

The Position of the Women Revolutionaries in the Revolutionary Movement of Bengal: The Revolution and the Land and the Society

Nupur Biswas

Assistant Teacher

Deshapriya Balika Vidyamandir, Prafullakanan, Kolkata, West Bengal, India

I. INTRODUCTION

It is some women who participated, in general, in the freedom struggle of India and in particular, in the revolutionary movement fraught with dangers and difficulties. The incidence of women's getting involved in a revolutionary movement by way of their being defiant of various social inhibitions on the one hand and both the stubborn opposition cum the repression of the British government, on the other hand is, of course, an object preserving of land approbation and commendation too. Despite, an initiative taken by social reformers more than one of the 19th century, the Indian women, save some brilliant exceptions, could not usually churn out from the circumference of the inner apartments. But the participation of these women in the revolutionary movement by way of their overcoming adverse situations indicates that women also succeeded in leaving behind them a great and noble contribution in natural life. Confronted with so many hazards travails lying the path to revolution and through going underground these women forces fought tooth and nail and neck to neck with their male counterparts and at the same time act themselves to different constructive works and service as well. Over and above, the way they maintained a balance between their domestic life and the revolutionary activities is unparalleled.

Contemporaneous with the growth of the nationalist thought in the wake of the impact of the western education is the rise of the secret societies like the *Anushilan Samiti* and the *Jugantar* group. It is not a tender - hearted house wife but a strong - willed woman signifying a motherland, which is worthy of being worshipped. But prowess or valour of a woman was merely an abstraction, visible not only in the world of imagination but also in the plain of realistic form in some respects. The name of Sarala Devi, the daughter of Swarnakumari Devi, the elder sister of Rabindranth Tagore may also be recalled here. A realization dawned on her that the emancipation of a nation could not be possible without the sound physique of the youth. She introduced the practice of the *Virastami* and *Udayaditya* festival in 1902 for the purpose of helping the Bengali youth to get rid of their physical weakness. Allegorically, her *Rudraveena*, a kind harp with seven cords was in tune with this *Raga* (a mode of Indian classical music) that 'A British blow versus a native fist lie in my hands and this was aimed at dissipating fear from the minds of the people of Bengal for white skinned people.'¹

For the young men of Bengal, Sarala Devi established gymnasiums and clubs of their own for the purpose of ensuring their participation in the national movement through the development of their mental faculty and physique as well. Such type of enterprise of Sarala Devi must have provided a boost towards armed and anti - government activities. At the same time, she remained reticent over the question of the physical exercise of women. She was in vigorous campaign for affording opportunities before the women for their joining politics.² Finally, she made a bid for inoculating the women with the ideals of wife, mother and daughter in a family.³

Despite such initial efforts, it took some more time for the women to take an active part in politics. Like a 'Flutist of Hamelin', Mahatma Gandhi was a driving force behind championing the cause of the women's joining politics publicly. Meanwhile, proposals were mooted for the opening of the women's branches in the secret societies as well. Yet for a long time, the inner circles of the secret societies remained inaccessible to the women. In most cases, the women were required to lend support to the revolutionary movement from the outside. They were initiated into the revolutionary ideals through familial connections. Their identification with the revolutionaries led them realise the implications of a revolution, further they also felt stimulated by the revolutionary life style and the self - sacrifice of their senior and junior fellows.

II. THE PROBLEMS IN RESPECT OF THE PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN SOCIETIES

At the initial phase of the revolutionary movement in Bengal the members of the secret principles involving abstinence from sexual pleasures and rigid instructions. To this was also added strict rules confirming avoidance of the company of women. In his memoirs entitled *elay Tirish Bachhar O Pak - Bharater Swadhinata Sangram* (Thirty Years in Imprisonment and the Freedom Struggle of Pakistan and India) Trailakyanath Chakrabarti, a revolutionary, deals with the aspects like the constitution, the written promise and the initiation. The male members had to take four kinds of oaths, with each was appended a rigid injunction. In the final written promise the members were directed to sever their links with their parents, sisters and their hearth and home.⁴ Again, at the time of their swearing in, the mode of initiative at the temple of goddess, especially, the worship and religious service, oblation and observance of religious rules and prescriptions relating to oath taking at the night of new moon were very much arduous tasks wherefrom the women were totally excluded.

