

Water, Left Politics and the Manufactured Dissent: Understanding the Politics of Political Mobilization of Local People against Coca Cola in Gangaikondaan, Tamil Nadu

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Abstract

The paper analyses the Peoples' movement against Coca-Cola Company in Gangaikondaan, firstly by narrating the various events of organized protests that tells the story of the rise and fall of the movement. Secondly, it subjects the politics of mainstream communist parties; particularly their politics of representation to criticism. And then finally the paper discusses the practical implications of the politics of representation by the mainstream left parties for the ecological discourse on the over extraction of water. This paper critically looks at the aspects of the ideological struggle of the left parties that led to the formation of the Peoples' movement against the Coca-Cola Company not only to understand the socio-political factors that led to the fall of the movement but also to understand how changing politics of mainstream left political parties in India towards articulating Non-Class conflict affects the ecological discourse on over extraction and exploitation of water resources. The paper argues firstly, the left move to articulate non-class conflict in our context through the ideological struggle against Coca-Cola Company has led only to the manufacturing of dissent where there is no dissent. Secondly the articulation of ecological concerns within the paradigm of "Conflict", particularly within the paradigm of "Non-class Conflict" prevents the Indian mainstream left from establishing a continuous engagement with the ecological concerns. The paper also argues that process of moving away from the class politics towards the articulation of non-class conflicts is a result of the crisis of the politics of representation of the mainstream left political parties in India.

Keywords: Class Conflict; Non-Class Conflict; Representation; Organic Crisis; Ideological struggles; Ideological Powers

Introduction:

The political engagement of mainstream Indian political parties with the environmental problems and the challenges posed by ecology is very scanty and momentary. It appears that the local political and economic interests of these parties prevent them from taking up certain substantial environmental problems that affects the ordinary people. It does not mean that these political parties are ideologically committed to ecological concern but not in a position to practice. Neither the government of AIADMK (All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam) in the past

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nor the DMK (Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam) government of the present paid any attention to the voices of dissent against the supply of water from Tamirabarani River to Coca-Cola Company (South India Bottling Co. (P) Ltd.,) at Gangaikondan. Locally powerful leaders of both DMK and AIADMK in the Maanoor Panchayat Union area were part of the local organisations that were created to protect the interests of the Coca-Cola Company. But the left political forces both the mainstream parties and as well as the radical Marxist-Leninist groups were not only exceptions but also spearheaded the struggles against the exploitation of both river and ground waters by the Coca-Cola Company in Tirunelveli.

The political involvement of all three major left parties, Communist Party of India (CPI), Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPM) and CPI (M-L) in the struggles against the exploitation of river and ground water by the Coca-Cola Company in the form of organising various protest rallies, demonstrations, fasting protests, awareness campaign covering the entire river belt of Tamirabarani could not succeed in stopping either the construction or running of the factory. This questions the validity of the thesis of Ramachandra Guha and Martinez-Allier that the political disengagement of political parties with the environmental issues and problems was the important reason for the failures of environmental movements that were articulating the dissent of the marginalized and poor affected by the developmental projects and policies of the State (1998). It is politically incorrect to assume that the mere participation and representation of political parties in the environmental struggles would help the marginalized to make their movement successful. The activists of both left parties, activists from the villages of Thuraiyoor, Gangaikondan and Rajapathy and the local NGO activists came out with many reasons for the failure of the movement against Coca-Cola: police repression against the protesters, the total support of the district revenue administration to Coca-Cola Company, divided village Panchayats, absence of political and moral support from the mainstream political parties such as DMK, AIADMK, MDMK, and Congress (I), the withdrawal of Puthiya Tamizhakam (a Dalit political party that has a strong mass base in that region) from the struggle, the concerted campaign of Coca-Cola Company against the protesters, completely fragmented movement on party lines, and almost nil support from the people of local villages. Though all these factors had contributed to the fall of the protest movement in their own way, the last two factors had detrimental effect

on the sustenance of the movement. The internal contradictions of the protest movement and move to wage an ideological struggle against the exploitation of natural resources by Multi-National Company (MNC) did not really inspire the local villagers to join the struggles. Under the banner of “Tamirabarani Protection and Anti-Coca-Cola Movement” the local CPI in Tirunelveli had tried organising the local people against the factory. The front organisations such as AITUC were part of the CPI led movement. The political formation led by local CPM had tried organizing local people under the banner “Tamirabarani and Ground water Protection Coordination Committee” consists of all the front organisations of CPM and twenty other organisations of NGOs, and local farmers. The political front of CPI (M-L) had also tried organising the local people under the common banner “Anti-Coke Struggle Committee”. Its struggles were spearheaded by the People’s Art and Literary Association (PALA). All these political formations of mainstream and radical left political parties had completely failed to get the moral support of the local villagers for their struggles.

The whole struggle against the Coca-Cola Company was organised on the single issue of prevention of the future ill effects of production of soft-drinks and overexploitation of river and groundwater in Gangaikondan and Prancheri Village Panchayat area. In the absence of actual ill effects of the factory, the local people did not take seriously the left perception of future ill effects and kept themselves away from the movement. The fragmentation of the movement on the party line gave the impression that the political interests of the parties are more important than the common cause of fighting against the exploitation of natural resources and pollution effect of the production of soft drinks. This forces us to critically analyse the aspects of the ideological struggle of the left parties that led to the formation of the movement against the Coca-Cola Company in Tirunelveli not only to understand the socio-political factors that led to the fall of the movement but also understand how changing politics of mainstream left in India towards articulating Non-Class conflict affects the ecological discourse on over extraction and exploitation of water resources. In many respects, the movement against the Coca-Cola Company was an ideological struggle. The political formation led by CPM was broad enough to include not only village level farmers associations but also many NGOs based in Tirunelveli and Madurai. The left forces tried to mobilize the local people not only against the Coca-cola but also

against the State and its repressive machineries. The radical left (M-L) led political front had to approach Madurai Bench of Madras High Court to get its permission to conduct their protest rally and other forms of struggle in the twin cities of Tirunelveli and Palayamkottai. Except a single protest event of fasting at Rajapathy village, no other protests were permitted by the local police in Gangaikondan area where the factory is located. This forced the protesting left forces to evolve multi-pronged strategies to tackle the complex and sophisticated enemy of MNC and the late capitalist State that protects the economic interests of the MNCs. The ideological struggle started with the village level awareness campaign on the ill effects of production of soft-drinks and overexploitation of river and groundwater in Gangaikondaan area. CPM led front went to the extent of evoking certain liberal notions of right to livelihood, human rights to mobilize the local people against the factory. This helped the front to some extent to move beyond the conventional Marxist position that the political and economic change must predate ecological concern but not completely. Despite their party differences, all the three left led political fronts were completely unanimous on one point that it is a struggle against the exploitation of natural resources by the MNCs rather than a struggle against the exploitation of natural resources itself. None of the party intellectuals and activists could give a convincing explanation about the overexploitation of water by the local and national capitalists. The effort to move beyond conventional Marxist position helped the CPM led front to construct a broad practical and ideological alliance with the NGOs and other non-left political formations. In spite of the ideological struggles of the movement against Coca-Cola, the movement could succeed neither in gaining the support of affected local people nor in stopping the factory from its production of soft-drinks that led to over extracting the river water. The paper argues firstly, the left move to articulate non-class conflict in our context through the ideological struggle against Coca-Cola Company points a significant transition in the left politics, particularly in the politics of mainstream left parties from class conflict to non-class conflicts. One of the important results of the transition is manufacturing of dissent where there is no dissent. Secondly the articulation of ecological concerns within the paradigm of “Conflict”, particularly within the paradigm of “Non-class Conflict” prevents the Indian mainstream left from establishing a continuous engagement with the ecological concerns. The practical implications of the political engagement of the Indian mainstream left forces with the environmental problems and issues for ecology

are two: firstly, it would push its ideological position of tracing the source of the ills (including all environmental problems) of contemporary society to capitalism. Secondly, it would give at most importance to immediate environmental problems rather than larger ecological concerns of conservation of bio-diversity and the need to articulate the concerns for protecting water resources within the larger framework water rights and environmental justice.

The paper analyses the movement against Coca-Cola Company under four major sections. The rise and fall of the movement is delineated in the following section-I. The analysis of the politics of mainstream communist parties, particularly their politics of representation in Tirunelveli is presented in the section-II of the paper. The concluding section-III discusses the practical implications of the politics of representation by the mainstream left parties for the ecological discourse on the over extraction of water.

