

Chapter VII

KSSP and Environment and Development

The term ‘development’ has many different connotations. In a broad sense, development is about people, about enhancing their ability and power to direct their own lives, in the context of their environment, history and aspirations for the future. Development is not about catching up with other people. But it is about an enlarged range and quality of choices, of lifestyles, of occupations. It encompasses better nutrition, health, education and freedom from oppression and poverty. The process of development involves structural transformations in the organization of society and the economy. Such a process cannot take place without alerting relationships of dominance and subordination, or affecting the interests of different groups within society.¹

The relationship between development and the environment is the focal point of the environmental debate in India. People are a part of the environment, intimately linked to the air, water, soil, flora and fauna. Sumi Krishna observes, “This complex web of living and non-living systems is in perpetual flux, and sustains the processes of life. It is not a fragile web, but a tough and dynamic system with an immense capacity for transformations, for resilience in times of stress”. The environment provides the resource base for development. But how

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people use these resources depends on their technological capacities, on the social structure which governs their relationships, and on their world-views.2

Extensive and excessive resource use, energy-inefficient life styles, industrialization and pursuit of economic growth are inextricably linked to environmental degradation, within and across state borders. Since the 1950s, world industrial production has increased four-fold.3 The environmental impacts of this economic activity have been widespread. Land degradation has increased to the extent that as much as one-third of the world's land surface is now threatened by desertification.4

Indian environmentalism was given an impetus in the latter part of the 1970s by movements directed to specific ends, notably the Chipko agitation to stop contract-felling in the western Himalaya, the crusade against the dam in Silent Valley, and the campaign to protect the Taj Mahal from pollution. The Chipko movement in particular went beyond the immediate goal of saving trees to confront the complex interlinkages between development and the environment; it gave environmentalists a 'human face', because this was a struggle involving poor rural people, not just scientists and educated city-dwellers. Chipko altered the parameters of environmental concern, brought the rural 'development-wallahs' into the environmental debate.5

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2 Ibid.
5 Krishna, n.1, p.33.
In 1980, the central government set up the Department of Environment, which became a part of the new Ministry of Environment and Forests in 1985. This led to increased government action in the planning, coordination and promotion of environmental programmes, and such action itself became a focus of environmental activism. The growth of various citizens’ movements- for women’s rights, civil and democratic rights, consumer rights and so on - helped to reinforce environmental activism. Environmentalism entered a more urgent and strident phase following the catastrophic leakage of methyl isocyanide in Bhopal, in December 1984. Increasing academic research on the one hand, and media attention on the other, helped to extend the environmental debate. 

Environmentalism is an ideology- a coherent set of beliefs about the essential nature of human society and the principles under which it should be organized. Indian environmentalism now incorporates a variety of philosophical approaches and multifarious points of view. Environmentalists may be Gandhians, Marxists, conservatives, socialists, radicals, liberals, democrats, humanists and so on, or any combination of these. From within, the environmental movement is criss-crossed with contradictions; from the outside it often appears to be ideologically homogeneous. Among the various overlapping strands, three prominent approaches can be discerned: popular, managerial and progressive. 

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6 Ibid.  
8 Sumi Krishna, n 1, pp.36-37.
The popular approach derives the philosophical basis and tactics mainly from Gandhi, but also appeals to many non-Gandhians. Indeed, the popular-Gandhian approach permeates the general public understanding of the environmental crisis. In its public stance, the popular approach often appears markedly progressive, although its ideological positions may, in fact, be publically conservative.