What was demanded of or from the revolutionaries was an almost disownment of women like a drug. As a result, the question of the revolutionaries' weaning away from women at the primary stage of the revolutionary movement was of paramount importance. Pulin Behari Das, the most important leader of the Dacca *Anushilan Samiti*, was strongly against the involvement of women in politics. In this context he points it out in his memoir *Amar Jiban Kahini* (Tales of My Life).

"Lured by the femininity those innumerable companions, followers, patrons, after having been assembled are overindulged in the boastful utterances of the women to such an extent as to become exposed gradually; as a result the more the so called independence is gaining ground or a foothold, the more adultery is spreading over its tentacles throughout the country."⁵

No less significant is the observation of Troilakyanath Chakrabarti, a revolutionary, on the question of the inclusion of women in the secret societies. Troilakyanath Chakrabarti states, "In 1920, we attempted to make women to be the members and made some progress in this direction. But upon being cognizant of the vices attending, we stopped it. Afterwards, our members continued to enroll their mothers, sisters and near relatives into the party, without having any contact with the others."⁶

He did not delve in detail the harmful effects of the women's joining the revolutionary party but he has represented the issue of the torture of police upon a woman for hunting of any revolutionary.

Troilakyanath Chakrabarti further states, "On those days, such a situation developed as to render it difficult for a youth to find out an accommodation for himself against paying a rent. He was suspected of being a member of a revolutionary party. To come out of such suspicion, an old mother of someone else was engaged in that room after her having been brought therein and she treated all the lads with care like her own son. She has had to undergo untold sufferings in the event of the encirclement of that house on grounds of suspicion by the police."⁷

Notwithstanding such problems, she spoke high of the women members. She asserts, "Many among our women members have left behind them an evidence of their spirit and presence of mind in various ways."⁸

According to Purnananda Dasgupta, a revolutionary, "His mother Labangalata Devi had winked at a plan for providing training to women for a revolution to take place, but she refrained herself from so doing due to the oppression of the revolutionaries and her male relatives."⁹

Initially, the revolutionaries were generally split up into two categories - the first one was prone to ultra - reactionary or male - dominated ideas and thoughts. The other group became progressive to a certain extent. The first group was not at all for the involvement of the women in the revolutionary activities. While the other group came to this realization that in spite of constraints a revolution could not reach its goal against its formidable adversary in any country without the support of women.

Banalata Sen, a revolutionary states that during training a communion between a male and a female was prohibited. An elderly male being was in charge of the organisation of the women. He used its establishment contact with the female head of a women's organisation. Ramesh Acharya was their leader and Banalata Sen herself being the guide of the women's organisation. It was only for 'Ramesh da' to come into contact with the women. He used to say - "You, the women, are like the appendices in our body. One cannot but seek your help and again, involving your assistance invites troubles for us."¹¹

In another incident, it is apparent that Barin Ghosh was making a best use of an allegation before Arabinda Ghosh against Jatindranath Bandyopadhyay for the latter's complicity in a woman related affair for the expulsion of Jatindranath from the

leadership of the *Jugantar*. As a result, the direct participation of women in revolutionary work was hindered again and again due to a tussle between the inner apartments and the outer.

In the 1920s, a change in the idea about women's worth took place due mainly to a growth in the self - respect of women. Many a women was initiated into revolutionary principles through their receiving training in body building and the wielding of arms in the training centres for women especially in Dipali Club and Vidyasagar's Bani Bhavan. Nonetheless, the leaders of the revolution did not venture on sending a woman revolutionary to a revolutionary action. Sri Akhil Chandra Nandy, a revolutionary remarks in his memoir -

"The general view about the action of women is that the women are not physically and mentally sufficiently fit for the undertaking of such adventures. Their efforts will be an exercise in futility. It will arrest the attention of the police. To secure their indirect help will be a difficult task and as a result the work of the revolutionaries will suffer a lot."¹²

In this connection, he also makes a mention of the fact that a revolutionaries leader told him -

"A minor girl cannot shoot by way of her standing before an English man six feet tall, her hands will tremble and revolver will fall to the ground. It will totally be a scandalous act."¹³

That is to say that the revolutionaries were skeptical about recognizing women as their fellow soldiers. But Pritilata and Bina were initiated into the revolutionary creed by the Dipali Club and iban Kalpana, the members of the Chhatri Club. They raised the questions - if the men resorted to self - immolation for the cause of a country, why could not be the women? In view of such disputes and claims the secret societies were forced to slacken their rules and restrictions. Again, not from outside, the women were also admitted members into the inner circles of the secret societies. The women became a party to patriotic activities.

