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Beyond Resource Mobilization Theory: Dynamic Paradigm of Chengara Struggle

M. Manosmita, C. Aruna and K. Libina

Department of Sociology, Pondicherry University, Puducherry 605 014, India

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ABSTRACT This paper focuses on Chengara struggle, from the perspective of contemporary movements and compares the features of old social movements and resource mobilization theory. This work is mainly framed through review of related literature as well as analyzing the data collected from 100 participants involved in the movement through an in-depth interview. The paper attempts to examine the application of Resource Mobilization Theory by describing the linkage between the theory and Chengara struggle. The present paper reveals the theoretical background under social phenomena of movements for liberation. It explores the ideological transformation of old social movements to new social movements, depicting certain similarities and differences between both temporal movements. While the old movements focused on ideological discourse of revolution, the new social movement is more issue oriented. The paper attempts to give a theoretical base to analysis, where the resource mobilization theory justifies the context of the struggle.

INTRODUCTION

With the changes in the agrarian structure the advent of the market economy and with the growth of the liberal education; people are more conscious about their rights and obligations. This becomes the base for the new social movements, which is concerned with the whole society not a particular caste or class. This paper focuses on two aspects – the changing representation of social movements from the traditionally class bounded conception of the old or classical to the generally non-class new movements or contemporary movements, and is illustrated through the Chengara movement, a new social movement in Kerala. The paper also focuses upon land alienation, as the base factor for crisis in the Chengara movement (rooted in resource mobilization), which is classified as a new social movement since land is a mobilizing resource for the minority group of the research setting.

Resource mobilization (RM) theory is now the dominant theoretical framework for analyzing social movements and collective action within the discipline of sociology (McCarthy and Zald 1977). Resource mobilization theory has recently presented an alternative interpretation of social movements. The review traces the emergence and recent controversies generated by this new perspective. A multifactor model of social movement formation is advanced, emphasizing resources, organization, and political opportunities in addition to traditional discontent behavior. Resource mobilization theory may be traced from early programmatic statements (McCarthy and Zald 1973, 1977; Oberschall 1973) through subsequent critiques and reformulations (Marx and Wood 1975; Piven and Cloward 1977; Perrow 1979; Fireman and Gamson 1979; Jenkins 1983; Klandermans 1983) to a number of empirical studies which have sought to test and modify the theory (Walsh 1978; Gamson 1992; McAdam 1982; Morris 1984; Rochford 1985; Cable et al. 1988).

Recently the study of social movements has moved beyond the limitations of traditional, social-psychological perspectives on collective behavior that viewed social movements as generally irrational phenomena. In contrast, recent works have taken a more dynamic approach to the study of social movements, examining among other issues the strategic problems of having to appeal to various constituencies (Lipsky 1968) and the tactics used by state officials and business interests to control insurgent efforts (Jenkins and Perrow 1977).

Movements are also seen as structured and patterned, so that they can be analyzed in terms of organizational dynamics just like other forms of institutionalized action (Oberschall 1973; McCarthy and Zald 1973, 1977; Tilly 1978). In sharp contrast to the earlier collective behavior

Address for correspondence:
Dr. C. Aruna
Assistant Professor
Department of Sociology
Pondicherry University
Puducherry 605 014, India
Telephone: +91-413-2654496
E-mail: caruna_lect@yahoo.co.in

tradition (Turner and Killian 1972; Smelser 1962), resource mobilization theory views social movements as normal, rational, institutionally rooted political challenges by aggrieved groups. The border between conventional politics and social movements thus becomes blurred, but does not disappear altogether.

In contrast to traditional socio psychological interpretations, resource mobilization theory emphasizes the importance of structural factors, such as the availability of resources to a collectivity and the position of individuals in social networks, and stresses the rationality of participation in social movements (Oberschall 1973; Gamson 1975; Marx and Wood 1975; McCarthy and Zald 1977; Snow et al. 1980; Gamson 1992). Participation in a social movement is seen not as the consequence of predisposing psychological traits or states, but as a result of rational decision processes whereby people weigh the costs and benefits of participation.