The Rise and Fall of the Environmental Movement against Coca-Cola Company in Gangaikondaan

As local people claim, the Coca-Cola Company has registered its local factory at Gangaikondaan as South India Bottling Co. (P) Ltd (SIBCL) mainly to evade from the attention of potential protesters such as left groups, environmentalists, civil society organisations and farmer's union. The factory is located in SIPCOT (State Industries Promotion Corporation of Tamil Nadu Ltd) Industrial Growth Centre area. This industrial estate comes under the village Panchayat limits of Gangaikondaan and Pirancheri. SIPCOT Industrial estate is located almost 17 kilometres away from Tirunelveli city. The decision to create a SIPCOT industrial estate near Gangaikondaan was taken immediately after 1997 caste riots and clash between the Dalits and Thevar communities in southern Tamil Nadu, particularly in and around Thuraiyoor and Gangaikondaan. The decision to create an industrial estate was taken based on the recommendations of an inquiry commission headed by Mr. Gomathinayakam that was setup by the state government to go into the causes and circumstances leading to caste clashes between Dalits and Thevars in Tirunelveli and Thoothukudi districts and the High Level Committee for Prevention of Caste Clashes in Southern Districts of Tamil Nadu. Both Gomathinayakam Commission and High Level Committee found that underdeveloped economic conditions and acute

unemployment problem in the region were the main causes for caste clashes. Therefore they recommended to Government of Tamil Nadu to setup industrial estate in the region.

The Coca-Cola Company in Tirunelveli came into existence with the plots allotment order of SIPCOT authorities to its SIBCL on October 10, 2004. The plots allotment order is a licence in a sense from the state government to setup the plant. SIPCOT has allotted 31.64 acres of land for the SIBCL plant on lease for a period of ninety nine years with lots of conditions. The following conditions are very significant for the ecological concerns: 1. The allottee shall not dump debris or any harmful or harmless waste materials within SIPCOT premises. 2. SIPCOT will, subject to availability, supply up to 6, 00,000 (six lakh only) litres of water per day at the rate fixed by SIPCOT from time to time. 3. The allottee shall not sink any well/ bore well/ tube well within the plot leased to them. In case of short supply from SIPCOT sources the allottee can apply for permission which can be considered subject to the conditions as applicable. 4. The company / firm shall treat all the effluents to relevant norms as prescribed by Pollution Control Board and as applicable to the area / inland waterways and commence production only after obtaining clearance from the Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board. SIBCL had agreed to all the conditions and signed the memorandum of lease deed on January, 19, 2005. The company got the consent order from Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board on March 3, 2005 to establish the bottling unit in the SIPCOT area of Gangaikondaan. The resistance against the establishment of Coca-Cola plant started when the construction work of the plant was going on in its full swing.

It would be extremely difficult to give exact dates for the beginning and the end of any social movement because the latent dissent takes longer time to become the open protests. It may be easy to fix the data for open protest but not for the latent dissent. Likewise the open protests can come to an end at a particular point of time but not the latent dissent because it remains undiluted. The dissent remains undiluted if the open protests were unsuccessful. This is very much true in the case of struggle against Coca-Cola Company in Gangaikondaan. When the factory started laying its approach road for three kilometres inside from the National Highway-7, the local people came to know about the advent of a new factory to their area. Many ignored it

because of its name. Some of them even approached it for a job. During the period of construction of the factory, George, an educated youth from Thuraiyoor village, who is also associated with an organization called “Movement for the Oppressed people’s right to livelihood” went to the factory site and found out that the new factory is Coca-Cola Company. He immediately informed this to Ganesan; a local activist who is working for Madurai based human rights NGO called “People’s Watch”. George and Ganesan, with the support of Aloysius and Kanakaraj, they formed a committee to take up the struggle against the factory because all of them were well informed of the Plachimada struggles in Kerela. Since Kanakaraj works among the peasants and organises them in that region, he became the natural choice for the position of coordinator of newly constituted front “Tamirabarani and Groundwater Protection Coordination Committee (TGPCC)”. When local CPM came to know about the issue and the formation of a committee to take up the struggle, it entered the struggle by launching its own first protest demonstration on April 04, 2005 near Tirunelveli junction supermarket with the two important demands that: the government should protect the water resources of Tamirabarani river and groundwater in Gangaikondaan area from the over extraction and exploitation of Coca-Cola Company and should stop selling our water to foreign companies instead the government should take initiative to distribute clean and safe drinking water to all. Since it was organised by the district committee of CPM, its district secretary V. Palani and R. Krishnan, a former party MLA of Vasudevanallur led the struggle. Almost two weeks after the protest demonstration of CPM, the TGPCC led by Kanakaraj, in a meeting that was convened on April, 21, 2005 in the community hall of Rajapathy village had decided to launch a campaign march to 25 villages around Gangaikondaan on May 25, 2005 to create an awareness among the villagers about the ill effects of over exploitation of both river and groundwater. A representative from a front organization of CPM, Tamil Nadu Science Forum attended the meeting convened by Kanakaraj but not from the main party. The meeting was attended by CPI, Revolutionary Students’ Union, Tamil Nadu Muslims Munnetra Kazhakam, and many other civil society organizations. CPM had attended the next meeting of TGPCC and in the same meeting Ex. MLA of CPM, R. Krishnan took over the co-ordinatorship of the TGPCC. Kanakaraj was removed from the co-ordinatorship. Kanakaraj left the movement same day and never returned to it. The movement against Coca-Cola in Tirunelveli that lasted for almost two years started in the early months of 2005 and ended almost by the end of 2006. I have

selected only the major protests events of CPM, CPI and CPI (M-L) led struggles for the below discussion on the rise and fall of the movement against Coca-Cola Company.

One of the front organizations of CPI (M), Tamil Nadu Science Forum, was also a member organisation of the TGPCC, it organised a special seminar on May 14, 2005 in Tirunelveli. The theme of the seminar was 'Anti-Coca-Cola and the protection of Tamirabarani Water' was attended by party cadres. Few intellectuals of the party had addressed the gathering. After two months, TGPCC had organised a campaign march (Padayathra) on July, 9, 2005 covering the entire river belt of Tamirabarani from Papanasam to Aathoor to create awareness among the villagers about the future ill effects of the factory. The March was started with an inaugural function on July 9, 2005. It was attended by many party functionaries and representatives from various NGOs who were part of the TGPCC. The march came to end on July 12, 2005 in Aathoor. As a part of the campaign march it circulated a handbill giving all details about Coca-Cola Company and the success stories of Plachimada and Padamathoor struggles.

On August 09, 2005, it organised huge Dharna (demonstration) at Market Ground of Palayamkottai. It named its dharna as 'Quit Gangaikondaan' because it was organised after six decades on the day of 'Quit India Movement was started. The slogans were same for the demonstration. The leaders who addressed the demonstrators were mostly from the party.

With the slogan 'Tamirabarani is our River and it is not for sale', it announced a fasting protest to be held in Thuraiyoor on December 23, 2005. It was the only protest event announced that it will be conducted in Thuraiyoor village. But the local police had refused to give the permission for the proposed fasting protest by citing the reason that the protest will instigate the communal clash between the Dalits and Thevar. In 1997, Thuraiyoor experienced worst caste violence and the police had to fire to control the communal clash. On behalf of TGPCC, its convenor R. Krishnan filed Public Interest Litigation in the Madurai Bench of Madras High Court seeking its intervention to cancel the clearance given to Coca-Cola by the Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board and the agreement should be kept in abeyance till court clears the petition. Since the petitioner the cited reasons of water extraction and pollution and condemnation will affect the agriculture and drinking water in that region, the court directed the concerned authorities to submit all the documents to the court. The Court

later dismissed the petition by stating the claims of the petitioner were not supported by any substantial evidence. I have not given the details of the struggles of the front organisations of CPI (M) like DYFI and SFI.