Most of those women wielding arms and ammunitions unitedly with the male revolutionaries and swooping down upon the British administration at the instance of the revolutionaries' party and also at considerable risk were mostly the educated young women. Like the male revolutionaries, the women revolutionaries also did realize that the rule of the foreigners that is the British was a cordial factor behind the distresses and the miseries of the Indians and also the degradation of the Indian nation and an intense hatred and resentment against the British rule were infused in their minds. The name of Pritilata Waddadar, a woman participant in the revolt of the youth in Chittagong stands foremost in this context. A statement was found out from the pocket of Pritilata Waddadar, a woman revolutionary killed in an armed expedition against a European club situated at a valley in Chittagong on 24th September 1932. An idea about her attitude towards the rule of the British and also about the revolutionary movement may be had from the statement -

"British people have snatched away our independence. ... They are the sole cause of our complete ruin, moral, physical, political and economic and thus have proved the worst enemy of our country. So we have compelled to take up arms against the lives of any and every member of British Community."¹⁴

But despite their profound love for the country and iron - will for participating in an armed expedition even at the cost of their life she as a woman revolutionary had to face a negative stand from the male revolutionaries. She states with great lamentation -

"I wonder why there should be any distinction males and females in a fight for the country's freedom. If brother can feel for their mother country and can fight for her cause why not the sisters? ... The modern Indian woman, be deprived of joining this noble fight to redeem one's country from foreign domination. If sisters can stand side by side with the brothers in a Satyagraha movement why are not they so entitled in a Revolutionary movement? As regards the methods, armed rebellion is not an ignoble method. It has been successfully adopted in many countries and females have joined it in hundreds. Then why should India alone regard this method as an abominable one? As regards fitness is it not sheer injustice to the females that they will always be thought less fit and weaker than the males in a fight for freedom?"¹⁵

Akhil Chandra Nandy, a revolutionary sheds light on the doubt about the physical fitness needed for an armed expedition and also on the negative stand taken on a woman revolutionary in a revolutionary struggle in his memoirs and indicates - "Can the soft - hearted women proceed in a blood - stained slippery was with firmness? Both physical strength and moral courage are a must for a struggle. Even, in spite of will can the women gain that and go ahead in a struggle like the male fellow soldiers by way of overcoming their natural instinct and physical limitations?"¹⁶

Still then, despite this negativity Akhil Chandra Nandy took an initiative in making women involved in revolutionary activities. In this connection he referred to Prafulla Nandini Brahma. According to him, Prafulla Nandini when informed of how far hazardous and risky the path to revolution was, how much torture would befall her, how much would be fear and

alarm, remained determined and unrelenting too, when apprehensions about the failure of a woman in a revolutionary path or bid were communicated to her, she retorted -

“Have men achieved success on all activities? Did not any one meet with failure? If we fail, why should there be a scandal? A unique example will be set by this.”¹⁷

Finally, Prafulla Nandini began to work among their classmates with great enthusiasm and excitement. To start with, they provided them with works dealing with nationalism and later on with works dealing with books proscribed by the government for their study. They took initiative in admitting those to the revolutionary party, deemed to be eligible for such purpose.

The logical outcrop of these activities was the killing of the magistrate of Comilla by Shanti Ghosh and Suniti Chaudhuri later on. The contributions of these two girls towards the freedom movement were received with appreciation and slander as well. A mention has been made of this in The Daily Statesman of 17th December 193 in this way -

“It is a heinous crime and unbecoming of the traditions of Indian womanhood”, declared by Mr. Vallabhbhai Patel, the President of the Congress.”