To the popular approach, the model of development that India has followed is the primary cause of the environmental crisis. Anupam Misra of the Gandhi Peace Foundation, New Delhi, has taken a strong position that the environmental problem is not a fight against one or two specific dams but a question of how society works, who runs society and what vested interests are involved. To him, we cannot talk about alternatives to development 'without changing our ways'. He says:

> To fulfil their needs and dreams, their irrigated agriculture and electricity, they need the dams. But we, the ones asked to search for alternatives - alternatives that will provide this electricity and irrigation! I do not see why we should lose sleep in trying to find alternatives to help fulfil their dreams.⁹

Radha Bhatt, another Gandhian activist, who organize the local women's struggle against mining in Kumaon voices the chief concerns of the popular approach - a rejection of Western models of industrial development, an appeal to age-old religious sentiments, and a stress on preserving traditional lifestyles.¹⁰

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The managerial approach has evolved as a response to the growing popular environmental advocacy in the US and Europe leading up to the institutionalization of modern environmental concerns in the 1970s. It permeates government policy and functioning and is espoused by many administrators, scientists and environmentalists, both within and outside the government. The approach of several NGOs can also be categorized as managerial rather than popular. The managerial philosophy argues that modern technology is necessary for utilizing resources, but what is needed, is to anticipate and minimize adverse environmental consequences. The managerial approach, therefore, emphasizes appropriate government policies and interventions to curb the adverse consequences of development. It seeks to bring about change in a gradual and incremental manner, through legislation and institutions, rather than through a sharp revoking of processes that have become well entrenched.

Much of the Gandhian critique of development is analogous to the more progressive approaches to the environmental crisis. For instance, M.K. Prasad of the Kerala Sastra Sahitya Parishad (KSSP) says, “development must be understood as enabling the majority of our people to come out of their sub-human conditions in the economic, social, political and cultural spheres .... Drinking water, sanitation and housing must be provided before we talk of prestigious projects and programmes”. In the progressive approach, environmental problems are a part of a wide spectrum of social problems.\(^{11}\)

Quite unlike some strands of popular environmentalism which are anti-modern science, -technology, -industry and -development, the progressive approach recognizes that drinking water, housing, and food need modern technology. In this it is akin to the managerial approach. But it goes further in placing technological development in the context of the political economy. As journalist Praful Bidwai points out, “It is not technology perse, but technology in the modern capitalist age that has really transformed, affected and destroyed nature in a basic way, working at its deepest interstices and disrupting its finest balances violently. Global warming would have been inconceivable in the feudal age”. The progressive approach has relatively fewer supporters, and there are not many progressive studies dealing specifically with environmental issues. The progressive perspective on the environment emerges only out of the wider area of left wing studies.

Decades ago environmental problems were almost universally regarded as minor, technical, and politically uncontentious. They were by-products of economic growth and social progress which further applications of growth and progress would duly solve, as increasing wealth created the resources and improved technology the means to solve them. The green movement’s claim that environmental problems represented a fundamental challenge to the economic system was straightforwardly rejected. But today throughout the developed and

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14 Jacobs, n.7, p.3.
developing world, governments and parties of both right and left now acknowledge that environmental problems are indeed very serious, requiring 'solutions' which are certainly not just technical, and may not be available at all without significant social and economic change.

The vehicle for this change has been the concept of 'sustainable development'. First introduced by the World Conservation Strategy of 1980, but popularized by the so-called Brundtland Report of 1987. In 1987, the World Commission on Environment and Development (headed by the then Prime Minister of Norway, Gro Harlem Brundtland) defined and elaborated the concept of sustainable development. "In essence, sustainable development is a process of change in which the exploitation of resources, the direction of investments, the orientation of technological development, and institutional change are all in harmony and enhance both current and future potential to meet human needs and aspirations". One of the members, Shridath Rampal a former Commonwealth Secretary General, and one-time Foreign Minister of Guyana, later expressed their broadly humanistic view of sustainable development as relating 'not just to "development" in a specialized Third World context, but to the development of our human society'. The concept of sustainable development has rapidly become the organizing principle of modern environmentalism. With its cleverly non-specific but by no means empty definition - 'development which meets the needs of the

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present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs' - sustainable development has succeeded in overcoming the conflict between environmental protection and economic growth which characterized the environmental debate of the 1970s and early 80s. It accepts that protecting the environment requires fundamental change in the direction of economic progress and the institutions of government policy. Economic growth should be promoted but guided in ways that are both environmental benign and socially just. With the 1992 'Earth Summit' in Rio, sustainable development has given a powerful impetus to environmental action in the 1990s.

