremely active in organizing women's front in provincial and district level. Mahila AtmarakshaSamiti tried its best for relief measures to save famine- affected people of Bengal and published a pamphlet namely 'CALL TO WOMEN' on 20thDecember, 1943 as propaganda in India and outside our country also. This organization along with Bengal Women's Food Representative Committee, YWCA etc. total 14 associations for women collaboratively formed Bengal Women's Food Committee which collected Rs. 75000/- for the poor , hungry people. Milk for children and medicines for both women and children had been distributed under leadership of the branches of Mahila Atmaraksha Samiti in Barishal, Dhaka, Faridpur, Mymansingh, Khulna, Noakhali, Kumilla, Chittagong, Jalpaiguri, Bagura, Rajshahi, Pabna, Medinipur, Burdwan , Howrah, Nadia, Hooghly and 24 Pargana etc. Calcutta branch of the Samiti opened total 17 centres for providing food in northern , central and southern parts of the city.

Atmaraksha Samiti organized exhibition for handicrafts made by women in Calcutta in September 1943 and arranged for prizes also. People's Relief Committee , formed in September , 1943, was enriched by participation of pillars of this Mahila Samiti namely Ela Reed, Manikuntala Sen, Kamala Chatterjee, Kanak Mukherjee etc. On 13thJanuary, 1944, a conference was organized by this women's forum on relief- providing centric issues. President was Dr. Shyamaprasad Mukherjee of the Bengal Relief Committee and devastating impact of famine on women , forced prostitution were discussed .

In April, 1944. Nari Seba Sangha was formed through joint endeavour of BangiyaPradeshik MahilaAtmaraksha Samiti and other women's organizations with representatives of relief-based associations. Total 18 organizations collaborated ; pillars were Sarojini Naidu, Lady Pratima Mitra, Lady Abala Basu ; president was Dr. Shyamaprasad Mukhopadhyay, vice-president Dr. Bidhanchandra Ray; secretaries were Sita Chowdhury and Khitishprasad Chattopadhyay. Rehabilitation of fallen women. welfare measures for children , providing educational facilities for women were some significant objectives. This Seba Sangha wanted

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to open at least 50 homes and handicraft- centres and approximate estimate was 50 lakh rupees.

Mahila Atmaraksha Samiti in June 1944, observed ' Samajjivanerpunargathansaptaha' and continued propaganda for homeless women as well as children . 'Kaparsaptaha' was observed also and the Samiti was quite active in providing clothing for needy children in various districts of Bengal. During the days of bloody communal riots (1946-47) relief squad had been sent on behalf of the Samiti in Noakhali. Renu Chakraborty, Madhuri Dasgupta, Manikuntala Sen took part in this endeavour. Communist women organized *shantimichhil* on streets of Calcutta during that turbulent period and Kamala Chatterjee was the pillar of ' SanjuktoShantibahini'. Congress and Communist Party's women volunteers formed ' Jhansi Rani Brigade' in September, 1947 and marched on streets of Calcutta for peace and tranquillity.

Leaders and activists of the Mahila Atmaraksha Samiti such as Manikuntala Sen, Kamala Mukherjee, Kanak Mukherjee, Manjushri Chattopadhyay had to withstand wrath of the Congress government in 1949-51 and they faced imprisonment. The Samiti was declared illegal by contemporary government in January, 1950. But their struggle continued in both urban and rural areas.

Women in Anti- Fascist Cultural and Gananatya Movement :-

Dedicated artists of the Anti- Fascist cultural forum (such as Binay Ray) promoted by the Communist Party of India played a pivotal role to provide adequate help for the impoverished , famine- stricken population of Bengal. 'Nabanna' drama was one of the most famous creations of Bijan Bhattacharyya, an eminent pillar of the I.P.T.A Movement. Manikuntala Sen, one of the leaders of the Mahila Atmaraksha Samiti, performed as Panchanani in this drama and that character Panchanani was shaped keeping in mind the image of freedom fighter Matangini Hazra. Kanak Mukhopadhyay opined that Manikuntala actually made everyone astonished through her power- packed performance .