Deploing over such killing, the former Mayor of Calcutta (B. C. Roy) says that this information that a Bengali woman had brutally murdered Mr. Stevens was especially disgraceful since the accused assailment was a Bengali woman.¹⁸ That is to say that this incident struck, as if, at the root of traditional Bengali female character. When the women took part in an armed struggle, they had had to take much more preparations to shun or do away with their feminine inhibitions. In the context of this, Malini Bhattacharya elucidates it in a report entitled ‘Samrayabad Birodhi Sashastra Sangrame Kalpana - Pritilata - der Katha’ (The Story of Kalpana - Pritilata, the Women Soldiers, An Anti - Imperialist Armed Struggle), in a book named *Nari Viswa* (The World of Women) edited by Pulak Chanda. She is of the opinion -

“First, the leaders themselves had serious misgivings about the involvement of women. Secondly, they were almost without any support from their family. Thirdly the nature of the movement was so as to make the women go beyond their conventional domestic role very often and to keep themselves ready for any physical obstructions or for any eventuality. In other words, it is not that in armed struggle, where basically the men are in a dominant position and the women, when oined with this, are content only with playing the role of women in the issue of leadership. The inherent rationale of the movement leads them to such a course where they unhesitatingly come over the limits of their expected role. In reality, this awareness at the movements of history has helped her to cross over the conventional limits of femininity.”¹⁹

There developed an apprehension and suspicion among a section of the Bengali intelligentsia on the question of the revolutionary activities of women in an armed struggle were firmly convinced that the course of life chosen by them would never have the backing or the approval or the approbation of the society. The British rulers and the police had not had any intention of projecting them as individuals who clung to the idea that the British government could not be overthrown only by recourse to non - violent actions. Out of this conviction these women resorted to an armed struggle.²⁰

Rabindranath Tagore was against the involvement of women in political movement and this is revealed in his novels *Ghare Baire* (The Home and the World) and *Char Adhyay* (Four Chapters). In the novel entitled *Char Adhyay*, a woman’s both evincing interest in and participation also in armed revolutionary activities or extremist politics have been represented as moral degradation or moral depravity of a female character.²¹

In this context, Tanika Sarkar also argues that much more progressive in outlook in contrast to his age, Rabindranath Tagore also did believe that the virtuous characteristic of a woman like tenderness (physical), charm, charity etc. would be lost because of their identification with the cause of terrorism since violent activities connected with ‘Nationalist Discipline’ are sharply contrasted with the concept of an ideal womanhood or are not in harmony with the concept of an ideal womanhood.²²

In his novel *Char Adhyay*, Rabindranath Tagore shows that when Ela, the heroine of the novel admitted that she had faulted in life for her exposure to revolutionary activities, Atin, the hero of the novel felt elated and stated, “By this time, it is evident that the women is real. Without much trouble, it comes to our notice that you are a romantic in a stage set for the deliverance of a nation. At the central point of a domestic life where rice and milk, head of a fish are available in a platter, you are seated with hand covered with a fan made from palm leaves.”²³

The fact that a woman groomed up in an Indian tradition committed homicide for unchaining the chain of her country’s subjection to foreign rule appeared, in most cases unacceptable to many persons including Rabindranath Tagore. On the contrary, the leaders of the armed struggle was agreeable on the question of bringing the women into the arena of face to

face fight. On this point, Malini Bhattacharya holds the view that some arguments were put forward against the involvement of women in a direct struggle of the armed revolutionaries. Although they were left with no option than to assign a side role to the women, yet the alarm created by that struggle and the possibility of a physical torture meted out to be the women when caught red - handed by the police were great obstacles before the leaders. Secondly, they were also permeated by the belief that despite the joining of women out of their natural suavity in violent actions, they would be trailing behind at the last moment. Thirdly, many among the revolutionaries were unmarried, adhering to the principle that they would not lead a worldly life till the attainment of their country's independence. They also shuddered with honour that their getting into touch with the women would in the final analysis, lead to their breach of a vow. Among those providing leadership to the uprising in Chittagong Ananta Sinha was one who was opposed to woman - folk so much so that when Surya Sen decided for the first time on entrusting Kalpana Dutta with a charge, he requested others to bring it to the notice of Ananta Sinha that the task of collecting acid was left to Bhulu Dutta, a BSc. Student (Bhulu was the nickname of Kalpana Dutta).