The resource mobilization theory equates social movement behavior with political behavior (Halebsky 1976). The general model posits the existence of a polity structure composed of groups that have regular, routine, and low-cost access to societal resources. Excluded groups are denied this ready access and strive for inclusion to the polity to gain such privileges. Hence, the model depicts a dynamic and interactive struggle between the out-polity groups who seek inclusion and the in-polity groups who resist such incursions. To facilitate their struggle the excluded groups organize themselves. This makes them better prepared to challenge the polity groups. Organizations act as repositories for the accumulation and concentration of community resources as well as provide a forum for the development of leadership potential and the articulation of group goals (Waterman 1981).

Social movement is built upon the conscious effort and normative commitment to change the existing social scenario and active participation on the part of the followers or members. The Chengara movement in Kerala, India is recent example for the emancipation of the downtrodden, which aspires for acquiring the permanent ownership on the disputed agricultural land. The movement is understood from a subaltern perspective, which is a potentially useful analytical paradigm for studying tribal and ethnic movements in India. This is important to understand the nature of the particular social movement in India and also examine the relevant theoretical perspectives as well as the changes occurring over a period of time.

The new social movement is understood to have some degree of correspondence with the image of society, hence the Chengara land struggle corresponds to this category. Subaltern approach seeks to restore a balance by highlighting the role of the politics as against the elite politics played in Indian history. Parallel to the domain of elite politics there always existed throughout the colonial period another domain of Indian politics in which the principal actors were not the dominant groups of the indigenous society but the subaltern classes and groups constituting the masses of the laboring population and the intermediate strata in the town and country.

Ruggiero and Montagna (2008) argues that the idea of social movement offers a spectrum through which we can view material conflict in an industrial society and equally well, view opinion persuasion or disposition in a late modern society. Bayley and Bryant (1997) divide coercive public protests into legal and illegal protest. Each category is further subdivided into violent and non violent protest some others divided into grass roots and macro movements, social movements are also classified on the basis of issues around which participants get mobilized. Some of them are known as the; forest, civil rights anti- untouchability, linguistic, nationalist and such other movements. Some others classify movements on the basis of the participant and issues together. Ray and Katzenstein (2005) examine how India's political contest has reshaped the panorama of Indian social movements.

METHODOLOGY

The Chengara land grab explains a land question spanned in colonial and post colonial era. Here, the movement is started by the Dalits against the government and civil society for getting permanent ownership on agricultural land and livelihood. In Desai's words, the civil and democratic rights of the people are not protected by the constitution as a result of which they engage in movements such as Chengara struggle.

Dalits, major participants of the movement occupy the lowest position in the caste and class

hierarchy. These subaltern groups have been trying to make their own history through the resistance against the upper class elites and state machinery. In this backdrop the present paper aims to understand Chengara struggle through the Resource Mobilization Theory and examine the changing representation in social movements.

The research design for the present paper is exploratory cum descriptive. The descriptive character of the study is derived from the interpretative methods, which is important of qualitative tradition. The field area, Chengara is a small village situated in Pathanamthitta district in Kerala. Out of 3000 families who have settled in Harrison Malayalam estate, participants from 100 families were interviewed in depth for the study. Around 70 percent of the participants of the movement belong to scheduled castes, 20 percent of them are Dalit Christians, and a small number are Muslims and other caste members. This work is mainly framed through review of related literature as well as analyzing the data collected from 100 participants of the movement.

DISCUSSION

The socio economic profile of the sample shows that majority (76 percent) are Hindus, followed by 18 percent of Christians and 6 percent Muslims. One half of the respondents are married and the participants of the movement are from the outskirts of Kerala and most of them belong to the socially, economically and educationally backward class.

History of the Chengara Struggle

Chengara is a small village situated in Pathanamthitta district in Kerala. Around 70% of the population here are Christians and 25% of them are Hindus and the remaining are Muslims. The village frequents the media due to a land struggle, popularly known as "Chengara Samaram" (Chengara struggle), which is led by Laha Gopalan,under the banner of Sadhujana vimochana samyuktha vedhi (the United Front of the Poor for Liberation). The hilly terrains at the southern plantation belt of the Pathanamthitta district in Kerala reverberates with a major land struggle of an unprecedented nature involving more than 3,000 families of the deprived sections of the society- dalits, adivasis and OBC's. These are the people left out in land reforms of Kerala, once lauded as a grand success. They demand land and labour to live.