Reba Raychowdhury in her memoirs entitled ' Jivanertaneshilpertane' had written about her struggle against Fascism and famine besides her endeavour to overcome obstacles of opposition from her conservative father and elder sister also after she obtained membership of the Communist Party. She was compelled to leave her parental house in Rangpur and went to Bombay with brother Binay Ray to participate in cultural activities of the Central Ballet Troupe during 1944-47. She made cheap but beautiful dresses as well as jewelleryes for performances in Holy dance etc. also. Her trainers (gurus) were exemplary stalwarts such as Shanti Bardhan, Shachin Shankar, Narendra Sharma and Abani Dasgupta . Folk- art based cultural items took a turn towards classical style due to arrival of Rabi Shankar in Central Squad and this transformation was criticised by Reba Raychowdhury. After returning to Calcutta, she took part in performances of I.P.T.A and earned praise for taking part in ' Janantike' drama of Salil Chowdhury and shadow-play entitled ' Shahider dak' of Niranjana Sen. Dramas produced by branches of South Calcutta under banner of I.P.T.A were enriched by significant performance of Reba Raychowdhury who once dedicated herself to the dance, song, play etc. of the Central Troupe of Bombay formed by P.C. Joshi. Reba indeed delivered excellent performances in plays of Biru

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Mukhopadhyay('Sankranti', 'Bhanga gora khela', 'Kalbaishakhi', 'Naukadubi', and 'Muktirupay') , in 'Nayanpur' play of Anil Ghosh ,Bijan Bhattacharyya's ' Debigarjan' and also in drama namely 'Rahumukto' etc.

Preeti Bandopadhyay was a remarkable singer of the famous Central Cultural Troupe , brainchild of the Communist Party's General Secretary P.C. Joshi . She took part in activities of I.P.T.A in Rajshahi and after participating in Central Squad of Bombay , she had to perform in stage with 15 days' training only. She participated in shows of ' Spirit of India ' in all- India basis and later gained name and fame for performances in Rangmahal hall of Calcutta. She trained tram-workers also in singing and dancing and prepared cultural workers for the Communist Party. Rubi Dutta was another famous name of the Central Troupe besides Reba and Preeti, two stalwarts.

Usha Dutta participated in I.P.T.A and collected money for war- affected and famine-stricken Bengal by shows of 'Durbhikko nritya' with Panu Pal. She was influenced by Hemango Biswas to join in I.P.T.A. She earned fame in Panjab under banner of the Communist Party and in Bejwada also with her 'Bhukha nritya' related performance. She participated in squad of ' Antim Abhilash'(Hindi translation of Bijan Bhattacharyya's ' Jabanbandi') play which was produced by I.P.T.A and became famous in Maharashtra and Gujarat. Usha later went to Bombay to perform in the movie ' Dhartike Lal' for invitation of Khwaja Ahmad Abbas.

Sadhana Raychowdhury came under the banner of the Communist Party through her relative ChinmohanSehanabish and later participated in singing squad of I.P.T.A.

Women in Tebhaga Movement and its reflection in contemporary literature :-

Bengal witnessed a massive peasant upsurge in 1946 and that uprising entitled the Tebhaga Movement was primarily based on the demand for two-third portion of production for peasantry . That movement was undivided Bengal's last large agricultural movement which continued after transfer of power and Partition of India. The movement took a historic turn in Kakdwip- Lalganj but ultimately was crushed in 1947-48 and later years. In Dinajpur , women activists had been given leadership by Rohini Barman and Joymoni Barman against police force and jotdars in Atwari Thana.

Among prominent women dedicated to the cause of Tebhaga, peasantComrade Dipashwari courageously fought against police violence and after that among 30 thanas of Dinajpur, the Tebhaga Movement rapidly could spread in 22 thanas. In Debiganj ofJalpaiguri , a Rajbanshi widow famous as 'Buri maa' organized a *naribahini* . In Ranishankail thana, police was attacked by women rebels guided by Bhandani and Rohini.

In Nachol thana of Rajshahi , the movement occurred during the phase of 1948-1950. Among excessive police brutality, and reign of terror inflicted by plunder and molestation of the Santal women, the struggle for Tebhaga flourished under leadership of Ila Mitra, Ramen Mitra, Animesh Lahiri, Brindaban Saha, Ajhar Hossain and Chitto Chakravarti. Nachol's peasant movement was marked by well-organized propaganda , proper training to

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withstand armed police atrocities etc. Ila Mitra was tortured and molested within police custody but did not utter a single word which could be used against other activists of Tebhaga.

In Chandanpiri of Kakdwip thana, police killed mercilessly several women namely Uttami, Batasi, Sarojini and even pregnant activist Ahalya and as a result two men mainly responsible for such violence namely Paresh Das and Basanta had been murdered by rebel peasants of Chandanpiri and Lalganj.

In DubirBheri of Hooghly district, police firing caused death of Pushpa Majhi, Panchubala Bhowmick, Dasibala Mal, Kalibala Pakhira and Muktakeshi Majhi in 19th February of 1949. Jhata-bahini of 250-300 women had been organized by Saraladi of Narail and police force retreated before her followers during the Tebhaga Movement. Bimala Maji was successful to organize militant peasant women activists in Nandigram thana of Medinipur .