Most Indian environmentalists-regardless of whether they subscribe to the popular, managerial or progressive approaches-endorse the concept of sustainable development as the only path forward, for the 'well being and the very survival of a nation'. Many economists now share the same concerns but differences in perception and language remain.

The term 'sustainable development' entered the environmental debate in 1980 when the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN 1980) launched the World Conservation Strategy. By stating unequivocally that the objective of society was to achieve sustainable development through the conservation of living resources, the strategy brought the international development community into the ambit of the environmental movement.

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17 Ibid.
18 WCED, n.15, p.3.
One of KSSP's objectives is to raise the environmental awareness level of the entire Kerala Society, through campaigns popularizing good environmental practice. KSSP's concern about the environment is linked with the concept of sustainable development. Among the multitude of activities, the major ones are: protection of forests, campaign against pollution, especially by chemical industries; education on environmental impact of wrong use of land, popularizing agro-forestering methods of soil protection, developing the three-dimensional environment concept: Physical, Biological, Socio-economic and Cultural ethical environment and acting as a consistent champion of protecting the environment for the future generations.  

At the centre of debate on environment in the KSSP were the issues related to interaction between nature, science and society. Ever since the 1977 Annual Conference at Quilon it had become customary that a topic be chosen for detailed study and discussion in connection with every annual conference. The theme of the study for the Quilon Conference was ‘Man and Environment’. Environment is not merely nature or ecology but also includes economic and cultural environment. Man-nature interaction is a social activity involving economic and cultural relations. “When we discuss the environment of man, the economic and cultural environments and their interrelationship have to be considered… All the three

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environments should be considered together."22

**Environment - Health Brigade and Environment Cells**

With the expansion of its activities in the sector of environment, the 1978 Annual Conference of the KSSP gave birth to its subcommittee on environment named - Environment and Health Brigade. One Thousand environmental classes were organized in the year 1979. The important themes were Chaliyar, Kuttanad, Silent Valley and other important environmental issues. A number of programmes were organised in the 1980s against deforestation and industrial pollution. Among them, struggles against water pollution, the 1980 Jatha against Kallada river pollution and the 1982 Vaikom agitation against Moovattupuzha river water pollution were noticeable.23 The year 1986 witnessed the emergence of Environmental cells at the district level, a necessary output of the massive outburst of environmental issues. The industrial pollutions of Titanium (Chavara), Madura Coats, Chacko Sons, Mulamkunnathukavu Asbestos Factory (Trichur), and Mothi Chemicals (Kannur) and also the soil erosion of Malampuzha Reservoir, Deforestation in Mukkumpetty were the important issues taken up by the KSSP in this period.24 In the same year under the auspices of KSSP and the Centre for Environment Education (CEE) Ahmedabad, a workshop on environment was organized for school students. The annual reports of KSSP contain brief accounts of how members of the Environment and Health Brigade, either by themselves or

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22 Ibid., p.18.
24 Ibid., p.35.
in cooperation with units have maintained vigilance on pollution. The 1983-84 Annual Report expresses serious concern about the pollution of three rivers - Chaliyar, Muvattupuzha and Kallada by industries dumping waste into them. In the case of Kallada river pollution, KSSP submitted a report to the Kerala High Court on this matter at the court's request. The Court then sent a notice to the company.

**Environment Centre**

When the KSSP get more and more involved in the environmental issues and activities, the necessity of having a centre to coordinate all these activities was a very much felt. As a result, in 1987 an 'Environmental Centre' was opened at the Parishad Bhavan, Ernakulam. In 1988, for the sake of convenience, the centre was transferred to Trichur. The centre is established to take care of environmental issues, to work out developmental alternatives and to create awareness among the people regarding environmental protection.