These limitations notwithstanding, the women participated in a movement in the revolutionary years and continued their fight neck to neck along with the men against the foreign rulers to the best extent possible, developed and represented themselves as progressive through the adoption of the principle of self - reliance as well.

The nature of the Revolution and also an appraisal of the women revolutionaries regarding their land and their country. In most cases, only a few revolutionaries, who were a party to the revolutionary struggle, were initiated into the liberation movement correspondingly with their school and collegiate education. Side by side they had had an opportunity to pore over different types of books. Some indications about what for the educated young women of middle class families were identified with an armed struggle what motivated them into their making a common cause with the revolutionaries may be had from a written statement of Bina Das before a court or from the last will of Pritilata Waddedar; and with reference to all these documents Malini Bhattacharya points out in her report - Bina Das, a recently passed B. A. confessed it in her report that although she had no personal grudge against the governor Stanley Jackson, the reason behind her attempt to murder him was that various stories about the atrocities of the British government and the direct experience generated so much an agonizing pain in her mind as to lead her to come to this conclusion that relief from such tormentation could be got only through death. Presuming that she would be awarded death sentence for this murder she goes on to suggest "Is life worth living in as an Indian so subject to wrong and continually groaning under the tyranny of a foreign government or is it better to make one supreme protest against it by offering one's life away?"

Pritilata Waddedar's last will also contains a reference to insufferableness of subjection, the objective of this freedom struggle was the ouster of British government, 'the only obstacle' towards the attainment of independence by any means. Either Bina Das or Pritilata Waddedar was for courting death by being a rebel against object sufferings under the iron wheels of the British imperialism. It is better to die rather to live under the yoke of the British administration. The idea of a woman's conventional purity or virginity stands in sharp contrast to the voluntary death of a freedom fighter. Hence, what is evident here is a persistent attempt at coming out from the image of womanhood. That an intense urge for tearing off of foreign rule is equally immanent among the women like the men also has been distinctly pronounced.²⁵

It was the highly qualified women revolutionaries who laid stress upon the absolute need of receiving education in revolution. At the preliminary stage, character - building in education was not so important but through various ups and downs Parul Mukhopadhyay realized that education breeds forth or begets in individuals a sense of self - respect and self - reliance also and instills or generates new hopes and aspirations into the hearts of many indigent families, the victims of oppression of the British government.²⁶

Afterwards, it was the female education which played a crucial role in leading women to a right track in the area of politics. As analysed by Banalata Sen, Kiran Chakrabarti and Pratibha Bhadra, despite the pervasiveness of a revolutionary spirit in their family, the women, considering education as a means to an end, arrived at a conclusion of their own without being influenced by others. It was the revolution or a non - violent movement, which course of action was preferable for attaining independence was that they perceived through their interaction with education and practical field. Appreciative of Mahatma Gandhi's charming personality and his role in mass movement the women were not in agreement with Gandhi's adoption of the policy of non - violence as a mode of struggle against the British government.²⁷

In this connection, Ishani Mukhopadhyay deals with the view point of Banalata Sen. She says that according to Banalata Sen, they were firmly convinced that achievements of independence without an armed revolution would be impossible. This armed revolution was to culminate in a mass upsurge throughout India, which would, in the long run hastened the pace of

liberation of our motherland. The attitude of Mahatma Gandhi towards the revolutionaries was repugnant to her.²⁸ Kiran Chakravarti believed that non - violent agitation would not be effective in bringing about our liberation since an alert must be sounded among them so much so that they must be forewarned of the consequences of a grave danger. Mahatma Gandhi, as human being commanded respect from the revolutionaries, yet there were differences of opinion regarding the course of action to be taken.²⁹

Further, Indrani Mukhopadhyay treats of the standpoint of revolutionaries Parul Mukhopadhyay. She writes - "Parul has said that Gandhi - led movement was never non - violent, and that turned violent. Any kind of protest on a large scale is bound to be aggressive."³⁰

In the same way Pratibha Bhadra affirms - "We seldom believed that independence would come about through non - violent movement. But non - violent struggle was not without a historical significance. This movement strengthened the spirit of our countrymen. The armed revolution was its terminal point."³¹