Historian Kunal Chattopadhyay stated that women volunteers under leadership of Comrade Bimala Maji fought against police force with *da ,banti, jhata ,lanka- nun* .Nari rakshibahini showed exemplary courage and steadfastness in Dinajpur, Rangpur ,Narail of Jashor and many other areas during that turbulent period. Joymoni of Baliadanga encouraged many women to take part in the uprising namely Sia Barmani, Mati Barmani, Brindavani Barmani and Jaya Barmani etc. Women militants played an important role in eradicating social exploitation and domestic violence on women and they warned as well as punished abusive husbands engaged in wife- beating as a habituated practice in rural households.

In Baheratali village, peasant upsurge witnessed glorious role of woman Hajong leader Rasimoni who became a martyr in 1948 while combating armed military forces besides Someshwaririver .Rasimoni herself killed the person among military force who molested a girl namely Saraswati and fought till her last breath hand in hand with male leaders like Surendra who became martyr also in that battle .Rasimoni was an active member of Mahila Atmaraksha Samiti and trained women with technique of guerrilla warfare against well -equipped armed forces of military. Suprakash Ray in his essay entitled *Shahid RashmonirKahini* included in the book entitled *Tebhagar Nari* edited by Chiraranjan Pal, had rightly stated that-

“ Baheratalirjuddhebidrohider joy holo. Shahid Rashmoniradarsho, jivanbyapisangram o atmatyag Bangla tathaBharaterkrishak- sangramenotunpransancharkorechhe. Tari adarsheanupranitohoye Hajong chashidersangramerparabartistareo Tanko pratharuchhederjonyo shahid hoyechhen Hajong chashiderbir kanya Revati o Sankhamonisaho aro ekshatopanchashjon Hajong birsantan. ”

Peter Custers in the book entitled *Women in the Tebhaga Uprising*opined that women volunteers safeguarded villages, arranged for shelter of male rebels , supplied food to them, collected secret news of attack of forces of landlords empowered by police and military, harassed police forces with traditional household weapons , warned male activists at the moment of entry of police in villages .

The Tebhaga Movement had a strong imprint on the arena of Bengali literature , especially on short stories and novels. Susnata Das in his article entitled *Bangla*

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Kothasahityekrishaksangram :Tebhagargalpo o upanyaserprekshite (included in Biswabandhu Bhattacharyya and Dilip Saha- edited book namely *BanglaPragati Sahitya : Samay o Sanskritiritibritto*) observed that-

“ Tebhagarandolane nirjatitonarigonniijedermaandiyechilen- prandiyechilen du-dhoronermuktirjonyo- srenishoshan osamajikshoshanthekesthayinishkritilabheruddeshye.....Banglachhotogalpeshrenisachetank rishak -sangramerprotiphalansarbaprathamghateTebhagaandolan -kendrikrachanagulitei. Nishandehebishisto Communist kothasahityik ManikBandopadhyay chilen er samaykalmadhyepurodhabyaktitto. AnyannodermadhyebisheshbhabeullekhjogyaholenSwarnakamal Bhattacharyya, NaniBhowmick, Sushil Jana, Samareash Basu, Sauri Ghatak, Mihir Acharyya, Mihir Sen , Abu Ishaq pramukho. Eder rachitoantotokuritigalpo Bangla sahityechhotogalpermadhyameTebhagaAndolonerdharakebohon kore cholechhe.”

Sauri Ghatak explained emergence of consciousness with self- respect among peasant womenfolk in his well- reputed stories namely ‘ Comrade ‘ and ‘ Aranyerswapno’. Renowned researchers such as Sunil Sen, Rani Dasgupta and Peter Custers elaborately described anti- feudal insurgent outlook based militant activities of rural subaltern population and especially rustic women. Sauri Ghatak through his creations had shown that krishak samitis even arranged for special court to curb tendency of domestic violence in rural household. In the story ‘ Aranyerswapno’ one can observe the scenario of barbaric torture of military forces inflicted upon young women activists and social stigma which they had to withstand after being molested/ raped by oppressor classes. Haripada , himself a leader of krishak samiti, declined to give shelter and rehabilitate his daughter- in-law Pakhi , who had been raped by military forces.

Manik Bandopadhyay had written two remarkable stories namely ‘ HaranerNatjamai’ and ‘ ChhotoBakulpurerjatri’ in the backdrop of the Tebhaga Movement . Moynar maa was an extraordinary character created by the author and she saved rebel leader Bhuban Mondal who was in disguise of her beloved son- in-law .Thus she outwitted police forces and such courage and ability to cross social barrier was outcome of the new consciousness produced by the historic movement. Dr. Biswabandhu Bhattacharyya praised ManikBandopadhyay’s exemplary capability in the story entitled ‘ ChhotoBakulpurerjatri’ exhibiting atmosphere of terror created by landlords and collaborator oppressors. Bravery and smartness of subaltern women during the days of Tebhaga were depicted by the author. ‘ Jayadrath’ and ‘ Chaitaliasha’ were the author’s other significant stories expressing emergence of class consciousness among peasant women.