When the struggle started, there settled more than 5,000 dalit, adivasis, and OBC families. The lease held by Harrisons Malayalam Estate for the 6,000 hectares in Chengara expired in 1996. The agitators say that the government promised to hand over the land to the landless Dalits, Adivasis and OBCs by acquiring the land illegally possessed by the plantation owners and pass it on to the land less; but did not do so. They are demanding a minimum of one acre of cultivable land anywhere in Kerala.

The entire discourse about land alienation was centred on the 1975 Act; the Adivasi – Dalit Samaram Samithi agitation, which begun in August 2001, ushered in a new phase of the land issue in the state. By 2003, land struggles in Kerala attained a new order of practices as the subaltern insurgents were then trying to break and destroy the then existing structure of power relation. The Sadhujana Vimochana Samyuktha Vedhi had started agitations focussing on the landlessness and related issues such as no place for burial or cremation, which the leaders alleged had been a regular feature every year and which neither the media nor the officials recognised in the name of salvaging the vaunted Kerala model of development. Land alienation was recognised as the crucial causative factor behind there backwardness and the state was blamed for hoarding most of their land especially tribal land. With the support of the state, large private players (companies) kept huge amounts of land in their custody without the authorization to do so. The movement also witnessed unprecedented solidarity between one section of the dalits and tribes.

The movement for land acquisition in Chengara was started on 4th August, 2007, under the leadership of Laha Gopalan, in southern plantation belt of Athumpumkulam,(specify the exact area). They occupy around 500 acres of land. Around 170 permanent workers, who were tapping in the plantation for more than 30 years lost their jobs. Among these workers 117, belongs to the Scheduled castes. The Harrison Malayalam company along with the trade unions have created a blockade which has culminated in the deliberate cutting off of food and other essential supplies to the protesters for more than 10 months. On August 14th 2008, the trade

unions lifted the blockade for a period of ten days and issued an ultimatum to the 5000 families to leave the plantation site in these days which fuelled the hostile situation.

Hostility made the life harder, in the sense that it was too difficult to reach their pavements, they have to take through the forest, and they are women who have to climb up and down hills to get water for their cooking, etc. Very few children in the Plantation were getting education; others had to stop their studies due to the financial problems as well as the blockade imposed on them by trade union members. The trade union members had imposed hostile while they had lost their daily job, which they have done for last 20 years.

The police have arrested some people on the estate, when they were trying to sell the rubber tapped from the plantation. Harrisons Malayalam Plantation claims it owns the rubber trees on the plantation. It approached the High Court to clear the space of encroachers. The company had got the order from the High Court telling the government to peacefully evict the families in the next three months. Any violence from the state will result in a huge bloodshed.

The civil society (in sociological discourses, which provided by the plethora of social movements and the role of the nongovernmental organizations in socio-economic development) of Kerala reacted to it, when the hostile has been imposed on them by the trade union of permanent workers in the plantation (it includes CITU, INTUC and BMS) when they demand to ensure the immediate lifting of the blockade and sufficient supply of food, medicines and adequate health care to the protest camps. Along with these the government provided medical facilities like medical camp and availability of the ambulance for 24 hours near to the entrance, the different NGOs had conducted medical camps for them.

Chengara Movement Culmination

Though Chengara struggle ran for 795 days on the demand for five acres (one acre is 0.4 hectare) of cultivable land for every participant family, the struggle ended abruptly on October 6, with clear signs of divisions in the leadership and the ranks of the agitators who played an active role in the struggle. But it was clear from the beginning that the Chengara agitation, if left unsolved, would become a cause for embarrassment for the Left Democratic Front (LDF) government in Kerala. In the settlement package it was announced by Chief Minister V.S. Achuthanandan, the government promised 50 cents each to 832 participant dalit families, one acre each for 27 tribal families (as it was promised to the Scheduled Tribes in other parts of the State) and 25 cents each to the landless others. In all, land and housing assistance were offered to 1,432 participant families whose applications were in the official records. The government was also to provide housing assistance to the landless as well as to those families that had only less than five cents of land.

