



SCIENCE MOVEMENT AS A SOCIAL MOVEMENT: A STUDY ON KERALA SASTHRA SAHITHYA PARISHAD

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Abstract

Kerala Sasthra Sahithya Parishad (KSSP) literally means The Kerala Forum for Science Literature founded in 1962. In 1972, KSSP decided to become a People's Science Movement and adopted "Science for Social Revolution" as its motto. The KSSP is involved, broadly in three types of activities: educative, agitate and constructive, in areas like environment, health, education, energy, literacy, micro planning and development in general. This paper is an attempt to trace out the role of Kerala Sasthra Sahithya Parishad as a New Social Movement in Kerala based on the nature of the movement with the support of relevant theories on New Social Movement and Gandhian approach to social action. This paper is purely a qualitative one and Secondary data is used for the construction of this paper which includes relevant books and journals, magazines, newspaper reports and official website of KSSP.

Keywords: *KSSP, New Social Movements, Science Movement.*

Introduction

Social Movements for change have existed for many centuries. Many of the oldest recognized movements, dating to the late 18th and 19th centuries, fought for specific social groups such as the working class, peasants, whites, aristocrats, Protestants, etc. They were usually centered on some materialistic goals like improving the standard of living or, for example, the political autonomy of the working class. The new social movements became dominant in the second half of the 20th century and include the feminist movement, pre-choice movement, civil rights movement, environmental movement, free software movement, gay rights movement, peace movement, anti-nuclear movement, alter-globalization movement etc. This paper is an attempt to trace out the role of Kerala Sasthra Sahithya Parishad as a New Social Movement in Kerala based on the nature of the movement with the support of relevant theories on New Social Movement and Gandhian approach to social action. The paper is divided into three parts ie, a, definitions and concepts, b, features of new social movements and c, discussion and conclusion.

Objectives of the Study

1. To define the concepts and features of New Social Movements
2. To assess the role of Kerala Sasthra Sahithya Parishad as a New Social Movement.

I. Concepts and Definitions

A, New Social Movements

Social movements are forms of collective action that emerge in response to situations of inequality, oppression and or unmet social, political, economic or cultural demands. They comprise ‘an organized set of constituents pursuing a common political agenda of change over time’ (Batliwala 2012:3). The term “social movements” was introduced in 1848 by the German Sociologist Lorez Von Stein in his book *Socialist and Communist Movements since the Third French Revolution* (1848) in which he introduced the term “Social Movement” into scholarly discussions. Social movements, including those integrating or focusing on gender power relations, have existed across history. Notable examples are the movement to end the transatlantic slave trade that had begun in the 16th century, movements of organized industrial workers beginning in the 19th century and movements to gain women’s suffrage (the right to vote and run for office), emerging in the late 19th century (Naidoo 2006; Tripp 2006; Ghimire 2005).

In understanding social movements it is vital to remember that they are dynamic, historical phenomena and as such ‘are shaped by circumstance; they are contingent things, which grow or shrink in response to factors that enable or constrain them’ (Dütting and Sogge 2010: 31). This includes contestation within them and significant changes in the external environment with impacts for social movement politics, membership and strategies. Hence, while generalizations can be made, it is also vital to consider movements in their historical context in order to fully understand their politics, choice of strategies, and the meaning and impact of their presence and actions. Put differently, ‘social movements must be understood in their own terms: namely, they are what they say they are’ (Castells 2010: 73).

B, Kerala Sastra Sahitya Parishad

Kerala Sastra Sahitya Parishad is a People’s Science Movement of Kerala, India. Actually it was founded in 1962 with about 40 members as an organization of science writers in Malayalam, the local language in Kerala. It started with an objective of publishing science literature in Malayalam and also for popularizing science. Soon they realized the fact that the privileged



minority is always monopolizing the benefits of science and technology at the expense of the majority which ultimately results in their enrichment. So, KSSP has decided to take it as their mission ie, arming people with the tools of science and technology so that they can reverse this process. Thus in 1972, KSSP decided to become a People's Science Movement and adopted "*Science for Social Revolution*" as its motto. Over the past few decades it has grown into a mass movement with a membership of about 60,000 drawn from different walks of life, distributed in more than two thousand units spread over Kerala. Over these years, it has also expanded its fields of interests and activities to almost all fields of Human Endeavour.