The 'Tamirabarani Protection and Anti-Coca-Cola Movement' led by CPI Tirunelveli district committee had organised a campaign march that originated in Five different towns(Kovilpatti, Sivagiri, Tuticorin, Thiruchendoor, Chengkottai and Kavalkinaru) in Tirunelveli and Tuticorin districts on July 3rd and 4th , 2005. The two days campaign march came to end with a huge public meeting on July 4, 2005 in Thaazhaiyooththu (Sankar Nagar) addressed by its then state president R. Nallakannu and its party Member of Parliament M. Appadurai. The single aim of the campaign march was preventing Coca-Cola from robbing the water of Tamirabarai River. Another important protest event organised by CPI was its one day fasting on October 2, 2005 demanding the cancellation of licence to Coca-Cola Company. All the important party functionaries of CPI had participated in the fasting protest. It was presided by district secretary R. Shanmugavel. It came to end with the valedictory address of M. Appadurai, its party MP. The CPI-led struggles were never tried to get the support of democratic forces in Tirunelveli. It organised very few protest events and did not show any interests in continuing with struggles. Its struggles were attended only by its own party cadres and functionaries. No one from Gangaikondaan participated in its struggles. Its two major protests events were organised out side Gangaikondaan. The fasting protest was organised in Palayamkottai. As a part of its campaign, the CPI published a pamphlet written by S. Kasivishwanathan, a local ideologue and the AITUC district secretary of the party. The pamphlet entitled "Tamirabarani Water Robbery" traces the Coca-Cola's long history of exploiting water resources. It sees the strong link between globalisation and commercialization of drinking water in third world. We will now move on next to the struggles of CPI (M-L)

The CPI (M-L) had announced that it is going to conduct a major protest of road blockade near Gangaikondaan on September 12, 2005. But they did not get police permission to conduct the protest. Therefore it went to Madurai bench of Madras High Court and filed a writ petition to cancel the ban on its protests. Thangapandian, the coordinator of People's Art and Literary Association(PALA) who filed a writ petition, claimed that they asked police permission only to conduct the

street corner campaign meetings but the district police administration denied the permission on the ground that road blockade protest will create a huge a traffic jam near Gangaikondaan on the National Highway -7. The High Court Bench had issued an order to the District Superintendent of Police to grant permission to conduct the protests within the limits of law. The Court also asked not do any preventive arrests of the cadres of the party. As they planned its cadres had marched from Gangaikondaan Government Higher Secondary School towards the National Highway for a road blockade. But they were stopped and arrested near Gangaikondaan police station before the reach the National Highway. They were taken to a private marriage hall and kept under custody. This protest of road blockade took place in the evening of September 12, 2005. The same day morning PALA had organised a huge a rally in Palayamkottai against Coca-Cola. It was widely reported in all the local newspapers. The protest event was a huge success in terms of getting the attention of the entire city. There were three main slogans: we will destroy the GATT's agreement that monopolizes the rights of water trade to MNCs, We will defeat the conspiracy of the World Bank that recommends the pricing of water use, and will over throw the rule of World Trade Organization that subjects our country to recolonization of the imperial powers.

Both PALA and Human Rights Protection Centre, the front organizations of CPI (M-L) sent a legal petition on October 26, 2005 to The State Information Officer of Tamil Nadu under the legal provisions of The Right to Information Act, 2005 seeking certain information regarding the licence issued to M/s South India Bottling Company Private Limited, Gangaikondaan. No details available with the researcher about the response of the State Information Officer. They demanded certain information regarding the licence to SIBCL under serious apprehensions about the environmental and ecological damage that may be caused by this plant, in the light of the closure ordered issued by the Kerela Pollution Control Board to Coca-Cola Plant at Plachimada.

When the Panchayat President of Gangaikondaan Kamsan died under mysterious circumstances, the fact finding team led by the advocates of CPI (M-L) and Mani, a Union Panchayat Councillor visited the village and spoke to the relatives of Kamsan and few other villagers and submitted its report on September 30, 2005 to both the President of District Commission of Legal Affairs and sessions judge of the District Court. Kamsan was initially supporting the SIBCL but later went against the

interests of the factory by adopting certain resolutions in the village Panchayat meeting. He again withdrew his decision under the pressure of the Company. Since he died under the mysterious circumstances, the fact team demanded CB CID investigation and an inquiry commission of a sitting judge of High Court to go into the circumstances that led to the sudden demise of Kamsan.

On April 15, 2006 CPI (M-L) started a new front “Anti-Coke Struggle Group” consisting mostly of local party members to fight against the Company in Gangaikondaan. The new front announced that it is going to organise on March 23, 2006 the Bhagat Singh Memorial Day “Protest by Burning” of Coke and MNC products in Tirunelveli. The wall writing in Tirunelveli announcing this protest led the arrest two cadres of the party.

Apart from the struggles of the left political parties, the political engagement of other democratic forces like Dalit movements and political parties was very disappointing because the factory is located in area where Dalits are not only more in number and but also very active politically after 1997 caste violence against them. Dalits in this area are largely *Pallars*. The political party that has large followings among the Pallars in southern Tamil Nadu is Puthiya Tamizhakam. Despite its strong presence in the Tirunelveli and Tuticorin in general and Gangaikondaan in particular did nothing significant to the local Pallars to protect their life which is under threat. Its President K. Krishnasamy rushed to Tirunelveli when he came to know about the issue and gave press statement that the Tamirabarani should be protected from Coca-Cola Company. He told the press that there will be a consultative meeting on May 29, 2005 to find out the views of the local people. He announced that his party will organise struggles soon to protect the Tamirabarani and the people who depend on the river for their livelihood. Nothing came from him for some time. Finally an announcement came from him that his party will be organising a cycle rally as a part of its campaign. It was announced that cycle rally from Azhakiyapandipuram to Thuraiyoor and a public meeting in Thuraiyoor on October 2, 2005. He left the struggle with the cycle rally and never came back to it. Many local leaders felt that he should have continued the struggle because he has a large following among the Pallars in Gangaikondaan area.

Dalit Panthers of India (Viduthalai Chiruthaikal) is no better compare to Puthiya Tamizhakam. They organised a demonstration on October 10, 2005 in the Palayamkottai Market Ground against Coca-Cola. Its General Secretary Thol.

Thirumavalavan led the demonstration and announced that his party will continue to engage with struggles. Nothing came from him after that. One needs to do separate study on the political disengagement of Dalit political forces from the struggles against Coca-Cola.

From the above discussion on the struggles of the left forces in Tirunelveli, one can find the absence of a very significant political process of participation of ordinary local villagers or the common people. The absence of participation and political disengagement of the ordinary local villagers with the struggles against the Coca-Cola Company can be noticed in the following political acts:

1. No voluntary participation in the Grama Sabha meetings of the Panchayats that were convened to decide the matters of the factory.

2. Not developed any antagonistic consciousness against the factory. On the contrary many young men and women are employed in the factory. Many are expecting jobs from the factory.

3. Total withdrawal of some of the villagers who were initially participated in the preparation for the struggle.

4. Except one protest event of fasting in the Rajapathy village, all other protests took place in Palayamkottai and Tirunelveli. The people who participated in the protests outside Gangaikondaan were party cadres, members of the front organisations of CPI, CPM and CPI (M-L) and NGO activists. No participation from the ordinary villagers in these entire city centred struggles.

5. Some of the village elders and educated youths from Gangaikondaan and Thuraiyoor were even organised against the protesting left forces.

Despite the absence of participation and moral support of the local villagers to the struggles against the Coca-Cola, the left forces had organised many protests and continued the struggles only on the hope that the local people can be persuaded on the practical and ideological grounds. But they could not succeed in mobilizing the local people. In the absence of political interests and the support of local people, the move to mobilize local people on the ideological grounds of fighting against the coming of multinational capital and its exploitation of water resources and fighting against the State that protects the interests of that capital had led only to manufacturing of dissent where there is no such dissent. What we see here is a clear case of crisis of representation that is emerging slowly among the Indian left in general and mainstream left in particular.

The Mainstream Communist Parties and their Politics of Representation in the Movement against Coca-Cola Company in Tirunelveli

One of the significant developments in Indian politics and an important shift in the ideological paradigm of the mainstream communist parties is the increasing political engagement with the non-class political mobilizations like taking up the cause of Dalits, supporting the victims of developmental projects, and organising mass against the exploitation of natural resources. The increasing political engagement with the non-class conflicts indicates in a sense a process of moving away from the old class politics and class based political mobilization. The process of mainstream left moving away from its class based political mobilization was identified by many political scientists and came out with their own interpretations on the shift. Those interpretations are very valid and insightful to understand the shift. Javeed Alam(1998) had analysed the shift and makes the following remarks,

“The class battles and struggles for economic relief to the people as a part of the moves to keep the class question as the focal point of politics have been pushed into the background... The organized left may legitimately argue that there is an implicit class dimension underlying their current concerns in politics.