**Anti-Pollution Struggles**

The KSSP's involvement in environmental issues began in the early half of the seventies when some of its activists took part in investigating the pollution problems in and around Cochin. It was the time when the environmentalist groups all over the world were inspired by the first Stockholm Conference in 1972. The group made preliminary surveys on air, water and land pollution, assessed damages

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27 KSSP, n.20, p.16.
already caused and worked towards creating public awareness as a possible means of demanding arrest of worsening of the environmental status of Cochin area. The Cochin Science Association and KSSP jointly sponsored a seminar in 1972 on Environmental Pollution, which was perhaps the first of its kind in Kerala.

Chaliyar

Campaign against water and air pollution by the Gwalior Rayons factory at Mavoor, in the Chaliyar river basin, was the first major anti-pollution agitation organised by the KSSP. The KSSP intervention came after a series of spontaneous protest by the local people. A KSSP team of experts led by Dr. K.T. Vijayamadhavan in collaboration with Kozhikode Science Centre and Indian Medical Association (IMA) made a detailed study of the problem and submitted its report to KSSP in May 1979. The same was released on 21 June 1979 at the Town Hall Kozhikode. In the Chaliyar river basin the villagers were subjected to all kinds of misery. The foul air that belched out from the chimneys of Mavoor Rayons factory destroyed the natural vegetation and the crops of the nearby villages of Vazhakkad. The Sulpherdioxide made the people chronically affected by respiratory diseases. The partly treated effluents poisoned the river and consequently people were deprived of water for drinking, bathing, washing and irrigation. There was a considerable loss of labour opportunities, and the local economy was paralysed.

29 KSSP, n.23, p.29.
30 Prasad, n.28, p.125.
The report contained a thorough study of the whole issue, identified the pollution estimated the qualities, surveyed the damages to the health and economy of the people and brought to light the best possible solutions for the malady. The KSSP's basic position was that it lacked adequate safeguards against pollution.

The struggle of Chaliyar set an example for local level intervention in factory pollution issues. Since then the KSSP has been involved in numerous anti-pollution struggles in various parts of Kerala, the most prominent among them are the struggles against the pollution by Punalur Paper Mills in Kallada river basin, Velloor News Print Factory in Moovattupuzha river, Titanium factories in Thiruvananthapuram and Chavara and Moti Chemicals in Kannur.\(^ {31} \)

These struggles drew KSSP to the midst of controversies. The KSSP was severely attacked by the managements, at times by trade unions and even by individuals and groups, some of whom genuinely feared that the rising environmental consciousness can hinder prospects of industrial development in Kerala. Environmental protection is seen by them as a luxury that a backward state like Kerala cannot afford.\(^ {32} \)

**Kuttanad Development Project**

The study initiated by the KSSP regarding the ecological and economic consequences of the water control project in Kuttanad at the request of the people in the locality was a model point in the development of the environmental concern

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in the movement. Kuttanad is a low lying deltaic region around the lake Vembanad and the confluence of four major river systems of Kerala. Extensive land reclamations had converted it into the rice bowl of Kerala. But it also reduced the area of water spread accentuating the flood menace.\(^3\)

A study team of the KSSP visited Kuttanad and conducted studies for a week, in January 1978.\(^4\)

They found that the Thottappally Spill Way was inadequate to alleviate the problems of floods due to various short falls in design. The permanent bunds were not cost-effective and technically deficient with a high failure rate, mostly due to malpractices by the contractors. The regulator had created a lot of unforeseen adverse ecological consequences. The water weed menace increased in alarming proportion, severely disrupting water transport and fishing and adversely affecting cultivation. Given the high use of pesticides and fertilizers, water pollution rose above tolerable levels and became a major health hazard. There was a sharp decline in the fish population with adverse consequences for the income of fishermen and nutrition of the poor. And to crown it all, it was found that the estimate of area the project would bring under double cropping was a gross exaggeration.\(^5\)

The report on the project was presented at the 15th Annual Conference of KSSP at Kottayam in 1978. It forced them to adopt a more critical attitude to development projects. The cost-benefit analysis made by promoters of projects has a tendency to underplay the costs and exaggerate the benefits. The conclusion of