Ii. Social Movements and New Social Movements

Features of the Social Movements

In this section some of the key defining features of social movements are set out.

1. pursues a common political agenda or 'common cause'
2. Has a visible constituency or membership base
3. Involves members collectivized in either formal or informal organizations
4. Engages in collective actions and activities in pursuit of the movement's political goals
5. Uses a variety of actions and strategies
6. Engages clear internal or external targets in the change process
7. Retains some continuity over time (Adapted from Batliwala 2012: 3)

Social movement politics are formed from the premise that the world is socially constructed and that it is both possible and necessary to change it to achieve a movement's vision of a just society and of power relations within it. The justifications for what needs to change (political agenda) and why (political analysis), who should change them (leadership, membership and representation) and how (actions and strategies) are the core questions of movements and both define social movements and differentiate them from each other. The existence of social movements and the visions and actions that they present are inherently political in that they aim to challenge and change systems of power.

Nature and Scope of the Movements

Social movements are a type of group action. They are large, sometimes informal groupings of individuals or organizations which focus on specific political or social issues. In other words, they carry out, resist or undo a social change. The study of new social movements occupies an important part in the study of social science. Unlike traditional social movements, the new social movements are highly participative and have strong programme of actions. A large number of social movements originated from the under privileged section of the globe.

New social movements emerge around new scopes and range of politics. The environment, the rights, the role of women, health, food and nutrition, education, shelter and housing, the dispensation of justice, communications and the dissemination of information, culture and lifestyle, the achievement of peace and disarmament none of which were considered to be the subject matter for politics in which ordinary people were involved, are major concerns for the new movements. If the scene of the "traditional" class struggle was the field and the factory, the ecology movements represent a new kind of class struggle, one over natural resources like forests and water. Likewise, the women's movement has insistently questioned the downgrading of certain forms of work on sexual grounds, both in the work place and within the household, and the barriers to the entry of women in many professions.

Leadership of the Movements

Social movement theory tends to focus on the question of who joins social movements and why, while social movement practice places more emphasis on defining who the legitimate or desired movement actors are and who should be targeted in outreach and constituency-building. The popular movements have some middle-class leadership of middle class intelligentsia, professionals, teachers, priests etc who offer their services as leaders, organizers or advisers to these community and other Third World movements. In the process of initiating, organizing and directing the people's movements, these outside intellectuals become an organic part of the oppressed and exploited masses and do not exist outside the common people. They are called 'organic intellectuals' because, they get organically allied with the common people in their ideological leanings and practical action.

The new social movements do not believe in a rigid hierarchy. Their organizational structure is horizontal in nature. As these organizations do not have a rigid hierarchy, the concept of the leader and the led does not exist. The prominent members of these unified organizations prefer to call themselves organizers and not leaders. They represent a rejection of the unified, disciplined and militarized party machine, oriented toward seizure of the state and enforcement of a single ideological line.



Methodology and Strategy of the Movements

The theories of power generated within movements in turn inform what we can call theories of change – conceptual frameworks underpinning choices around movement membership, strategy and actions. In their practice, movements create activist and organizing cultures, typically performing the emancipator power relations and forms of relationship and expression that they seek to instigate in the broader world. Popular education¹, consciousness-raising² groups, public art such as muralist and community theatre, protest marches, models of consensus-based decision-making, community-based fund raising and the creation of new languages and names are all examples of activist counter-cultures formed in and propagated by progressive social movements challenging gendered injustices. This is a methodology of critical intervention, creative action and participatory mobilization. Theater workshops and street plays serve as an important medium not only for conscientising clients but also for sensitizing the participants to the problems at hand.