Kalpana Joshi, one of the leaders of the plunder of armoury in Chittagong, while in confinement, came to be familiar with the Marxist socialist ideologies. In her memoirs she adds, "Three to four years afterwards arrangements were made for accommodating all women prisoners of war at one place. Many among them, due to this long stay with the detainee obtained some information about the world outside. The writings of Joad and Cole, Shanes' socialism and some works on communism have come to my home. The arguments and the debates found in in those works stir up my mind and cause me to think, when the stream of thought is on this way I received Romand Rolland's work captioned "I will not rest." It is not only that the work "I will not rest" made merely an admirer of the Russian revolution but I have started revering Lenin also."³² Therefore, their career leads one to suggest that far from being merely parties to revolutionary activities, they sought to mould their own thinking and political ideologies also through enlightenment.

Notwithstanding the unacceptability of the Gandhian mode of struggle to many among the women members of the Anushilan group, they endeavoured to build up this movement as a basis for mass contact. In her report Ishani Mukhopadhyay states that the women of the Anushilan Samiti worked as active members of the Congress in public. This 'double front' implied political forum under the protection of which mass movement could have been accelerated. Though abiding by the strict rules of the Anushilan Samiti, Banalata Se was associated with the girl student politics and active in Congress Women League.³³ Mrinalini Devi of Anushilan Samiti (in the language of the police - Ex C. D. Convict) was the President of the Jangeepur Congress Committee Pramila Devi was the President of All Bengal Congress Reception Committee. She was a woman member of the Anushilan's Bhattacharyapara Club in secret.³⁴ In her statement Parul Mukhopadhyay is of opinion that almost all irrespective of Surya Sen, Amulya Mukhopadhyay joined the Congress. This was a big cover below which revolutionary activists could be pursued safe and without any trouble.³⁵

The female education and the ambience of their family were an incentive to the women revolutionaries in respect of their forming of a typical political standing. In many respects, the women revolutionaries had to chalk out a course of action in accordance with the principles and the ideals of a secret society and also of a party. Mentionable in this connection is the work of two famous secret societies of Bengal - namely the Anushilan Samiti and the Jugantar groups. Both the groups believed in an armed revolution in their struggle against an imperialist power but the aims and the programmes of both the groups sharply differed. Especially at the beginning, the Anushilan Samiti group turned much attention towards organizing and mobilizing the youth but not so towards a direct struggle. As a result, a group of young men within the party became espousers of the cause of terrorism. On account of the difference of opinion on this issue some young people including Barin Babu began their revolutionary activities through a separate Jugantar group. Naren Das, a revolutionary contends, "I have my own reading about the Anushilan Samiti group. This group was against terrorism but the support of the young akin somewhat to Easter rising."³⁶

With regard to the women also, their programme was determined on the basis of the principles typical of its own, of the revolutionary party. Ishani Mukhopadhyay states, "The leading women of the Anushilan Samiti did not have faith in the role of women in bombs and pistols in the violent politics. On this point there was little difference between half - literate and highly qualified or fire - like girls. Their purpose was to build up the character of women by way of grouping them."³⁷ However the incidents like the direct struggle of the women revolutionaries of the Yugantar group, the killing of Stevens by Shanti and SUMiti were received with warm ovation by the women of the Anushilan Samiti. In this context, Parul Mukhopadhyay states, 'The girls of the Anushilan Samiti were never averse to killing the British officials, and this too under duress - although the male revolutionaries always directed the women to refrain them from so doing.'

In the preliminary stage of an armed struggle, the women used to work mainly as assistants from outside. Their main duties included - helping one to reach news, keeping banned documents or arms and armaments in secret, providing shelter to an absconding revolutionary etc. But education played no conspicuous role in case of women revolutionaries committed to armed resistance at the thirties. Almost all the young women revolutionaries being a party to a direct armed struggle happened to be the students of either schools or colleges. As for example, Kamala Chatterjee, Kalyani Das, Kalpana Dutta and Pritilata Waddadar, Lila Nag all graduated from the Bethune College. Shanti Ghosh and Suniti Chaudhuri accused of killing the District Magistrate of Comilla were the student of the Faizunnesha Girls' School of Comilla. The movements of the women participants of a new generation from place to place alone, their stay in disguise with their fellow male soldiers - all these facts point both to their independent stand and thinking especially in regard to their realizing their goal and also to their keen interest in making a sharp departure from the traditional and conservative feminist thinking, instead of acting as tools in the hands of the revolutionary leadership.

