

**Soma Marik**

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**Communist Women and Alternatives to Socialist Realism:**

**Alexandra Kollontai and Sabitri Roy**

Socialist Realism, as promoted by Gorki, Zhdanov, or even by Lukacs, was never the only framework within which communists wrote fiction. While socialist realism arose in 1928 – 1932, the fiction of Alexandra Kollontai can be seen as an attempt to create a different model. Her collection *The Love of Worker Bees*, especially the novel *Vasilisa Malygina*, was anything but a typical socialist realist novel which takes up gender and class in an interlinked manner. This novel also focussed on class solidarity rather than the wisdom of the party, examining the meaning of sexual liberation under socialist construction, Kollontai presented a critique of what she saw as an emergent new hierarchy, and also challenged the re – inscription of patriarchal norms, mild as they were in the mid – 1920s compared to the 1930s.

In Sabitri Roy's novel *Paka Dhaner Gaan* (abridged tr. Harvest Song), there is a deep realism, but hardly framed within the canons of Socialist Realism. In *Harvest Song*, there is a very sympathetic examination of women's double burdens, and a recognition that the communist argument about economic independence for all is a necessary, but not sufficient condition for women's emancipation, especially in looking at their roles in holding the community together, as well as in matters of control over sexuality. The tebhaga movement itself both brings many women as well as men peasants together but also reveals the double burden of the women. But there is also a sharp counter – positioning of middle – class women's perceptions with poor peasant women's perceptions.