Another component of their methodology is participatory research. The experiences and experiments undertaken by the social activists who at once combine both the roles of catalyst and analyst are producing a new social science. By highlighting the question of ecology, health, gender etc., which were earlier considered peripheral, the new movements have a valuable role to play in enlarging the scope of lower class movements. In the economic field these movements initiate alternative development strategies and are able to involve the poor and the dispossessed in self-reliant development projects. The popular movements work simultaneously at two levels. At one level, they are defensive, seeking to protect civil society from the tentacles of the centralizing state; at another, they are assertive, seeking to change civil society from within.

The new social movements follow a three step strategy. They are: Diagnosis, prognosis and Motivation. The process of identifying the issues in society and making this a public issue is termed as diagnosis. After identifying the issues, the next step is to making enquiries and needed investigations in order to rectify the issues in the society . The third step is to motivate the people to bring the needed changes. They do so in specific narratives or interpretive packages directed at authorities, movement participants, supporters, and at the public at large. Social movement actors give meaning to events, situations, and social practices. They function as signifying agents alongside other actors like media and government agencies. They sought to alter the prevailing structures of power, project values of justice, equality and freedom adding new dimensions to them and marked the rise of a new social force.

The new social movement's mobilization strategies focus on the new political formations of the poor and the deprived which conflate the category of class with those of ethnicity and gender. This general approach is to work for and with specific vulnerable groups, assault on whom has increased under globalization. They reject the inputs view of rural development and focus on creating capabilities of self-development among the rural poor and also on evolving mechanisms of protection for them against various forms of social terror to which they are often subjected to in this process.

New Social Movements and Gandhism

The impact of Gandhi on the new social movements has been significant. Gandhian influences can be traced to many important civic initiatives, movements and organizations around Third World liberation, peace and non-violence, international solidarity, the environment and democracy. What would bring mass participation to new popular movements were the five Gandhian principles of action. They are:

1. Swadeshi
2. Boycott against oppressive regimes
3. Padayatras or long marches linked to direct action
4. Intervention by direct nonviolent intervention in conflicts
5. Mass support for constructive programmes to give humanitarian support.

III. Discussion and Conclusion

Discussion

Genesis of The Kerala Satra Sahitya Parishad (1957-1967)

The chronological history of the KSSP will reveal a step by step expansion of the scope of its activities as well as absorption of those persons who come up with new ideas into its core. In 1974, the KSSP adopted the slogan “*Science for Social Revolution*” and in 1978 christened itself and likeminded organizations- People's Science Movement.

¹ Popular education is a community-based practice of learning and consciousness-raising where people (typically adults) analyse oppression from their own life experience, and use this reflection to develop conceptual and practical methods to challenge it.

² Consciousness-raising is a group process that helps to explore personal experiences of violation and/or empowerment.



It is a *People's movement* in the sense that it recognizes the fact that the Indian Society is broadly divided into two groups: a large majority which is getting continuously impoverished or threatened with impoverishment and a small minority which gets continuously enriched at the expense of the majority and that the movement takes a partisan position along with the majority (the people) and against the minority whenever interests are in conflict.

It is a *science movement* because it understands that science and technology is today a powerful weapon in the hands of the rich minority enabling them to appropriate for themselves a more than proportionate share of social production, and that the majority should be armed with this weapon in their fight against impoverishment.

It is a *Movement* in as much as its scope widens continuously, its actors diversify and expand and its ideology gets refined continuously.