Nonetheless, the stance of the Communist movement today is in sharp contrast with that in the 1960s or during first decade of independence. Class struggles and protracted economic battles for the exploited and the oppressed were the marked features of its politics then. There was also, therefore, hope and confidence in the future. A sense of being besieged, together with rearguard actions, predominates the politics of the left today; this is in spite of considerable growth, even if halting, registered by the communist parties. Such a shift is noticeable in the change in tactics from the united front of left and democratic forces earlier to that of secular and democratic forces from the mid-1980s onwards”(pp.179, 180).

Why did such a change come about? He provides some clues towards an understanding of the present condition of the forced retreat from class politics by forwarding the following thesis,

“Crucial to the arguments is the thesis that the Indian communist movement looked at the build-up of the revolutionary potential in Indian society only by, or at least primarily through, working on the state, its institutions, processes and dynamics. Such an orientation to politics in turn led to a withdrawal of attention from society as such—its institutions, values and particular modes of articulation—as direct targets of revolutionary focus. Underlying this sort of conception of politics were two assumptions: first, that to get at the bourgeois state it is sufficient that the state is brought under siege by the exploited and allied classes and secondly, that this class-based mobilization directed against the state is sufficient to transform the outlook of toiling people into revolutionary consciousness”(p.180).

In his critique of the interpretations of Javeed Alam, Nigam (1998) came out with an important insight to understand the retreat from class politics. He argues that the hegemonization of the communists by the nationalist discourse already foreclosed any possibility of their conducting a hegemonic struggle in the post-colonial context. He has come to this conclusion by analysing the politics of post-independence communist politics, especially from the 1960s, specifically on the CPI (M). He observes,

“I suggest that key to the CPI(M)’s transformation from a militant radical party of yesteryear to its present ‘reformist’ incarnation lies in the discourse on the nationhood and the acute contestations around this notion in the Indian polity at large”(pp. 207, 208)

He elaborates further the same point like this,

“I shall argue that this was the axis around which attempts at defining the ‘national self’ were taking place, rendering irrelevant the abstract, secular discourse of class politics. This led to greater and greater isolation of the party from ‘the people’. The more this isolation became manifest, the more its rhetoric moved closer to the secular-nationalist discourse of Nehruvian vintage” (p.212)

The interpretations of both Alam and Nigam are valid and threw certain important insights to understand the politics of left and the point of crisis that led them to move away from the class politics. But I am not sure whether those interpretations can adequately explain the various dimensions of the left politics in India today. I disagree with Alam that the State centred political mobilization of the Indian communists led them to retreat from class politics because it is well known that the communist parties, particularly CPI (M) was intensively involved in organising, landless labourers, marginal peasants in Thanjavur to achieve fair prices for peasants’ produce and to obtain fair wages for agricultural labourers for three decades in 60s, 70s and 80s. The CPI (M) had also agitated against the introduction of tractors and other modern agricultural machinery on the grounds that they aggravate the under-employment of rural labourers and bring down their wages (Gough, 1989). It would be totally unfair to interpret that communist parties were engaged largely in the State centred politics. I differ from Nigam on the central point that the hegemonization of the communists by the nationalist discourse already foreclosed any possibility of their conducting a hegemonic struggle in the post-colonial context. It would be difficult to generalise because there were many struggles led by CPI (M) in the past where its formation of hegemonic front was successful enough to build up a broad political

alliance with the popular-democratic forces to fight the against the common enemies. The movement against the Sakthi- Coca-Cola factory at Padamathur village in Sivaganga District of Tamil Nadu in the year, 2003 was very successful. The joint-venture between Sakthi Sugars and Coca-Cola was short lived because the agitation was very strong. The movement got support from various popular-democratic forces and civil society organisations. Apart from this, the movement got widespread support from the villages around Padamathur. The CPI (M) of Sivaganga district was the leading force in the 'Joint Action Committee against Groundwater Exploitation'. It includes Dr. Ambedkar Girama Vuzhaikum Makkal Manitha Vurimai Iyakkam, Tamil Nadu Environment Council, Tamil Nadu Campaign for Protecting Water Resources, Indian Democratic Women's Association, Tamil Nadu Farmer's Association, Democratic Youth Federation of India, CPI (M-L), Labour's Forum, and Campaign for Right to Livelihood and Food Security. One can bring in many such instances of struggles led by hegemonic formations of CPI (M) from all over India to reject the conclusion of Nigam.

This might sound that the author of the paper supports the politics of the mainstream Indian left parties, particularly CPI (M) and has no criticisms against them. I understand the crisis of the Indian Communist parties in a totally different way from Alam and Nigam. The process of moving away from the class politics towards the articulation of non-class conflicts is a result of the crisis of the politics of representation. I depend heavily on Gramsci to defend my argument. According to Gramsci, the crisis of representation of political parties is the result of the organic crisis of the hegemony of a social class. Organic crisis is a kind of political crisis in which the hegemony of the leading class begins to disintegrate in the form of losing the political and moral support of the other classes that accepted the leadership of the leading class. Gramsci sees the possibilities for periodical organic crisis of hegemony of a social class because hegemony can never be taken for granted, but has to be continually fought for fresh. This requires persistent activities to maintain and strengthen the social authority of the leading class in all areas of civil society,

“A social group can, indeed must, already exercise 'leadership' before winning governmental power (this is indeed one of the principal conditions for winning of such power); it subsequently becomes dominant when it exercises power, but even if it holds it firmly in its grasp, it must continue to 'lead' as well”(SPN, 57-58).

According to Gramsci, the organic crisis of hegemony of a leading class may leave profound effects on political parties that represent the interests of a leading class. As Gramsci says,

“At certain point in their historical lives, social classes become detached from their traditional parties. In other words, the traditional parties in that particular organisational form, with the particular men who constitute, represent, and lead them, are no longer recognised by their class (or fraction of a class) as its expression” (SPN 210).

When a social class detaches itself from its traditional political parties that represented its political interests so far by refusing to recognise their political manoeuvrings, those parties get into crisis of representation. I shall explain at the first instance how the organic crisis of hegemony of the leading class, in our context, it is working class, led to the crisis of the representation of the mainstream left parties in India and then to get into the analysis of how the crisis of representation of left parties led to the shift in their politics from class based political mobilization towards an articulation of non-class conflicts. Industrial wage-earners and agricultural labourers constitute the core of the working class in India. The industrial proletariat is employed largely in factory establishments, as well as in the mines and ports, on the railways, and in other modern transport sectors. The industrial labourers of these sectors are more formalized and organised. The increasing need for the labour forces in the expanding urban centres, particularly the metro cities led to the large scale migration of labour force from the rural and other small towns who are largely employed in construction industry and in other infrastructural development projects. The large section of the migrant labour force is both unskilled and semi-skilled. They are largely employed in informal and unorganised sectors. The migrant labourers constitute the significant part of the industrial and urban working class. It is sometimes debated whether those who do not take a direct part in material production should be counted as members of the working class. Sau (1981) writes that they are not members in the strict or narrow sense of the term. It should be recognised that the condition of the workers in the organised sector is much better than that of workers in the unorganised sector. Those who are employed on the basis of regular employment and standard working conditions are able to lead a relatively secure existence than the labourers of unorganised sector. Those who are having relatively secure existence are highly unlikely to become the revolutionary force.

The trade unions that represent the interests of the working class largely aim at an economic struggle for securing for workers a share in the surplus value in the respective industries or enterprises. But it is totally unaware of the fact that such fragmented, sectoral struggles carried on independently in the several industries or enterprises resulted in inter-industry and inter-enterprise exploitation to which the workers become a party; that in the process the capitalistically more developed and trade-union wise better organised sectors exploit the less developed and less organised sectors. The widening disparities between more developed and organised sectors and less developed and organised sectors started affecting badly the formal unity of working classes. The working class struggles within the narrow confines of trade unionism of the organised sectors have no space to include the interests of the other working classes (Dandekar, 1981). The classification of working class in India never included the urban poor who are sub-proletariat and lumpen proletariat into it. According to Breman (1976), there is not much tangible evidence of the prospect of organising the sub-proletariat on a class basis. 'In view of the heterogeneous make-up of the sub-proletariat, there is probably no question of class consciousness... The structure of the labour force gives me no cause to believe that the likelihood is particularly great of its being converted into a political unity, oriented towards one class enemy' (Breman, 1976). In spite of some praiseworthy progresses, communists have failed to make an all out effort to mobilize the rural poor. In 1979 for example, 'the 23rd conference of the CPI(M)-led Kisan sabha estimated that only 1% of the agricultural labourers in the country had been organised into the agricultural labour unions and only 2% of Kisans had been organised into Kisan sabhas... The communist neglect of the rural poor, especially of the agricultural labourers is not accidental, but stems, at least, from the constraints imposed by their theoretical understanding of the peasant question, and often also from their preference, deliberate or otherwise, for the middle peasants whose interests are incompatible with those of the agricultural labourers' (Tharamangalam, 1981). The Indian class structure presents a paradoxical situation, so different from classical revolutionary schemes. The neediest, exploited and numerous social groups are the lumpen-proletariat and the sub-proletariat. Yet, these groups are also the most heterogeneous, weak and unorganised and the most difficult to organise as well. By and large, revolutionary theory still bypasses them and fails to motivate them. The specific composition and characteristics of the proletariat in India raises certain questions on its revolutionary

