

Interim Emergency, Politics, Movement and Leftist Bengali Women (1959-1977): A Review

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Abstract: In the 4th general election of March, 1967, the first co-allied government was set up. In this election many leftist women leaders competed and won the election. In 1967, the co-allied government was fragmented and Progressive Democratic Front (P.D.F.) Government was created. Civil disobedience rose up as a protest against this fragmentation. Many women leaders were arrested. For the release of the prisoners and for the resignation of the P.D.F. Government and also for internal election, many women revolted in West Bengal. To control the situation of pressure of the opposition, the P.D.F. Government was dismissed and President's rule was enacted in West Bengal on 21st February 1968. On 9th February, 1969, second co-allied government was formed through internal election. On 16th March 1970, the second co-allied Government was abolished when the Chief Minister Mr. Ajay Mukherjee resigned. Again West Bengal came under President's rule on 19th March, 1970. The leftist women association protested as the women were exploited and their usual social life was corrupted due to the President's rule. In 1976, they created a huge movement among the mass on the issues of price-rise, Government's interference in distribution of food and for fixation of fair price for essential commodities. In 1977, the President's rule in West Bengal was abolished. On 11th and 14th June, in the Bidhansabha election, the left-front Government was established in West Bengal.

Key Words: Association, President's rule, Women.

1. INTRODUCTION:

1942 is an important year in the history of leftist women revolution. In the 3rd decade of 20th century when many women and female students started to be attached to the socialist ideals the leaders of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) decided to associate them in the year 1942 and founded Mahila Atma Raksha Samiti (MARS). 1947 after India's Independence, the Mahila Atma Raksha Samiti (MARS) of provincial Bengal was divided into two parts. The larger part remained in the East Bengal whereas the shorter part remained in the West Bengal. The MARS of West Bengal again started to be fragmented on the question of principles.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

No research work was made on ideas, activities, and movement of the leftist women. There are some books. 'Mone Mone' of Kanak Mukherjee, 'Dhaka Theke Kolkata' of Nibedita Nag, 'Communist in Indians Women's Movement' of Renu Chakraborty, 'Sediner Katha' of Manikuntala Sen, 'The Making of The Left Ideology In West Bengal- Culture, Political Economy, Revolution 1947-1970' of Chandan Basu, 'Women in Decision Making' of Ranjana Kumari, 'Radical Idology and Controlled Politics: CPI and the History of West Bengal 1947-1964' of Chandan Basu, 'Communist Gender and Violence' of Partha Chatterjee, 'Political Participation of Women in West Bengal-A Study' of Jayasree Ghosh etc. But the work of these books was not done only on the leftist women of Bengal.

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

The present work has been undertaken for a number of reasons. Firstly I have tried to discuss the ideas, activities and movements of the leftist women in Bengal. Secondly, I want to understand the political, socio and economy conditions in Bengal of this period. Therefore I intend to prepare my paper on this topic.

4. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY:

From 1958, 31st December to 1st January 1959, in the 9th meeting of women self-defence league, a reform took place and the term "Self-defence" was deducted. So, from 1959 the league was named as West Bengal Women League. From 18 to 19th February in the 10th meeting in 1961, the proposal taken were-right to vote for every citizen in the municipal election, technical nursing, demand for job and education and protest for price rise etc. In the 11th

meeting of 1965 on 4th and 5th December, the demand were- release of arrested, demand for job and protest against price rise.

Though the women leaders were capable of joining themselves with national and international issues but the league started to be weak from the aspect of its association. From the report of 1956 it was seen from the 8th meeting that the activities of women league did not spread in every districts. As a reason for the weakness, it was seen that different leaders started to be divided on the basis of their political ideologies. On the other hand in 1956 on 16th to 21st January in the seventh meeting of the communist party, it was known the number of members of women self-defence league declared from 18,000 to 7000-8000. As a reason it was said that (i) the women of working class were not included in women league (ii) the indifference of the party towards the women league. So, it was said that, though the women league continued their activities but their foundation became weak.

Conflict in Leftist Women Association from the Aspect of Ideals

After the formation of Union Front Government in 1967, the conflict of ideals inside communist party (Marxist) became prominent. Usually, the associations influenced by the party were also shadowed by this conflict. In the meantime the leftist women league was also divided due to two basic reasons-(i) a team object the idea of going against the congress party (ii) another team wanted to submit memorandum by the name of the National Women Federation and not by the name of West Bengal League. As a reason, it was that the second team thought that the congress party influenced National Women Federation was larger than the West Bengal Women League. So, it was obvious that the women league was divided. But they were agreed to continue their movement together in spite of their ideal conflict.