The genesis of the KSSP can be traced to the formation of a “Science Literary Forum”³ in 1957 by a group of concerned social activists and science writers. Later in 1962, another group of science writers in Calicut, not aware of the earlier efforts took initiative to organize a “Forum for Science Writers” and in September 1962, the KSSP subtitled in English as “Science Writer’s Forum of Kerala” was launched with a one day seminar and a five day exhibition on science and science books. Occasional symposia and seminars mostly organized in and around Calicut constituted the main activity of the group for the next two years. In 1966, Some of the Malayali scientists in Mumbai had begun to actively consider the possibilities of producing the science literature in Malayalam. The contact between the Bombay scientists and organizers of KSSO led to the formation of the Sasthra Sahithya Parishad (Malayalam), Bombay in 1966. Another affiliated group was formed in Bangalore in February, 1968. It consisted of Malayalee scientists who were working in various departments of Indian Institute of Science. A few months later, a similar group was organized in Calcutta consisting mostly the scientists working in the Botanical Survey of India and Zoological Survey of India. The fourth annual conference of the KSSP held at Thrissur was an important milestone in the history of KSSP. It approved a constitution for the organization and in July 1968, KSSP was registered under the Charitable Societies Act. Thus, by the end of the first decade, the loosely knit science group evolved into a well defined organization.

KSSP as A New Social Movement (1967-1987)

The second decade saw the growth of the organization into a mass movement. All the basic contours of the present day activities, organizational structure and style of functioning evolved during this period. The KSSP is involved, broadly in three types of activities: educative, agitate and Constructive in areas like environment, health, education, energy, literacy, micro planning and development in general.

Aims of KSSP

1. Popularize science and scientific outlook among the people
2. Develop a sense of optimism in them, instill in them a sense of self confidence that they can change the world and can build a better tomorrow.
3. Expose and oppose the abuse of scientific knowledge detrimental to the interests of the majority.
4. Expose and oppose the abuse of environment
5. Propose and help implement, alternative modes for development, with emphasis on equity and sustainability.
6. Carry out Research and Development work to transform lab technologies into mass technologies.

Activities and Strategies

The Science communication efforts of KSSP can be classified according to their nature as (a) communicative (b) ideative and (c) provocative. KSSP uses several media to communicate, ie, printed words, posters, spoken word, theater, electronic media etc. It has organized massive leaflet campaigns on many subjects. KSSP has developed a unique form of theatre, ie, “KALAJATHA”⁴ or Art Caravan. KSSP is the India’s largest science publisher, having published more than 1,000 titles and producing 30-40 new titles every year. KSSP is also publishing three science magazines separately for primary school students, high school students and the general public ie, Sasthragathy, Sasthra Keralam and Eureka. KSSP also organizes every now and then massive lecture campaigns on a variety of topic and each campaign will result in several thousand lectures, which reaches out to hundreds of thousands of people. All these leads to participatory mobilization in which these

³ Sasthra Sahithya Samithi

⁴ A combination of stree, folk and proscenium theatre.



groups organize their clients to defy unjust norms, to resist exploitation and oppression and to fight a militant though non-violent battle for their rights.

KSSP and Education

The journals Sasthra Kerala and Eureka proved to be the first bridges between the KSSP and the formal school system in Kerala. With the strength of several thousand teachers among its members, KSSP organizes in-service teachers' training to make them enjoy teaching, promotes pedagogic innovations to make learning an enjoyable activity for children, assesses curriculum and text books, organizes massive children's science festivals, teacher exchange programmes and talent festivals for children, publishes science journals and books for children and organizes mass movement for quality improvement and mass literacy campaigns. KSSP played a lead role in making Kerala totally literate. KSSP has established a separate centre to do research and in depth studies in the field of education ie, Education Research Unit(ERU) with three campuses, at Thiruvananthapuram, Thrissur and Kozhikkode.

KSSP has a children's organization called "Balavedi". It is an unofficial gathering of children where they play, sing, conduct experiments, observe things and come across the methodology of science. At present the term "Balavedi" refers not only to children's organization but also to all the activities performed by KSSP in the field of children co ordinating and clustering various organizations and institutions of children.