Sushil Jana wrote Tebhaga- centric important stories namely ‘ Bou’ and ‘ Beti’. In the first one , we can observe a newly married woman sacrificed her life before bullet of police to save her husband Arjun’s life. Arjun was a rebel leader who could spent only one night with his wife before her death caused by police firing in early morning.

Samareash Basu depicted a horrible picture of atrocities of joint forces of police and landlords in his story ‘ Protirodh’. During their terrible assault , office of krishak samiti was

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burnt to ashes; they murdered and plundered mercilessly, women had been naked and molested. Susnata Das opined that-

"Tebhaga Andolan damanesarkaridamannitirnarakiyobibaranSamaresh Basu jadiyechhenekmatro tar paksheibodhhay ta deoasambhav .SandehoneiKakdwiper shahid antosattwaAhalyar smritilekhakchittesadajagoritochilo."

Women's role during devastated era of Partition and refugee crisis :-

West Bengal was indeed overcrowded and flooded with refugees after Partition of India and undaunted refugee families withstood governmental repression to eradicate them from their forcefully occupied colonies. Women activists like Manikuntala Sen tried their best during rehabilitation process of those uprooted people and especially women victims of defilement /abandonment, initially taking shelter in Camps of Sealdah, Dhubulia and Ranaghat etc. Manikuntala observed a real renaissance related to female emancipation due to the empowerment of self- dependent , bread- winner once refugee women who came from East Bengal. Mahila Samitis flourished in those colonies with help from male family members also and according to Manikuntala Sen, some ladies namely Renu Ganguly, Kabita, Kamala and Basanti emerged as able organizers of Colony Samitis. Manikuntala stated that- "*Samitirsankhyakromoshobartelaglo. ParabartisamayekhonAtmarakshaSamitisahoei sob Samitigulirmilitokendrorupe Mahila Federation gareuthlotakhon e samasyaanektamitlo."*

Rachel Weber elaborately explained women's role in the development of refugee Colonies of South Calcutta. Bijoy Majumdar became successful in convincing members of the Mahila Atmaraksha Samiti to communicate with the refugee women overcoming lathi charges of the police with courage and determination holding their household weapons. Many women were wounded and some had to die ; even pregnant woman was not spared from attack of police bullet in Dhakuria. Prafulla Chakravarti, the author of *The Marginal Men* , had rightly declared that women were completely brought to the streets by the eviction process. Women's such militant activities and rallies mainly coloured by the leftist politics, continued later in the Movement against Tram Fare Enhancement (1953) and the Food Movement (1959).

Conclusion:- Undoubtedly in the new Progressive socio-cultural renaissance, women of Bengal played a vibrant and power-packed part through various performances related with Social Realism for helping Hungry Bengal. People's Relief Committee ,Mahila AtmarakshaSamiti, NarisebaSangha , Women's Union were significant organizations developed with active participation of female Communist activists. Those bodies used to provide medicines, shelter, education related to handicrafts for the needy ones. Kamala Mukherjee, Renu Chakraborty, Indusudha Ghosh were deeply connected with Nariseba Sangha which organized excellent exhibitions with several objects created by empowered and self- dependent women. Members of Mahila AtmarakshaSamiti had to withstand and overcome hatred towards Communists invading mass psyche and staunch opposition from their own conservative families in the days of Anti- Fascist Movement during World War II

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and Famine. Some activists had to leave their houses to continue their participation in the Progressive Cultural Movement promoted by contemporary I.P.T.A etc.

Rural downtrodden women from the peasants during the historic Tebhaga Movement played an extremely militant part of it and their exemplary courage, intelligence, ability of collaborative opposition against the age-old exploitative socio- economic system, strata-consciousness even challenged violence inflicted by their so- called male guardians within own household . In 1944, there were 43,500 members in Mahila Atmaraksha Samiti and a large number of those members had been none but poor women from peasant families. For example it can be stated that in Dinajpur district , 80% of members of this Samiti were peasant women and women from urban impoverished families. Jashor, Nandigram, Pashkura, Ranishankail Sakrail, DubirBheri, Baheratali, Lalganj and Chandanpiri were some significant areas where Naribahini/ Narirakshibahini played a glorious role withstanding gruesome police atrocities .

Finally it can be stated that women activists in urban sphere completely transformed the ideal image of bhadramahila in middle class household of Bengal and in rural sphere created a new era in zamindar- peasantry and man-woman relationship.

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