The 12th meeting of West Bengal Women League was held in Kolkata on 30th September and 1st October. At the time of meeting total members of league were 34,872. In this meeting 12 issues were taken as agenda- food scarcity, stopping of polygamy in Muslim society, women education, job, the problems of women at the time of pregnancy, equal right of women and men in society, support the democracy, etc.

The date of internal election was declared on 9th February, 1969. After the election "Second Union front Government" was set up. The division in women league in this time became more prominent. So, in the 13th meeting in 1970 on 7th and 8th March the league was finally divided. On 7th March, two meetings were held- one was held in Muslim Institute Hall and other was held in Shialdaha in Netaji Subhas Institute in the name West Bengal League. To drive out the confusion of name in 1971-one was named as West Bengal Democratic Women Association influenced by communist party (Marxist) and another remained as the West Bengal Women League. On account of mental conflict of the workers in 1967, the publication of "Ghare Bahire" was stopped. In 1968, the communist women published a new monthly magazine "Eksathe". (1)The 14th meeting of West Bengal Democratic Women Association was held in 1973 at Madhyamgram in 24th Paragana on 20th and 22th April. A union meeting taking 5 leftist women association was held in Bharat Sabha Hall on 27th September in 1974 for the demand of food and torture against the women. The chairman of the association were Kanak Mukherjee of Democratic Women Association, Bhakti Mukherjee of All Bengal Women Association, Badal Mukherjee of Women Cultural Association, Shanti Sarkar of Agrani Women Council and Reba Mukherjee of West Bengal Agragami Women Association.

The year 1975 was considered as international women's year by the United Nations. To celebrate this different women association fixed many programmes. The 15th meeting of West Bengal Democratic Women Association was held in 1975 from 28th to 30th March at Salkia, Howrah. In the meeting almost 19 issues were taken as agenda- food scarcity and price rise, equal rights of women, education were important among them.

Internal Emergency was started on 25th June in 1975. The Women League started to set different cultural programmes as meeting, procession, etc were banned during Emergency. In the 8th election of West Bengal Legislative Assembly in 1977, the Left front Government came into Government rule. According to the source, the power of Women League was increased after the Left-front Government's establishment.

First Union Front Government and Activities of Leftist Women

In the election of 1967, the congress Government was defeated and first union front Government was established. Many leftist women came forward to take part in this election and were elected as candidate. In this election Geeta Mukherjee, Ila Mitra and Nanda Rani Dal won the election as candidates. Indian women federation sent 50 delegates to support and congratulate the newly elected Chief Minister Ajay Mukherjee. (2)This Government did not last long. On 20th November, 1967 the union front was divided and internal P.D.F Government was formed and Prafulla Ghosh became the Chief Minister. C.P.I, R.S.P and Forward Block allied with the P.D.F Government. (3)A civil disobedience movement started demanding the resignation of the ministers of the Government on 30th November. In the first phase 55 women took part in the movement under the leadership of Joyti Chakraborty, general secretary of West Bengal Women Association. (4)In the second phase, 77 women took part in the movement under the leadership of Kanika Ganguly, Secretary of Women Association on 18th December, 1967. Many women of Hoogly, Burdwan, 24th Paragana, Malda and other districts took part in the civil disobedience movement. Due to the protest of common

men and women, the President's rule was evolved on 21st February, 1969, dishonouring the P.D.F Government. The Governor promised to release the arrested and ordered for internal election. As the demand was not fulfilled, on 17th July, 1968, almost 10 women association guided by the West Bengal Women Association met the Governor and submitted memorandum and demanded for the release of the arrested and for internal election.