KSSP and Environment

A distinctive feature of the third decade of the Parishad has been the spate of campaigns it has undertaken against the various instances of abuse of science and technology. The KSSP had taken up a number of such issue as misconceived development projects, environmental pollution by factories, occupational health hazards, drug abuse, militarization of science and the danger of nuclear war, for agitation campaigns. One of the KSSP's objectives is to raise the environment awareness level of the entire Kerala Society, through campaigns popularizing good environmental practice. KSSP's concern about the environment is linked with the concept of sustainable development. Among the multitude of activities, the major ones are: protection of forests eg., Silent Valley Movement, Campaign against pollution, especially by chemical industries, education on environmental impact of wrong land use, popularizing Agro Forestry methods of soil protection, developing the three dimensional environment concept, ie, physical, Biological, Socio Economic and cultural ethical environments and acting as a consistent champion of protecting the environment for the future generations.

KSSP and Development

The People's Science Movements took note of the increasing degree of globalization of human society and it also observed that this global network has begun to exhibit positive feedback tendencies and resulting in instabilities. They realized that democracy becomes the key concept, a type of democracy quite different from what we have seen so far. Participative and creative democracy is possible only on smaller scales. Small has to become powerful, not only beautiful, Hence, KSSP has been involved in building up models for sustainable and equitable development, campaigning for decentralized planning and local level planning, initiating a large number of field experiments in local level planning, empowering the local communities through volunteer based resource mappings, socio economic survey, data analysis etc; formulation of people's structures like "Neighbourhood groups" and village committees for transparent democracy. Analyzing the "Kerala Model of Development" to arrive at general conclusions and seeking its improvement is another activity. With the help of its members and friends, KSSP undertakes regular studies on developmental issues of Kerala and publish papers, monographs and reference books.

KSSP and Health

Over the last few decades KSSP has actively campaigned for People Oriented Approaches to Health. Led by a dedicated band of doctors, health workers and activists, the organization has conducted village level classes and discussions on common health problems and scientific and cost effective solutions. The campaigns also sought to expose the role of multinational corporations and big business in promoting and perpetuating ill health. The KSSP health study of 1987- helped to define the morbidity load and its relationship to socio economic variables. The health policies of Central and State Governments were critically examined and alternative People's health policy formulated. Parishad continues the struggle for better health for the poor and the oppressed, along with like-minded organizations in India and abroad.

KSSP and Women Issues

Even though KSSP was formed in 1962, the women's wing started functioning only in the 1980's. Various activities like publication of booklets and leaflets, organizing Vanitha Kalajadha, Samatha Vijnanothsavam etc were taken up with this end in view. Training for employment and Income generating activities are also being provided to women. Even a small income of their own, results a much desired change in the status of women in family and society. At present, the most important initiative of KSSP on women issues is a comprehensive study on the status of women in Kerala.



From the above discussion, we may understand that like that of all the New social Movements, mobilization strategies of the KSSP is also focus on the new social political formations of the poor and the deprived which conflate the category of class with those of ethnicity and gender. Their general approach is to work for and with specific vulnerable groups, assault on whom has increased under globalization. They reject the inputs view of rural development and focus on creating capabilities of self development among the rural poor and also on evolving mechanisms of protection for them against various forms of social terror to which they are often subjected to in this process.

Conclusion

Many of the New Social Movements were attempts to break out from the colonization of mind and a trial to new emancipation. It happens in two directions ie, Firstly, many of these movements are locally organized to attend the immediate issues of the community. Secondly, it misses the universality in ideology and action. So, KSSP and its experiments manifest the true nature of the contemporary world crisis and prepare for a future desirable society. Its moral vision is significant. By highlighting the question of ecology, health, gender etc., which were earlier considered as peripheral, the KSSP have a valuable role to play in enlarging the scope of lower class movements. A movement to make small powerful, to make democracy real and participative, to rewire the world society into a negative feedback system, to break up economic and political concentration-the role of KSSP as a new social movement is crucial in Kerala. Rarely was it handicapped by a mechanical understanding of the past, present or future. It assimilated the power and newer ideas and also the proponents of these ideas. They also recognized the danger of using knowledge without wisdom.

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