

New Social Movements in Karnataka – Some Observations

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Abstract

Unlike the other parts of India, Karnataka witnessed very few social movements in its history. Most of the movements belonged to the post-colonial period. These movements need to be located in a particular context and period. In fact some of the social movements came to surface during 1970s (Dalit Movement) however other social movements surfaced during 1980s/1990s, There are many issues that made the possibilities of social movements emerging: terms of trade going against the agriculture, growing depletion of environment, globalization, growth of a militant social categories, and finally, growing fear of 'loss' - loss of Identity, loss of culture, loss of social space, loss of social life, and loss of nature. Nonetheless, post 1970s saw many 'New' social movements: ecology, farmers, dalits, tribals, etc. This is a common phenomenon throughout the country, including Karnataka.

The paper highlights the above issues reflecting some major reasons.

Introduction

Until the end of the colonial rule Karnataka State did not witness different forms of crises such as ecological/environmental crises, crises of urban space, crises of working class, including the fact that state did not witness massive growth of industries. This is the reason why majority of the social movements came to surface during post-independence period. Nonetheless post-independence movements are popularly called New Social Movements.' (Brass: 1995) This conceptualization is done on the basis of following:

1. Unlike the earlier movements the 'New' social movements are concerned about the larger issues afflicting the social categories.
2. These movements believe in undivided social categories and thereby advocate
3. class harmony and unity among the categories.
4. New Social Movements are no more confined their activities to the rural
5. areas rather their operational areas have expanded to reach global level.

6. They believe in forming larger collectives both at the national level and international level.
7. They have the distinct notion about the history and the future.
8. New Social Movements basically believes in retrieving an autonomous space
9. for different social categories from within the civil society.
10. Although new social movements throw up large number of ideologies however, they all vouch for Gandhism or its variants.
11. The Strategies that they employ Is also new-Gav Bhandi to Jal Samadhi or ransacking the Multinationals and its properties.
12. They believe in analysing the issues both from within and from the larger perspectives such as from the perspectives of globalisation, etc

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Environmental or Ecology Movement

The concern towards environmental issues emerged during the early decade of 1980s, although its symptoms were present much earlier. The depleting green cover, depleting water levels and forest lands, massive industrialization and the attended pollution and other issues created conditions for environmental movement. However, there are multiple groups that took up the cause of environment. This shows that, Karnataka unlike north India could not able to throw up a comprehensive environmental movement. Most of the time issues raised were specific to areas concerned or are specific to local culture.

Movement against Social Forestry:

One important issue that received much focus in the environmental movement during 1980s was the issues of social forestry. It all began when Karnataka government under the massive aid from the World Bank introduced social forestry, which later on converted into monoculture of Eucalyptus plantation to serve the interests of Rayon and Paper industries. The latter was supposed to provide fuel, fodder, timber, manure, fruits, oil, fibers, and raw materials for the rural people. But the transformation of social forestry into a monoculture had the multiple effects on the ecology: it would dry up the water and the fertility of the soil in and around the planted area, it acts as ecological destabilizer, it excludes the growth of vegetation under it, it creates condition for deficit in the food crop materials and invite draught: the toxic element would adversely affect the ecology. More than that eucalyptus plantation would transform the self-sufficient economy into a market oriented deficit economy, including the fact that it would increase the rural unemployment and poverty. One important movement which opposed the eucalyptus plantation was 'Kittiko Hattiko Chalavali' or popularly called 'Kusunur Horata' in Dharwad District during 1980s. This struggle began when

Karnataka government leased out 30,000 hectares of land to the Harihar Polyfibre Company to plant eucalyptus saplings. 'Samaja Parivarthana Samudaya' took up the cause of the peasants who were displaced and rendered unemployed. On November 4, 1987 peasants destroyed thousands of saplings in Kasanur village. As a result of the struggle the government ordered the closing down of the company.

Save the Western Ghat and Agitation Against Mega Industries: One of the earliest environmental struggle was Save the Western Ghat March in 1989, This march was necessitated due to the fact that the western ghat region was coming under severe pressure due to rampant urbanization, industrialization, deforestation, inappropriate utilization of natural resources, mining etc. Subsequent to the march a spate of new movements began to grow in the erstwhile Dakshina Kannada district in the coastal areas. Mega industries such as Cogentrix, MRPL, Nagarjuna, Ispat, Indo- Gulf Fertilizer Ltd etc came under severe contestation. In all these cases pollution, increasing stress on the eco sensitive district, loss of fauna and flora, acid rain etc became the major issues. In Dakshina Kannada the struggle against the mega industries was led by Nagarika Seva Samithi, Dakshina Kannada Jilla Parisaraskta Okkuta, (Dakshina Kannada District Environmental Federation), Dakshina Kannada Meenugarara Parisara Samiti. As a result of series of agitations such as protests, street plays, pamphleteering, jathas, lobbying, cycle jatra, bandhs etc some of the Company's were made to withdraw from operating in Dakshina Kannada/coastal areas. Similarly, North Kannada or the Uttara Kannada saw the series of agitations during 1980s. One important agitation was the 'Appiko Chalavali'(Hug the trees) against the deforestation. This agitation or campaign received its influence from Chipko Movement of North India. This campaign began from Balegadde Village in North Kanara and continued for 38 days. Second important struggle was 'Against 'Bedthi' Project as it would have destroyed large number of forestland and also displaced large number of population. However, during 1990s 'Uttara Kannad Ulisi Andolana'(UKUA), opposed Kalga Power Plant, Karwar port, Eco Tourism of Taj group that would have taken away lands of peasants and fishermen.