At a joint press conference following the announcement of the package in the presence of Opposition Leader Oommen Chandy (who played a key role in formulating the settlement), the Chief Minister said it was difficult to find the necessary land in Kerala even to implement the package that was being offered and there was no way the government could fulfill the SVSV's demand for more.

Gopalan, one of the leader said that his organization was accepting the "leftover" offer under protest, convinced that this was the best that Dalits could expect from both the ruling and Opposition coalitions. He, however, said the agitators would leave Chengara only after the land promised by the government was actually allotted to them. Some other leaders also claimed that the package was a sell-out and that it kept a large number of families that were part of the struggle outside the list of beneficiaries.

"Dalits in Kerala are going to lose a lot because of the Chengara package. We are all disappointed. There is a clear scaling down of the extent of land that the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes can claim from now on. Dalits were demanding one acre; the package says they are eligible for 50 cents. Not long ago Adivasis were promised up to five acres, but the government now says they will get only one acre." (Frontline 2009). Chengara is yet another indication of the restlessness that is building up in the lower strata of Kerala society, which is sought to be articulated pointedly under a caste (rather than class) identity, and disturbingly, at times, with extremist overtones.

The movement is having the character of cultural pluralism, which deals with the changes in the life style and the reconstruction of the

social structure. They believe that, acquiring agricultural land will make them perfect to live in this neo liberal economy. Dalits insurgencies have to be understood in the backdrop of the attempts of the post colonial India to revitalise landlordism and to promote parasitic landlordism. After the land reforms the overwhelming majority of tribal communities and dalits in Kerala continue to be entirely landless. Most of the tribal people were through the past few centuries drafted into agrarian society as bonded workers and otherwise. Chengara, struggle for land acquisition raises the draw backs of the land reforms or the mainstream society's (civil society's) attitude towards the backwardness of certain groups of people. In Kerala, 85% of landless people are Dalits, Adivasis and OBCs. The state land reform itself made them land owners and at the same time landless. The unorganized sections of the society are organized on the basis of Ambedkars ideas and Ayyankali. Chengara Stuggle as such had some political influence but there is no core political agenda.

Chengara struggle as a New Social Movement

Chengara struggle which can also be considered as a new social movement is different from previous ones in terms of their social support bases, goals, structures and styles. Earlier movements were rooted in the class conflicts of capitalist societies. Whereas the new ones are said to derive from value cleavages that identify only communities of likeminded people. The goals of these movements are said to be collective goods rather than the more narrow self interests of older social movements. Their internal structures are also allegedly more decentralized, open and democratic than older and more hierarchically organized labor unions. Chengara movement of Kerala which is a new social movement/ contemporary movements are fused on goals of autonomy, identity, self realization and qualitative life chances, rather than divisible material benefits and resources.

It is somewhat difficult to define what the differences between New Social Movement and Old Social Movement. Extensive effort has been made by writers in defining the differences particularly among the new social movement theorists, who believes that contemporary social movements are fundamentally different from old social movements. The attributes compared (refer Table I) are drawn from Chris Rhodes's work (Buechler 1995; Cohen 1985; Gamson 1988, 1992; Inglehart 1981; Martell 1994; Melucci 1994; Mertig 2001; Offe 1994; Sutton 2000).

Table 1: Comparison of old and new social movements

Components	*Old social movements*	*New social movements*
Ideology	Political focus	Cultural focus
Society	In early capitalist societies	In advance capitalist societies
Period	Pre- 1960's movements	Post 1960's movements
Participants	Class-based	Cross class participants
Issue raised	Class-based issues	Non-class/ cross class issues
Goals	Materialist goals	Post materialist goals
Organization	Centralized: Formal and hierarchical	Decentralized: Informal and grass roots
Medium of change	Institutional action; collective action; political involvement	Direct action; collective and individual action; individual life style

The Chengara struggle is a social movement which can be interpreted as a new social movement as it fulfills the claim of the New Social Movement theory and are significantly different from previous social movements of the industrial economy. The primary difference is in their goals, as the new movements focuses not on issues of materialistic qualities such as economic wellbeing, but on issues related to human rights. The Chengara struggle comes under post 1960s movements in advance capitalist society. In terms of organization it is seen that the Chengara struggle is decentralized in terms of informal and grass root level participation. Most of the agitators in this movement actively participated in the political activities of different political parties and some are also members of trade unions. Moreover, cultural focus comes when it is related to the identity of the downtrodden.