President's Rule and Political Activities of the Leftist Women

The date of internal election was declared on 9th February, 1969. The second union front government came into power after the election. In this situation the women leagues was divided into two. Usually the activities of the women association became weak. In 1970, on 16th March the 2nd union front government lost its power, when Ajay Mukherjee resigned from Chief Minister. Again the President's rule started from 19th March, 1970. Many women were injured when they were continuing the activities of the party. As for example- Uma Adhya, Parul Basu, Joyti Chakraborty, Archana Bhattacharya, Madhabi Majumdar, Asha Mandal, kshama Bhattacharya, Maya Dhar, Ratna Bhattacharya, Hasi Majumdar and many others. (5) Bithi Dey, Purnima Banerjee and many others of Democratic Women Association died. (6) On 3rd April, 1970 many women of Democratic Women Associations issued a procession along the streets of Kolkata and submitted a memorandum to the Governor demanding for internal election abolishing the President's rule. From 1971 the Leftist Women Associations continued their activities jointly. As an example on 20th Feb 1972, West Bengal Democratic Women Association, Women Cultural Association and All Bengal Women Association held a joint meeting and demanded for refusing Misa and P.D.A laws.

Congress Govt. and Leftist Women Association

In the election of 1972, Congress Govt came into power under the leadership of Siddharta Sankar Roy. A convention was held on 13th May, 1972 taking leftist women association in A.B.T.A Hall. Their demands were basically the release for the arrested and protest against price rise and they decided the representatives of West Bengal Democratic Women Association met the Prime Minister in Delhi and described the condition of Bengal.

On 23rd May, 1974 five Leftist Women Association and West Bengal Democratic Women Association gathered together in the office of Democratic Women Association. The associations were West Bengal Democratic Women Association, West Bengal Women Association, West Bengal Agradami Women Association, Women Cultural Association, All Bengal Women Association. They decided to support the railway workers and observe Integration Day on 26th May. (7)

The Leftist Women In Protecting Women's Dignity

The movement of the women got a new dimension when they faced some dishonouring incidents at the end of 1970. On 29th March, 1971, Bithi De was arrested from Kalicharan Ghosh Lane under Kashipur Police Station and was murdered by the police. The same type of incidents took place in Howrah, Hoogly, Burdwan, Maldah, Murshidabad, Nadia, Birbhum Cochbihar and other districts. The leftist women association influenced the women of workers, farmers, labourers and middle class families and made protest. (8)

As a protest against the tortures the women of all classes were associated and raised their voice. On 22nd May, 1971, some miscreant attacked Joyti Chakraborty, chairman of West Bengal Democratic Women Association. After the attack in the slum area of Belegkata, on 2nd November, 1971, the local Women Association submitted deputation to the Phulbagan police station. After the attack in Mianbagan slum area, Kolkata Zila Demoratic Women Association submitted deputation.

An unanimated decision was taken in November, 1973 by the nine parties for the demand of democracy and individual independence. A movement for disobeying the central law was arranged on 12th and 13th November in different districts and on 15th November in different districts and on 15th November in Kolkata. Almost 40,000 men and women joined the law disobedience movement in Kolkata.

The women associate more strongly in 1974 movement. A report of a big meeting is known on 11th and 12th March in Kolkata by the women for the release of the arrested and for the other demands and they made stay-in-strike before the Governor for 24 hours. The women members of Democratic Women Association, Women Workers of Socialist Party and Women of S.U.C.I made procession and submitted deputation in January, 1974 for the demand of job. (9) A democratic convention was held in Jalpaiguri on 24th February, 1974 taking 36 trade unions and associations. Sachi Banerjee was important among the women members who were present in the convention. She was a member of Democratic Women Association. (10)

A state convention was held on 27th September, 1974 taking five leftist women associations. Almost 250 delegates joined in the convention. Kanak Mukherjee of Democratic Women Association, Bhakti Mukherjee of All Bengal Women Association, Badal Mukherjee of Women Cultural Association, Shanti Sarkar of Agrani Women Council, Reba Mukherjee of West Bengal Agradami Women Organisation were important delegates of that convention. The main proposal of the convention was delivered by Pankaj Achariya, secretary of Democratic Women

Association. In that proposal she demanded for stopping the torture against women. Mamata Niogi, a member of All Bengal Women Association also raised the same proposal.

5. CONCLUSION:

It is clear that the movements of the women from 1967 to 1977 were formed on different issues and basis. Primarily, the women were associated with Self-Defence League and protested against different issues. Due to change in situation, they were involved in conflict. Though the league was declared as illegal, the women continued their work even in pressure which was worthy for that time. Another important factor was the Self-Defence League was transformed into West Bengal Women Association. The ideal conflict in the Leftist Women Association at the end of 1960 was another important factor. At last the Leftist Women Association was divided. It was a usual factor of women association. They had limitations and problem of unification. Yet they continued their activities.

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