Agitation Against Mining in Kudremukh:

One of the Important struggles in recent days wherein large number of environmental groups entered in was the Kudremukh struggle. This struggle was centered on opposing further extension of teasing to the Kudremukh Iron Ore Company in the Kudremukh region of Chickmagalur district. Their opposition also combined other multiple issues: the Kudremukh Iron Ore Company, a profit making public sector, is involved in 'ecocide' from time to time; that it is creating-serious ecological problems, it is involved in violating the laws of the land on pollution, conservation and environmental protection. Further, environmentalist also argues that company was said to be causing serious damage to the irrigation potentiality of the Bhadra River, an important lifeline of Karnataka. Finally their argument centered around the fact that, 'mining over the past twenty five years have depleted the Shola forest and replaced them with heaps of mined waste.

Dalit Movement:

Unlike other social movements, the history of dalit movement can be traced to the early decade of 1970s. Initially it took the form popularly called 'Dalita Bandaya.' The Dalit movement, which later on transformed into Dalita Sangarsh Samiti was the product of four radical land reforms measures. Nonetheless, during 1970s and 1980s the regional specificities of culture and social relations also contributed towards the growth of a militant Dalit movement or the politics. In Raichur district for example Dalit movement emerged against the cultural practices of nude worship, domination and confiscation of land. In Chickmagalur the issues of 'Bagar Hukum' land, destruction of property by the dominant caste controlling common grazing of 'gomal' lands created the conditions for Dalit movement to grow. In Gulbarga dalit movement developed against the practice of bonded labor, special boycott, practice of untouchability in hotels, and nude worship. In Bangalore it started as a protest against increasing discrimination in the workplace or bureaucracy, atrocities, prohibition to enter into temples, prevailing bonded labor; land alienation, confiscation of common grazing land etc.

Land struggles:

Until the end of 1980s the dalit movement resorted to many land struggles: One important struggle is known as Sidlipur Land struggle of 1977,

this struggle made the government to introduce Prevention of Land Alienation Act. Second important struggle was Honnali Land struggle in Shimoga district, which ended up in issuing tenancy letter to the landless peasants; Bidait Kavli land struggle of 1980s in Hasan district was largely a 'land grab struggle'. Similar was the Chandgod and Kooduvalli struggle in Chickmagalur in 1979, Medikanala struggle centered on confiscating tank land in 1984; Mohammad Nagar struggle of 1987 in Bellary district was against encroachment by the sugar baron. Most important struggle was Nagasandra struggle in Kolar in 1985, its success lies in the fact that government ultimately agreed to distribute six hundred acres of land to the Dalits.

Struggle for student hostels: This struggle was the result of discrimination and unfavourable treatment meted to the dalit students in different hostels. These struggles also combined the issues of Scholarship or freeship to the dalit students. Some of the famous struggles were: Dharwad-Vyasrajapura struggle, Kolar-Hunsur, Mysore struggle.

Struggle against Untouchability:

This struggle mainly was to oppose untouchability practiced at different levels- hotels, social interactions, public places, etc. Struggles in Kundur, Alagud, Kada Kothnahalli and Hirenaganur were some of the important struggles that the Dalit movement waged.

Struggle against Rape:

Some of the important rape cases that the movement took it up were the cases of Ansuyamma, Nagamma, ChinaAtamani, Makkeli Tayamma.

Agitation against Globalization:

For the last couple of years Dalit movement is concerned about the effects of globalisation. The Dalit Movement is under taking including a critical analysis of Globalization a series of agitations. There are three inbuilt arguments vis-a-vis the globalization: loss of identity, loss of culture, and loss of economy /employment. Nonetheless, Unlike wise the farmer's movement the militancy of the dalit movement has muted over the years. One of the reasons is the growing sharp differences from within the movement leading to the split. One of the issues is the politics- supporting or opposing a particular political party. These differences can be seen even on the issue of internal reservation or what is called 'reservation within reservation' for 'Holeyas and

‘Madigas’, For the last couple of years each group is demanding reservation in proportion to its numbers. All these have made the Dalit movement to lose its identity as a powerful social movement.

Farmer’s Movement

One of the most important movements which went beyond the national boundaries to join international collectives is the farmers movement of 1980s under the Karnataka Rajya Raitha Sangha (KKRS) which began as a protest movement against the terms of trade going against the purchasing power, increasing cost of input prices, declining per capita income, increasing indebtedness, unremunerative prices for the agricultural crops, uneconomical holdings, against losing proposition of agriculture, against the increasing poverty level and finally against the urban biased policy of the state.

