The Study of Five Women as Social Workers/Activists in Bengal (1943-1975)

Abstract

This dissertation attempts to assess and evaluate the roles of some of the exceptional Bengali women who played constructive roles as social workers/activists in Bengal when it was passing through a tumultuous period. The time frame I opted to probe into is the period between 1943 and 1975 because a gap in research existed for this period, as not enough work had been produced on this area especially with regard to the constructive role played by women in the social sector. Between the years 1943 and 1975 women had a mammoth task before them. The famine of 1943 made women its worst victim. Bengal’s social life was in complete disarray and a lot needed to be done to re-build social life. During the communal riots of 1946 women’s dignity was under barbaric attack. There was also urgent need for restoring communal peace. Women both during the famine and the communal riots penetrated into the countryside to be on the side of the helpless. After independence age old feudal laws which had put women in chains required to be changed. In the post-partition dislocation of the province refugee problem, women’s employment and their equal rights in workplaces assumed significance. The government needed to be convinced to provide equal opportunities to women and more importantly to arouse consciousness among ordinary women about their rights. Issues like the procurement of food and education required immediate attention. True the women’s movement was in a dormant stage during this stage; nevertheless, women achieved some milestones, however, limited during this period. Lastly, the path-breaking report ‘Towards Equality’ in 1975 was a landmark as far as women’s history was concerned.

My thesis would focus on the contributions of some eminent Bengali women social workers and activists who belonging to affluent families and being educated could have opted for a more easy-going and comfortable life. Instead they took a more unconventional path- that of social service and endeavoured to create a just, egalitarian society. This had made them truly extra-ordinary.

Paramita Sur Ray