role. In spite of their capacity to paralyse the economy by organised action, their organisations are somewhat weak and divided. This explains to a greater extent the crisis of the Indian working classes. The heterogeneous character of the working classes on the one hand and industry specific trade-unionism on the other hand had prevented effectively the hegemonic formation of the working classes in India. In order to overcome the problem of heterogeneity of working classes and the incompatibility of class interests between two different working classes, the Indian left came out with the unified politics of organising and mobilizing all the working classes against the State that represents the interests of both national and international bourgeoisie. According to the CPI, the state in India is the organ of the class rule of the national bourgeoisie as a whole, in which the big bourgeoisie holds powerful influence. This class rule has strong links with the landlords. The CPI is therefore in favour of forging a broad "National Democratic Front"- comprising working classes, urban middle class and intelligentsia. For CPI (M), the present Indian state is the organ of the class rule of the bourgeoisie and the landlord, led by big bourgeoisie, who are increasingly collaborating with the foreign finance capital in the pursuit of the capitalist path of development. It therefore loses its progressive character and must be overthrown. A "People's Democratic front" should be formed to establish a "People's Democratic Government under the leadership of the working class. Even in its resolution adopted at the 14th Congress of the CPI (M) Madras, January 3-9, 1992) we can see the continuity with its earlier positions,

"The CPI (M) Programme clearly defines the class alliance -- People's Democratic Front -- that can fulfil the task of completing the democratic revolution. Based firmly on the worker-peasant alliance, this front will have the agricultural labour and poor peasant as the basic allies of the working class. This front will include the middle peasant and the rich peasant. The urban as well as other middle classes and broad sections of the national bourgeoisie will also be allies of this front. The CPI (M) Programme lists the basic tasks that have to be completed in this stage. It defined the CPI (M)'s role as one "of uniting with all the patriotic forces of the nation, i.e., those who are interested in sweeping away all the remnants of pre-capitalist society; in carrying out the agrarian revolution in a thorough manner and in the interests of the peasantry; in eliminating all traces of foreign capital; and in removing all obstacles in the path of a radical reconstruction of India's economy, social life and culture." (Para 110)".

Whereas the CPI (M-L) accuses the Indian ruling classes of having 'mortgaged the country to the imperialists powers, mainly to the US imperialists and Soviet social-imperialists'. The Indian bourgeoisie is comprador, and the state is semi-

colonial and semi-feudal. It insists on doing “New Democratic Revolution” under the leadership of the proletariat through armed struggles.

The left move to produce a unified politics in this context for the completely differentiated and fragmented working classes did not get any significant support from these classes. To the extent that the left seeks to retain its identity as the representative of working classes, it finds itself without any support from working classes because its effort to produce a unified politics can not represent certain social and cultural specificities like caste and other ethnic identities that mediate to a greater extent the class position and class consciousness of a particular working class. For instance, the emergence of Dalit movements in various parts of India have mobilised the Dalit agricultural labourers and Dalit wage and menial labourers in the urban areas to form a caste based organisations to represent themselves rather than organising under the leadership of traditional left parties. Apart from this, there are number of NGOs are involved in organising the labourers of unorganised sectors. The construction workers’ unions in most of the urban centres in India are the non-party formations of NGOs. Both these cases confirms the proposition of the paper that the larger section s of working classes in India no longer depends on the traditional left parties to represent their interests and detached themselves to a larger extent from the mainstream left parties. This explains to a greater extent how the failure of the working classes to form a counter-hegemony in India has resulted in the crisis of representation of the left parties.

The crisis of representation of left parties has led to the political realization that it is important to take up non-class contradictions seriously to articulate non-class conflicts. One need not always articulate the interests of the marginalized within the framework of class struggle. When there is realization that the political and ideological struggles can be taken to articulate the social, cultural and political contradictions outside class relations between the oppressed and the oppressor, the subordinated and the dominant, the victims and the aggressor and the powerless and the powerful, the class conflict that originates from the class contradiction becomes redundant. This has forced the left parties to take up the issues of non-class conflicts such as environmental conflicts between the exploiters of natural resources and the sustainable users of natural resources, Dalits and the dominant castes, victims of the

development projects of the State and the State, and the Adivasis and the settler communities. The shift in the politics of the left parties towards the articulation of non-class conflicts brought the left closer to the politics of new social movements.

Though they come closer to new social movements, they retained certain elements of old class politics. The strong political conviction of the left that the mass by itself does not possess the spontaneity to do revolution because it is not a homogeneous entity and the leadership of the party is inevitable to homogenize the mass. This political conviction comes from the ideological position that the working classes must be organised under the leadership of the communist party to represent their political interests of overthrowing the State that represents the interests of the capitalists and establishing socialism by eliminating capitalism. The party should lead the working class revolution. The relationship between class and party was much debated issue within Marxian political theory. Marx expected the working class itself to develop the necessary revolutionary consciousness and to emancipate itself. That was the first and basic consideration written in the General Rules of the International Working Men's Association:

“That the emancipation of the working class must be conquered by the working classes themselves” (as Marx quoted in Miliband, 1977).

Miliband observes that Marx's position on this issue of the need for the working class to organise itself under the leadership of the party was very ambiguous because at one point Marx was categorical that the working classes themselves should fight for their own emancipation. Later he speaks of the need for a party of the working class. He spoke of it in a resolution of the First International in 1871, saying,

“That against this collective power of the propertied classes the working class cannot act, as a class, except by constituting itself into a political party” (as Marx quoted in Wielenga, 1991).

For Marx, the party was only an instrument of working class. But the subject of revolutionary action remained the same. It is class, particularly the working class. As a leader of revolutionary force Lenin felt the need to build a party and at the same time stressed the necessity to maintain organic link between class and party. Without this organic link, the party would go stale and bureaucratic, and lag behind the masses. The important contribution of Lenin to Marxism, according to Miliband (1977), was that there must be organization and direction if the revolutionary process was to be advanced. The party is essential without its guidance and leadership the

working class would be a social force incapable of any revolutionary actions. Lenin came to this conclusion partly because he accepted the thesis of Kautsky that the socialist consciousness did not necessarily develop as a result of the proletarian struggles. On the contrary it was the intellectual leadership of the vanguard party led to the development of socialist thinking and class consciousness. Trotsky was quick to respond to this position of Lenin. Trotsky warned Lenin about the undue importance given to party because it can lead to the dangers of ‘substitutism’. ‘Lenin’s methods lead to this: the party organization at first substitutes itself for the party as whole; then the Central Committee substitutes itself for the organization; and finally a single “dictator” substitutes himself for the Central Committee’ (Miliband, 1977). In her own contribution to the debate, Rosa Luxemburg attacked Lenin for his ‘ultra-centralism’ in her book entitled “Organisational Question of Social Democracy” published in 1904. She argued that ‘social democratic centralism cannot be based on the mechanical subordination and blind obedience of the party membership to the leading party centre’ (as Luxemburg quoted by Miliband, 1977). The debate is so important for us because it can throw some lights on our analysis of the politics of representation of left parties in Tirunelveli. In spite of the shift towards the articulation of non-class conflicts, the party had retained some elements of old class politics by allowing the party to assume the centrality in the struggle, building up of the intellectual leadership of the party over the completely scattered and fragmented masses in the name of creating political awareness among the local villagers. It is very important for us to explain the shift of left parties from their politics of leadership to the politics of party dominance. The critiques of Leninist position on the centrality of the party in leading the revolution will be very useful in our context to explain the severed organic link between the masses of local villages and the party politics of CPI, CPI (M) and CPI (M-L) and also to explain how the lose of organic link leads to party dominance. The institutionalization of the party is solely responsible for the party dominance over the ordinary masses. The interview that appeared in the 1970 issue of “The Socialist Register”, Jean-Paul Sartre made the following remarks on the institutionalization of the party,

“In effect, I tried to show that the party, in relation to the mass, is a necessary reality because the mass, by itself, does possess spontaneity. By itself, the mass remains serialized. But conversely, as soon as the party becomes an institution, so does it also—save in exceptional circumstances—become reactionary in relation to what it has itself brought into being, namely the fused group...(p. 234)

As an institution, a party has an institutionalized mode of thought—meaning something which deviates from reality—and comes essentially to reflect no more than its own organization, in effect ideological thought. It is upon its own schema that is modelled, and deformed, the experience of the struggle itself... (p. 235)

Here is the underlying contradiction of the party, which has emerged to liberate the masses from seriality and which has itself become an institution. As such, it harbours so many negative features (I don't mean here bureaucracy or other forms of degeneration, but rather the institutional structure itself, which is not necessarily bureaucratic) that it finds itself compelled, fundamentally and in all cases, to oppose all the new forces, whether it tries to use them or whether it rejects them" (p. 236).