Notable among the women revolutionaries associated with armed resistance like Pritilata Waddadar, Kalpana Dutta and others chose a hazardous life like the male revolutionaries. The emergencies of a revolution required them sometimes to move in the garbs of men, sometimes again to provide shelter to revolutionaries and to stay in the same house on the identity of being anybody's wife to escape from the watchful eyes of the detective police. Furthermore they were found negotiating with the revolutionaries also at the dead of night. Malini Bhattacharya narrates - "On a study of an account containing information about the death of Nirmal Sen and Bhola Sen in their clash with the police at Dhalghat in 1932, it seems clear to us that at the dead of night, Pritilata, at the call of Surya Sen, attended there for the purpose of negotiations with the others - seventy six years back, a young woman of a Bengali middle class family of an outstanding town was on a move to an unknown place by way of overcoming a path fraught with dangers and difficulties for the exigencies of a revolution in 1932 - this is not only an index of her exceptional intrepidity but also of her unique mobility. A report containing particulars about two incidents of clashes at Goriola (February, 1933), Gohira (May, 1933) leading to the arrest first of Surya Sen and then Tarakeshwar Dastidar and Kalpana Dutta shows that Kalpana Dutta, an unmarried maiden, has been in hiding along with the male revolutionaries at the house of a reliable supporter in a thoroughly rural area. Their living was unlike the living of the other girls of middle class families of the then times. Their life was a negation of the fact there was a considerable extension of the sphere of the activities of women. Kalpana, Priti, Bina or Ujjwala equipped and developed themselves by way of exploiting opportunities inclusive of living in separation from their respective families, establishing contact with the outside world, their academic sphere so much so that they could go beyond conventional role of women and operate without trouble."³⁹

In the same was Tanika Sarkar tells us, "The revolutionaries were for a revolution with aims to establish a progressive society in place of the British rule, but their plan did not envisage transformation of society by way of connecting women with a political movement as a part of social revolution. Issues like incidents of revolutionary Pritilata Waddadar's providing leadership to a dale in Chittagong, Kalpana Dutta's wearing the dress of man and going in hiding in a forest of Chittagong along with the male revolutionaries and Suhasini Ganguli's living as husband and wife with a male acquaintance the object whereof was providing shelters to the revolutionaries - etc. were radical steps in case of conventional or customary politics and social relations. On the whole, these seldom brought about a revolutionary transformation in the social position of women. None of them was a true representative of the principle that the women had equal rights like men and this too in respect of choosing their stand. Rather, in an era of transition in national life, they projected their revolutionary activities as the religious duty of a woman."⁴¹

Initially, however the male revolutionaries took serious note of the issues concerning the limitations of the revolutionary movement and the lack of mass contact by way of gaining experience and as a result their ideas and thoughts about their country and the society were taking a concrete shape, this was also the case with the women revolutionaries who took initiative in forming a clear idea about their land and society.

On this score the name of Kalpana Dutta is deserving of our attention. She was directly involved in the plunder of Chittagong armoury and after her release from long - term imprisonment she joined the Communist Party. While in prison she came to be familiar with the communism, that is to say, with the Socialist thought like other revolutionaries. Her memoirs dealing with the invaders of the Chittagong armoury throw light on the different aspects of the revolutionary movement in Chittagong along with Master Da Surya Sen and also on a change in the revolutionary career or life under the impact of

socialism. While being a political prisoner she came to develop an acquaintance with the concepts like socialism, communism etc. through different works. She remarks -

“It seems, the communism is beneficial and not incompatible with our ideals to a slightest degree. When someone said that the communists looked upon the terrorists as foes, I laughed at and rejected it outright since I could not afford to believe it. When our ideal is freedom and this too of both the parties, then we are on the same track and also adorer of the same freedom.”⁴¹

That is to say she has traced similarities in the patriotic sentiments and the ideals of the revolutionaries with those of the principles of communism. She further adds in her memoirs that though the old revolutionaries learnt their lessons from the glorious revolution of the past, yet developed contact with new ideologies or that is to say, with the communist ideas and thoughts, there existed a conflict in dichotomy between the past and the present among them. She writes,

“Most of those among us who joined the communist camp were once terrorists. Though we embraced communism as an ideal and took pride in identifying ourselves as communists, our ideologies and the course of action smacked off terroristic undertone.”⁴²

Besides, she represents a lurid picture of the miserable condition of the people in social life, arising out of first a situation prevailing in Chittagong in the post Second World War period and second a famine. The failure of the revolutionaries in respect of their land and society has been attributed to this.