Globalization and the farmer’s movement: Farmer’s movement under KRRS in Karnataka resorted to different strategies, beginning with organizing seminars to adopting resolutions to direct attack and forming international collectives at the global level. All these strategies had one larger meaning other than contesting globalization: This is but to claim the authenticity of representing the natives/locality/nation and nationality.

Tribal Struggles or the Movement:

For the past few years the tribal struggles have become sharp with the globalization entering into the domain of culture, nature and environment. This is because tribals have been confronted with new forms of contradictions. Historically their immediate contradiction has been the state- earlier it was colonial state and, after the independence it has been shifted to post-colonial Indian state (through the means of forest officials). In recent days the entry of World Bank/global capital under the grab of eco-development project has added one more dimension to the contradiction. This has come out at a time when Indian state was giving up the model of ‘command economy.’ succumbing to the pressure of globalization/western capitalism. In addition, the recent Supreme Court verdict to vacate the lands occupied by the tribals in the forest region has further sharpened the contradiction between the Indian state/ global capital and the tribals.

Unlike the colonial period, the tribals in recent years have formed many organizations to resist and to advance their claims: Rajya

Moolanivasigala Budakattu Janara Vedike, Girijanara Jilla Samiti, Nagarhole Budakattu Janara Hakku Stapanana Samiti, Budakattu Krishikara Sangha, Karnataka Rajya Moolanivasigala Budakattu Janara Vedike etc However, their struggle all these years took different forms-dharnas, protest marches, defying the law, submitting memoranda etc. Some of the most important struggles that the tribals waged in recent years are as follows:

Movement Against Eco-Development Programme: This is a World Bank project aiming at converting the Nagarhole areas into a National Park or Protected Areas(PA) .The project has five important objectives: to improve the capacity of PA management, to conserve biodiversity and to increase opportunities for local participation in PA management activities and decisions; reduce negative impact of PAs on local people and increase collaboration of local people in conservation efforts: more effective and extensive support for PA eco-development to ensure effective management, prepare biodiversity to ensure effective management and finally prepare biodiversity project. However the larger implication of the Eco-Development projects are different one: it makes the tribals living in the core areas to vacate the forest areas; it will increase cultural alienation and the alienation .between the tribals and the nature, loss of communitarian life, suppression by the state, loss of economy, and loss of the self.. Nonetheless, tribal struggle against Eco-Development Project was sharp during later part of 1990s, Tribals resorted to series of demonstrations, strikes, long marches including the fact that they came to cities to ‘enlighten the urbanites’.

Enter the Forest Movement: This is a part of asserting the ‘self rule’ in the forest areas as recommended by the Bhuria Committee. This struggle began in 1995 in the vicinity of Nagarhole national Park in south Karnataka. The major claim was that the tribals were denied the traditional right to collect fuel, fodder and also to worship the nature. Most important argument was that, Forest which was our house in the past had become the property of forest department, it was high time we re-established our self rule in forest. In fact, tribals symbolically asserted their claim over the forest areas by forest region.

Land Struggles

Land has been the major concern for majority of categories in Karnataka. Despite the introduction of land reforms act of 1970s by late Devaraj Urs, the land question has remained incomplete for varieties of people. This is because of the fact that land reforms act itself was defeated by the landlord categories by using the loopholes inherent in the Act. This is one of the reasons why land reforms act never destroyed the feudalism in Karnataka. The presence of feudalism can be seen in the way caste atrocities have been perpetrated by the dominant caste/upper caste over the Dalits, the presence of bonded labor, the caste struggles etc. Even it can be seen in the forced labor, presence of different land structures or relations etc. It is in this context the Karnataka saw the simultaneous presence of two social formations-feudalism on the one hand and capitalism on the other. Nonetheless, land issues has become important for varieties of social categories for three important reasons: One, it provides the required ground for identity formation in the country side; two, it helps in the transformation of rural economy and three, it creates spaces for the growth of autonomous individuals in the country side. This is the reason why different social groups including the left parties took up the cause of land.

Conclusion:

All these show the increasing growth of social movements in recent years. Nonetheless these social movements are not without any weakness. Some of the weaknesses are as follows:

1. These social movements failed to bring in radical transformation both at the grass root levels and at other structural levels. Whatever the changes they brought in were half hearted and were not effective to bring in over all changes.
2. These social movements have not been able to over come the sectarian interests and thereby they could not able to form a strong burger collective at all Karnataka level.
3. Most of the struggles have remained localized, class-caste and area specific.
4. They could not able to spread evenly between different regions. This is because their effects are different in different regions.

If environmental movement is powerful in coastal belt, the same is not true in North-Western region.

5. Even they could not able to address the issues within a clear-cut framework-both theoretically and ideologically.
6. Most important is the lack of unity from within the social movements. This led to the split and dilution of militancy. The sharpening contradictions, including the caste, class and area specificity of the movements are some of the reasons for the split and the subsequent dilution of militancy of the social movements.
7. Finally, limited agenda of the movements also prevented the movements becoming effective.

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