For Sartre, the institutionalization of the party can be seen in its ideological impositions and persuasions of the masses to accept the positions of the party or to follow the lines of the party. The ideological impositions and persuasions of the institutionalized party needs to be analysed to understand the party dominance. It can be done by studying its ideological powers. According to Haug (1984), Engels was the first one to use the concept 'ideological powers' to mean social power above and over society. With Engels, we see in the state the first ideological power. Haug in his reformulation the concept conceives it as institutions of reproduction of an antagonistic social order. Their function is to hold society together by "containing" its contradictions. They can do it by organizing socialization from above. It works from above to below. The social interests had to be articulated in political projects, and the political projects had to be articulated ideologically. The term 'socialization' is the direct translation of *vergesellschaftung*, normally means either 'making socialist' or adapting individuals to social order. Since the ideological is conceived as socialization from above, the society is organised for people by the ideological powers but not in solidarity with the people themselves (Haug, 1984 and Koivisto and Pietila, 1996/97). The politics of left parties in Tirunelveli to mobilize the local people against Coca-Cola Company become very clearer if locate them within the Marxist theorization on the relationship between masses and the party. When the party severs its organic link with the masses, the institutionalization starts with the enforcement of ideological powers not only in terms of reproductions of an antagonistic social order but also the reproduction of antagonism on the lines of the party. The ideological socialization from above or from the party in this case forces the local people not only to develop an antagonism against the capitalism of Coca-Cola Company but also developing that antagonism only on the party lines. Therefore there is a close link between the institutionalization of the party and the party dominance in terms of reproduction of

antagonism and manufacturing of dissent on the party lines where there is no antagonism and dissent. It does not mean that the party that leads the struggles should not indulge in ideological persuasions of the local people about the future ill effects of the factory. It does not even hint at that the pure spontaneous rebellion of the affected local mass is the precondition and basic requirement to advance a revolution or lead a struggle. But at the same time, it is absolutely a wrong move to engage in struggles by imposing party's positions on antagonism between the interests and institutions of Multi-National capital and the local working classes and the poor on local villagers without their spontaneous support and consent. For the CPI (M), the Indian state is controlled by and led by big bourgeoisie that increasingly protect the economic interests of the foreign finance capital. Therefore it is important form a people's democratic front to over throw the capitalist interests of both big bourgeoisie and the foreign finance capital. This ideological position of CPI (M) appears repeatedly in all the official documents of the party. I quote some paragraphs from the party "Programme" to support my observation. The "Programme" was adopted first at the Seventh Party Congress of the Communist Party of India held at Calcutta, October 31 to November 7, 1964 and was updated by the Special Conference of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) held at Thiruvananthapuram, October 20-23, 2000.

"3.4 After independence the dual character of the bourgeoisie manifested itself through conflicts and collusion with imperialism. The big bourgeoisie which acquired the leadership of the State adopted a particular type of capitalist development. It compromised with imperialism and maintained its alliance with landlordism. It utilised its hold over the State to strengthen its position by attacking the people on the one hand and seeking to resolve the conflicts and contradictions with imperialism and landlordism by pressure, bargain and compromise on the other. In this process, it has forged strong links with foreign monopolists and is sharing power with the landlords. With liberalisation, the big bourgeoisie is the strongest advocate of opening up the economy to foreign capital and forging strong links with international finance capital; it is the prime mover behind the demand to privatise the public sector and the economy as a whole.

7.3The second urgent task is to free the economic, political and social life of our people from the disastrous influence of imperialism and domination by the MNCs and various agencies of international monopoly capital. With this is also related the task of breaking the power of monopoly capital.

7.13 The working class and the Communist Party of India (Marxist), while not for a moment losing sight of their basic aim of building the people's democratic front to achieve people's democratic revolution and the fact that they have to inevitably come into clash with the present Indian State led by the big bourgeoisie, do

take cognisance of the contradictions and conflicts that exist between the Indian bourgeoisie including the big bourgeoisie and imperialism. Opening up the Indian economy to the unbridled and free entry of MNCs and foreign finance capital will intensify this contradiction. The Communist Party of India (Marxist), while carefully studying this phenomenon, shall strive to utilise every such difference, fissure, conflict and contradiction to isolate the imperialists and strengthen the people's struggle for democratic advance.

2.5 ...The rapacious drive for profits by the multinational corporations and the extravagant consumption of the rich countries have devastated the environment and is seriously threatening the world's ecology in general and that of the third world in particular. The fundamental contradiction inherent in capitalism between the ever-growing socialisation of production and the increasingly private appropriation of the surplus has become more acute.

xviii) Comprehensive steps will be taken to protect the environment. Development programmes will take into account the necessity to sustain the ecological balance. The country's bio-diversity and biological resources will be protected from imperialist exploitation.”

From the paragraphs quoted above, one central point or single agenda emerges is that the people's democratic revolution will eliminate the both the big bourgeoisie with its foreign finance capital collaborators and the State that protects the economic interests of these big bourgeoisie and MNCs. Therefore all the political and economic contradictions should be resolved within this framework of ideological struggle of CPI (M). Even the ecological conflicts needs to be articulated within this framework. When the CPM (M)-led TGPCCC mobilized the local people and organised struggles against Coca-Cola Company, it largely articulated the demands within the ideological framework of the party. To substantiate my point I quote from the Handbills and the pamphlets of both CPI (M) and TGPCCC. The Handbill entitled “Yesterday Plachimada and Sivagangai, Today Gangaikondaan?” was circulated for the April 20, 2005 protest demonstration reads like this,

“The foreign company Coca-Cola is moving like a ghost to convert our water resources into money. ...Let us prevent our water resources from selling to the foreign company.”

This was organised by CPI (M) Tirunelveli district committee much before it taking over the leadership of TGPCCC. Another handbill circulated by one of the front organisations of CPI (M), All India Insurance Employees Association says,

“The MNC Company Coca-Cola operating its branches in 110 countries. The company is earning Rs. 95,000 crores per annum by selling soft-drinks and water. In many countries it controls even the governments. It captures water resources like rivers, aquifer, large lakes, groundwater, riverbeds in many countries and sells its products to the same people whose resources it over extracts. The advent of the same company here is part of the globalization. Therefore we oppose the Coca-Cola Company”.

The pamphlet written by C. Muthukumarasamy published on behalf of Tamil Nadu Science Forum (member of TGPC and front organization of CPI(M)) is entitled “Privatization of Water” observes,

“... with the support of our government our natural resources are robbed by the MNC Companies. Their industries are mainly responsible for the pollution in India. When the pollution level reaches its highest point, it will affect our agriculture, water gets polluted. As a result drinking water becomes very scarce resource. MNCs are beyond our legal framework. It is pathetic that our government itself relaxes its rules to accommodate their interests. Therefore we mobilize the people against the atrocities of the imperialism”.

It becomes very clear that the CPI (M)-led struggles had organised the local people completely on the ideological lines of the party. Almost there are no differences between the ideological position of the party document and the interpretations of movement documents. Therefore, the leaders and the intellectuals of the local CPI (M), who is in the struggles in Tirunelveli felt that it is inevitable to form a popular-democratic front to guide the local masses into organised struggle by creating political and ecological awareness. Despite the realization of the fact that the local people were not showing any interests, they continued with their awareness campaign to mobilize the support of the local people for the struggle. The ultimate result of this campaign was the production and reproduction of antagonism and dissent where there is neither antagonism nor any dissent existed.