Chengara Movement and Resource Mobilization Theory

The Chengara struggle of Kerala is a new social movement that inspired a new wave of liberation for the downtrodden through its mobilization process. Resource Mobilization theory

concerns more with the process of mobilization of the movement rather than focussing on the causes. In the present paper the resource mobilization theory is aptly significant. The assumption of the theory fulfils the criteria of the Chengara struggle giving the movement a theoretical approach. Studies have been done with relation to the theoretical approaches to social movements but resource mobilization theory forms a new alternative to the existing theories (Jenkins 1983).

Turner and Killian's (1957) formulation of the collective behavior tradition was oriented to short-term, spontaneous actions and was not well-suited to studying ongoing, organized, political forms of protest. Kornhauser's (1959) analysis of a mass society in which only the most marginal, socially isolated people would become involved in collective behavior seemed to fly in the face of mobilization patterns in 1960s movements. Smelser's (1962) assumptions that collective behavior involved a short-circuiting of institutional channels by irrational actors under the sway of generalized beliefs were an especially inappropriate way to analyze much (though not all) of the protest behavior of the 1960s. And Gurr's (1970) synthesis of relative deprivation approaches ultimately rested on psychological models of frustration-aggression which also distorted more than they revealed about many forms of activism. Against this theoretical backdrop, the resource mobilization theory framework offered an appealing alternative for many sociologists. In contrast to traditional socio psychological interpretations, resource mobilization theory emphasizes the importance of structural factors, such as the availability of resources to a collectivity and the position of individuals in social networks, and stresses the rationality of participation in social movements (Oberschall 1973; Gamson 1975; Marx and Wood 1975; McCarthy and Zald 1976; Snow et al. 1986; Gamson 1992).

The present study on Chengara struggle deals with the downtrodden, often involved in struggles to establish rights. These include rights to livelihood, rights to land, and for the human rights. To the extent that many demands of the social movements are based on struggle to establish rights, it may be said that they are part of the attempts to create or recreate a civil society. It also drew the focus back to issues of identity and culture. The movement also centered among minority groups which drew some of their movement's strength from reassertion of identity place but also on how the movement is organized. It was called resource mobilization theory because the theory purported to show that the success of a movement depended on the resources available to be used. These resources arose from inducting individuals to participate and contribute to the cost. Resources mobilization is focused on a functional model assuming rational actors and misses psychological factors such as frustration and alienation.

Social movements are traditionally seen as extension of more elementary forms of collective behavior and as encompassing both movements for personal change and institutional change like legal reforms and changes in political power. Resource mobilization theorists have, in contrast, seen social movement as an extension of institutionalized actions and have restricted their focus to movements of institutional change that attempt to alter "elements of social structure and the reward distribution in a society (McCarthy and Zald 1977). Similarly in the Chengara struggle importance has been given to the institutional change whereas land as a source of mobilization played an important role in initiating the movement.

The new social movement is seen as illustrative of a different style of political involvement characterized by decentralization and much wider public participation than is common in traditional forms of interest group activities. They are also said to be more likely to resort to unconventional political tactics pursuit of their goal and to advocate a new world view.

CONCLUSION

The struggle at Chengara is more than a struggle for land; it is a political struggle for identity and citizenship, and marks a new phase in the history of democratic struggle in Kerala. It is a voluntary struggle entirely initiated by the landless people who belong to dalit community who have suffered a lot as landless and marginalized for several decades. It may seem strange that it in fact takes up a struggle that has been left unfinished by the traditional Left in Kerala as the land reforms have not done anything for the landless dalits as they were given only the residential land for pursuing agriculture. There are no changes in the case of

landless dalit people. Meanwhile they started movement against the state and its representatives, the struggle assumes special significance at a time when more and more peasants, adivasis and dalits are being robbed of their land and their traditional, life giving habitat and driven to starvation and suicide.

The present paper emphasizes that the Chengara movement has taken place in the modern neo liberal society with the characteristics of new social movement. This paradoxical movement requires the attention of several disciplines, voluntary and philanthropic association, social workers for the in depth understanding of the problem.

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