She writes -

“So long after we feel where we have faltered or where we have been at fault. What sort of lapse was there in our thinking. Our love for the people had very shallow roots. We were not in the know of the people. We did not have any knowledge about them.”⁴³

This led her to decide on reversing her earlier stand or that is to say she represents boldly her decision to accept and welcome communist ideology in these words -

“The undiluted patriotism is communism and that communism implies not laying superficial reliance upon the people not even being a follower of the leaders - rather awakening of that self - confidence among the people so as to enable them make their own fate - the terrorism taught us to develop self - confidence among us, the communism taught us to how to trust the people. The terrorism taught us to depend on the moral virtues of the human being, the communism also teaches us to know the people and the country and to change oneself correspondingly in bringing about changes in the minds of the people.”⁴⁴

In this connection a letter seems to be important. A boy, Sahho Gianchandani by name, a third year student of the Viswabharati, was the writer of the letter addressed to Kalpana Dutta. We do not possess any reply to the reader. Despite a lack of evidence about what Kalpana Dutta thought about the future plans of the revolutionaries the essence of the letter is illustrative of the fact that the revolutionaries, the believers in an armed struggle or the patriots were in a process of causing a significant change in communistic thought in determining their future course of action. Mass contact and the self - awakening of the oppressed people became more important to them rather an armed struggle - revolutionary movement⁴ freedom struggle of India revolutionaries British government

Dear Sister Kalpana,

I take the privilege of addressing you as sister which I hope you will not deny me. ... leaving aside the sentimental reasons. I would like to know about your mass work. “What is the method of your approach to the ignorant and poverty stricken people? I know you propagate socialistic ideas, but how do first begin work? How do you organize them? I put these questions because I feel that the most difficult talk in mass work is the beginning. How to begin? Where to begin? Whom to approach? On whom to rely? ... I would like to have Purnendu’s opinion also on this matter. He has been working among the workers for a pretty long time ... I this connection, I would like to know specially your method of approach to the rural areas where the peasant is the sufferer instead of the factory labourer of the urban areas. ...”⁴⁵

With love,

Yours brotherly,

The women involved in armed struggle determined the way towards the fulfilment of political programme yet patriotism was related to the revolutionary movement of the women. This had nothing to do with the women’s liberty. The sole objective of the women revolutionaries was that there should be no discrimination between men and women in their fight

for their own country and they would wage a crusade along with their male fellow soldiers for their country. Pratibha Bhadra opines -

“In a revolution, company with women was absolutely a political issue with which was joined patriotism. It was unrelated to the women’s liberty. The women had to take part since they were in a majority among the population and the revolution would remain unfinished if they did not make any advancement. This joining presupposes a teaming off of social fetters, although the women seldom gave a thought to it upon careful consideration.⁴⁶

On this question, Sekhar Banerjee in his work captioned - *From Plassey to Partition* asserts that with the advent of Gandhi the national politics underwent a significant transformation from the perspective of gender. The participation of many more women in national movement, Gandhi’s laying stress upon non - violent Satyagraha prove that the principles relating to the universal code of conduct of the women had not been violated. The women’s service to the cause of nation formed a part of their spiritual duty. On the contrary, our society was bitterly critical only when a handful number of women identified themselves with violent revolutionary work by way of their overstepping the limits of decency of women as fixed by the society.⁴⁷

With reference to Tanika Sarkar, Simanti Bren shows that the women involved in in the revolutionary struggle in Bengal stand in sharp contrast with those women joining the populist movement in Russia at the close of the 19th century or with those identified either with the terrorist movement in pre - 1911 period or with the movement of 4th November in China. They clamoured not for equal rights for them but for equal rights of their male comrades for the latter’s self - sacrifice for the cause of nation.⁴⁸

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