Many leaders and the intellectuals of the movement against Coca-Cola Company were unanimous in saying (but I have given below only the views of the two leaders of TGPC because it organised many awareness campaigns) that the awareness level is very low among the local villagers about the ill effects of the factory and over extraction of water. Therefore they came out with many programmes to create an awareness, like cycle rally, *Padayathra* (a long march) covering villages in the entire river belt of Tamirabarani. R. Krishnan, the convenor of the CPI (M)-led ‘Tamirabarani and Groundwater Protection Coordination Committee stated,

“What I see is that generally there is no ecological awareness among the local people. Government has no concern for this. Not many literatures published on this matter. There are no writings that are comprehensible for the ordinary masses. No political parties showed any concerns about this. Few NGOs are here and there doing something but within the four walls of their organisations. They (NGOs) are incapable of developing it as people’s mass movement. It is possible only for those political parties who are working for the people”.

Another intellectual of TGPC and a functionary of CPI (M)’s All India Insurance Employee’s Union, C. Muthukumarasamy made the following observations about the economic conditions of the local people and explain how the economic conditions affected the political consciousness,

“They are leading a life where they earn Rs.30 for a day. Eighty percent of them are leading that kind of life. The remaining twenty percent of the people are better off. Even the seasonal changes do not bring them different jobs. They do not think to think and engage in struggles. They are misguided by some organisations who are taking the people support only to show that they have a huge following”.

He told the researcher that only after the intervention of the party and TGPC, the life of the local people started changing and awareness level improved. As a part of this campaign, it went the extent of organising a trip of selected villagers to Plachimada in Kerala to show the ill effects of Coca-Cola factory. In its move to create awareness among the villagers, it reached first the elected Panchayat representatives of Gangaikondan, Pirancheri village Panchayats and the councillors of Maanoor Panchayat Union. All these efforts had both positive and negative results. The positive result was the gaining of the support of very few individuals and the negative result was some of the village leaders went to extent of forming a local front against the protesters. The large section of the villagers remained neutral and in fewer occasions some of them were even expecting either jobs or some other economic benefits from the factory.

The efforts of the left parties to create awareness among the local villagers were proved to be a failure because they could not get the moral and political support for their struggles from the villagers. In the absence of actual ill effects of the factory, the TGPC’s organised trip of selected villagers to Plachimada did not help them to either sustain or expand the support base of the movement. Most of the villagers who were travelled to Plachimada later moved slowly away from the movement because there were no continuous programmes to engage them and no moves to reduce the

ideological distance of the local participant of the Plachimada trip. R. Krishnan had to make the following observations on the absence of the local people's support,

“No ill effects so far. They have not experienced the ill effects. That is why they refuse to believe what we say. Therefore whatever we say becomes mere imagination for them. Only we think about the consequences and future ill effects. They have not understood correctly... For these reasons, not enough support for our struggles from this people”.

According to Britto (the Director of a local NGO ‘Vaanmuhil’ and the member of TGPC) , the whole campaign programmes, demonstrations and other protests events were completely interventions from outside and no support from the local villagers,

“It did not appear that local people ever had any awareness from the beginning. People were largely unaware of the issues like privatization of water and basic needs. I am not sure about the political orientation of some of the people who were part of Coordination Committee. Only forces from outside went to the villages and told them that we are going to do this programme or that programme. The local people had no drive to do anything at firsthand.

No spontaneous uprising from the local people. We, the organisers were partly responsible for this. No planning meetings for the struggle were ever conducted in the villages. All planning meetings were conducted only in Palayamkottai and Tirunelveli. We should have conducted some meetings in the villages of Gangaikondaan, Rajapathy and Thuraiyoor. If we would have conducted meetings in these villages, at least four to five people from these villages would have participated. Neither we gave our attention to it nor did they show any interests in it”.

It is not only the planning meetings were not held in the Villages around the factory but also the organised protests. Almost all protests events were conducted either in Palayamkottai or in Tirunelveli except one fasting protest in Rajapathy village. Apart from these two important reasons for non-participation of local people, there are many other reasons that I mentioned in the introduction of the paper itself. Though it is not very relevant for the paper to discuss all these reasons, it is inevitable to discuss the activities of the Coca-Cola Company against the protesters, particularly against the struggles of CPI (M)-led TGPC. The Coca-Cola Company was engaged in two sorts of counter campaign against the protesters: Firstly, by conducting few welfare activities and programmes in and around Gangaikondaan. Secondly, by encouraging village level politicians belonging to AIADMK and DMK to form various temporary forums to campaign against the left led protests in Tirunelveli.

The Coca-Cola Company in the name of SIBCL had conducted a free medical camp on August 14, 2005 in the premises of Government Higher Secondary School at

Gangaikondaan with the support of Galaxy Hospital and NSS programme of the same school. It was a free medical (vaccination) camp to prevent the children from getting infected by Hepatitis-B. It announced that the camp will be conducted in three phases. Since the protesters cautioned the villagers that the polluted waste water and other effluents from the factory will affect the health of the local, the Company had organised those free medical camps. It spent few lakhs of rupees to the de-siltation of irrigation canals in Gangaikondaan area to counter the campaign of the protesters that the over extraction of river and groundwater by Coca-Cola factory will seriously affect the agriculture in and around Gangaikondaan. Apart from these welfare activities, the company gave donations for the renovation of two local village temples.

In order to counter the campaign of the protesters, the company encouraged few elders to start the forum to counter the claims of the protesters against the factory. SIPCOT Industries Protection Movement was started by S. Nalingam, the branch secretary of AIADMK in Gangaikondaan and the former president of Gangaikondaan village Panchayat and A. Karupiah, a former Member of the State Legislative Assembly of Tamil Nadu who got elected to assembly in DMK ticket and the president of Water Users' Association of Gangaikondaan Irrigation Canal and Masilamani, a retire school teacher from Thuraiyoor. Some of the local villagers of Rajapathy and Thuraiyoor claimed that all these three leaders of SIPCOT protection movement benefited personally from the Company. Nalingam is a labour contractor for the Coca-Cola factory. Masilamani got the local transportation contract from the Company. As a part of its protection activities, the SIPCOT Industries Protection Movement gave a petition to the District Collector demanding a fencing for the entire SIPCOT area of 2030 acres because the protesters claimed that hundreds of cattle and goats died after drinking polluted water that comes out of the factory. Therefore the fencing of SIPCOT area would prevent not only cattle and goats entering the factory but also prevent the activities of anti-social elements in that area. The same demands of the petition appeared in a Tamil newspaper (Dinamalar, Tirunelveli edition) later (on December 19, 2006). The same three individuals were behind the publication and circulation of few handbills under the banner of various forums. Three hand bills were circulated under the banners of people of village public: "the public of Gangaikondaan and surrounding area", "The village public of Gangaikondaan and "The village public of the villages comes under the limit of Maanoor Panchayat Union" against the left led campaign and struggles. The content of all the three

handbills is same: blaming left parties for preventing industrial growth in SIPCOT area of Gangaikondaan, rebuttal of all the apprehensions of the left parties about the ill effects of the factory and extending all support to Coca-Cola Company for its efforts to give employment to the local people.

Three things become very clear from the above discussion: 1. that the entire struggles against Coca-Cola led by various left parties, particularly CPI (M) were basically the moves to manufacture dissent and antagonism where there are no dissent and antagonism. 2. The articulation of interests of non-class conflicts between the Coca-Cola Company and affected local village community about the over extraction of water were completely within the framework of party programme. 3. The movement against Coca-Cola Company was a complete failure because it never received any kind of moral and political support from local villagers. It becomes all the more important in this context to understand the practical implications of the political engagement of leftist forces with the environmental problems and issues.

The Political Engagement of the Leftist Forces with the Environmental Problems and its Practical Implications for Ecology

The practical implications of the political engagement of the left with environmental problems need to be located within its history of responses to the challenges of environmental movements. Early responses were very hostile. It was hitting at its middle class nature and felt that the ecological concerns were marginally relevant for the revolution of the working class. It went one step further in its hostility and interpreted the environmental struggles were major distraction from mobilizing masses against the capitalism (Dobson, 2007). But this hostile attitude did not continue for long. It started taking its challenges seriously and one school of thought within Marxism went to the extent of abandoning the central elements of Marx's theory and declared that the certain questions posed by ecology cannot be resolved within the Marxian theoretical framework. Rudolf Bahro belongs to this school of thought. Opposed to the positions of this school of thought we find a tendency which aims to defend the central theoretical elements of Marxian theory. Grundmann (1991) locates a third group of theoreticians between those two schools of thought within Marxism who accepts that ecology in fact poses a serious challenges to Marxism, but who are at the same time convinced that ready-made answers are contained within Marx's thought. Ted Benton is the prominent theorist of this third group (Grundmann, 1991). Though this debate is marginally relevant for the central argument of the paper,

I do not want to get into it deeply because it will take us to the theoretical complexities of the western sense of the dichotomy between “Red and Green”. I am more concerned with the practical implications of left engagement with the environmental problem rather than understanding how these theoretical debates affecting the practical politics. There are two important practical implications for ecology: firstly, it would push its ideological position of tracing the source of all environmental problems of contemporary society to capitalism. Secondly, it would give at most importance to immediate environmental problems rather than larger ecological concerns of conservation of bio-diversity.

The Capitalism is the source of all the Ills of Contemporary Society

The leftist forces are completely convinced that the ‘capitalism’ is the source of all environmental problems. Where as political ecologists trace it to ‘industrialism’ because they find no difference between the socialist and the capitalist countries when it comes to exploitation of nature and the environmental degradations. It is the result of their common belief that the needs of their respective populations are best satisfied by maximising economic growth (Dobson, 2007). This particular ecological position was attacked by the leftists. The leftist forces argue that it is capitalism’s use of industry to produce for profit and not for need, rather ‘industry’ itself which causes the problems. Joe Weston asserts that ‘It is time that greens accepted that it is capitalism rather industrialism per se which is at the heart of the problems they address’ (1986 p. 5). Radical greens might accept the argument of the leftists that the elimination of capitalism is a necessary condition for restoring environmental integrity but not the sufficient condition. They point out that the former communist countries which had some of the worst environmental records in the entire world (Dobson, 2007). Our political reality of attacking Coca-Cola Company for its capitalist interests in exploiting and over extracting our natural resources, particularly water reflects exactly the leftist debate with the greens on the question of tracing environmental problems to capitalism. Unfortunately we find the echo of the attack of the greens on the leftist positions in the criticisms of the Pro- Coca-Cola Company group in our context. The forums that were created by the Company to protect its business interests were using the same logic of the Greens to attack the struggles of the left parties against the Coca-Cola by pointing to its double stands on certain issues. Let me get to the details to substantiate my argument by quoting some paragraphs from the pamphlets of all the three left parties who led the struggles in

Tirunelveli. The CPI (M-L) propaganda pamphlet released on July, 2005 entitled “Water: for thirst or profit?” interprets the cause of our environmental problems in the following way,

“The capitalists are responsible not only for poisoning the rivers but also for spoiling the chances of getting rainfall by destroying our forests” (p.21)

“Every one agreed that the global warming is responsible for missing monsoon rains. ... Sea level is rising because of global warming. As a result of this, the availability of drinkable water is fast decreasing. ... Therefore we need prevent the air pollution. In order to do this, we have to bring some restrictions on the production of two wheelers, cars and air condition machines. In stead of controlling this, our government encouraging such industrial productions by relaxing certain restrictions. This journey towards disaster interpreted as the progress and development of the nation. Thus, the international bourgeoisie and domestic comprador bourgeoisie for their profit maximisation will completely spoil our nature.”(pp. 23, 24).

“If Water scarcity is analysed from any angle, the culprits are capitalists. They may be owners of dye-ing factory, cloth factory and liquor factory. Even they may be comprador bourgeoisie and multinational bourgeoisie.” (p.25)

The campaign pamphlet of CPI (M) entitled “Privatization of Water”, also traces the environmental problems to the capitalist interests of the MNCs,

“Coca-Cola like MNCs over extracts groundwater in various places. It also leaves effluents on the land. As a result of this, the pesticides like TTT and Endosalphane that are banned all over world mixes with the groundwater. This causes diseases like breast cancer... The polluted of groundwater cannot be used either for agriculture or for drinking purpose”. (p. 20)

The CPI’s pamphlet entitled “Tamirabarani water robbery” not very different in its reading from the other two parties in establishing the link between capitalism and environmental problems. This pamphlet traces the capitalist investments in water to the IMF’s the economy stabilization programmes and World Bank’s structural adjustment programmes. It tries to trace the links between the World Bank’ s programmes of water management and the decision that converted drinking water into priced commodity.

In the critical rebuttal to the claims of the left parties, Natalingam makes the following observations as the Gangaikondaan branch secretary of AIADMK that sounds almost similar in logic that the greens levelled against the Marxists,

“O Communists! If you claim that the starting of Coca-Cola factory in Gangaikondaan will affect the life of the local people, what is the reason for 3 Coca-Cola factories running in the Communist ruled West Bengal?

O progressive thinkers! If selling Tamirabarani river water to foreigner is wrong, what about selling Hoogly river water to foreigner? Is it not wrong?”

But these criticisms did not prevent the left parties in addressing immediate environmental problems in their own local context rather than addressing larger issue.

The Environmental problems more important than the larger Ecological concerns

Some of the Marxist environmentalist found that the ecological concerns on conserving bio-diversity and maintaining Eco-system balance are not very important because they are not addressing of the immediate environmental problems. They felt that it would be completely irresponsible for the green movement to concentrate on its 'not inconsiderable resources upon protecting hedgerows, butterflies and bunny rabbits' (Weston, 1986 p.12). While the day-to-day life of large number of people are in urgent need of reconstruction. We find the same of kind of urgency among the left political parties in mobilizing the local people against the Coca-Cola Company in Gangaikondaan. The whole movement was organised to remove the factory or stopping its production activities by extracting water from Tamirabarani. When the researcher asked some of the leaders of the movement the reasons for not evoking certain larger ecological politics of articulating water rights and environmental justice, they told that the larger ecological politics of articulating water rights and environmental justice were in fact manifested in their struggle for immediate environmental problems. I quote Mani, an elected councillor of Maanoor Union Panchayat and the prominent voice of protest from Rajapathy village,

“The main slogan of our struggle “Tamirabarani is our river. Quit! America’s Coke Quit!

We told the local people about their rights to land and water. At the same time alerted them that all these rights to land and water are under the threat. The Coca-Cola is going spoil all”.

C. Muthukumarasamy claimed that the CPI (M)-led TGPC in fact the spoke to the local people about ‘water as a basic right’ and ‘water as a basic need’ but the people were not able to follow. They were not able to follow because there is no awareness. Even we are not able to create such awareness because there is coordination between the intellectuals and the activists who are in the field. Britto also had similar opinion about the need to articulate water rights and lack of awareness,

“The awareness about the social and economic rights has not yet reached the local people. Not only local people. Even those activists who were part of the struggle not aware about the existence of such rights. As a result of this lack of awareness, the whole movement was centred on the issue and immediate problem”.

The opinions of the leaders make it clear that the immediate environmental problems are more important and the larger ecological politics needs to be articulated along with the struggles to address the immediate problems.

Conclusion

I started the paper questioning the proposition of Guha and Martinez-Allier that the political engagement of political parties with the environmental problems will strengthen the environmental struggles of the marginalised. The analysis of the struggles led by left political parties in Tirunelveli leads us to tell the contrary, the political engagement of political parties might sometimes weaken the struggles of the marginalised. When they tried to articulate the non-class conflicts, they miserably failed to prevent the party from assuming centrality or forcing the popular struggles to toe the party line. Thereby it was forced to produce and reproduce an antagonistic social relation or manufacture the dissent where there are no antagonism and dissent against the MNCs. What we see is the affected local communities had refused to become a homogeneous social entity by refusing to assume or develop an antagonism against the bourgeoisie interests of the Coca-Cola. Left could not handle the plurality of the village society. This led to the collapse of the movement against Coca-Cola Company in Gangaikondaan. This does not rule out the other factors that were contributed to the collapse.

The political engagement of the left parties with the environmental problems and issues led only to strengthen their preconstituted belief and old ideological positions that the capitalism is the source of all the ills of our contemporary society. Thus, the environmental problems need to be traced to the evil designs of capitalism. The other important political development of left engagement with the environmental problems is that the immediate environmental problems needs to be addressed first before taking up the larger issues of ecological politics. There cannot be any disagreements with the left on this matter because that is how the real politics unfolds. If the left takes up the larger ecological concerns first, it might end up in demanding the capitalism to deliver on its own promise. The left will not have anything to add to it. The ecologists have to bear with the political engagement of the left with immediate environmental problems if they are interested in mobilizing support of the democratic forces to articulate larger ecological concerns.

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