\(^4\) KSSP, n.23, p.30.
\(^5\) Issac and Ekbal, n.32, pp.27-29.
the Conference was that “it is in the interest of the nation to have a devil's advocate to face the issue squarely and focus public attention”.36

The Silent Valley Campaign

The Silent valley is in the Palghat District of the Kerala State. It is a unique tract of forest. It is truly a silent valley, and one of the few tropical rainforest areas that remain relatively undisturbed by man. The valley got the name 'Silent Valley' because of the relative absence of the cicada insect which normally causes a distinctive sound in most forests.37 The valley contains India's last substantial stretch of tropical evergreen forest is perhaps the only vestige of a near virgin forest in the whole of Western Ghats. It is one of the only two remaining habitats of an endangered species, Macaca silenus (lion tailed Macaque). The Silent Valley is the home of two other endangered species, the tiger and Nilgiri Tahr.38

In the early 1970s the Kerala State Electricity Board had proposed to build a dam across Kunthipuzha, a tributary of Bharatapuzha, flowing through the Silent Valley, with a view to produce 60MW firm electric power and to facilitate irrigation of 10,000 hectares of land. For the first time in the history of any hydel project not only in Kerala, but in India as a whole, scientists have raised serious objections. The task force constituted by the National Committee on Environmental Planning and Co-Ordination (NCEPC) recommended after studying the problem

36 KSSP, n.20, p.11.
38 The Silent Valley Hydro-electric Project A Techno-Economic and Socio-Political Assessment and Ecological Aspects of the Silent Valley, Report of the Joint Committee Set up by the Government of India and the Government of Kerala (Kochi, 1997), p.11.
that the project be abandoned in the interest of preserving the ecology of this unique area.\textsuperscript{39}

The issue was raised within the KSSP in the Annual Camp of 1977. But it was only after a year long discussions and debate, that the Annual Conference of 1978 a resolution was adopted opposing the implementation of the project. A team of KSSP experts was entrusted with task of studying the techno-ecological and socio-political aspects of the entire project. Madhav Gadgil and Subhash Chandran observe. "Initially KSSP members were not convinced, for they were greatly concerned about the need to generate power and create employment in the state".\textsuperscript{40}

The KSSP had launched a vigorous Campaign in order to save the Silent Valley ecosystems. Thousands of meetings and marches, hundreds of lectures and seminars, exhibitions, street plays were organized across the length and breadth of the state. Lobbying political leaders and bureaucrats, articles in newspapers and journals and legal court actions were tried.\textsuperscript{41}

The basic arguments of the KSSP against the project were presented in the document ‘The Silent Valley Hydroelectric Project, A Techno-Economic and Socio-Political Assessment’ drawn up by an interdisciplinary expert team of the KSSP activists. Besides their own field trips to silent Valley, the team relied on the investigations conducted by scientists in Botanical Survey of India, the Zoological

\textsuperscript{39} Ibid., p. 4. Report of the Joint Committee, n.2, p.4.

\textsuperscript{40} Madhav Gadgil and Subash Chandran, “Scientist as Social Activist”, Frontline (26 May 2000), p.86.

\textsuperscript{41} KSSP, Kerala Sastra Sahitya Parishad: Moonnara Pathittantu Kalathe Anubhavangal (Kochi, n.d.), p.30.
Survey of India and the Geological Survey of India and the report of the taskforce of NCEPC for their assessment of the ecological consequences of the project.\textsuperscript{42}

To quote Issac and Ekbal:

The Parishad argued that Silent Valley is one of the biologically richest, oldest and least distributed and largest continuous stretches of forest in the Western Ghats which could be protected. Its floristic compositions are one of the most complexes and not yet studied. It is a genepool of immense utility for the future. It is the habitat of at least three endangered species of animals including the Liontailed Macaque, the second most threatened primate in the world. The construction of the dam would submerge 830 hectares of reserve forest including the invaluable riparian ecosystem. The reduction in the forest area will make the Silent Valley habitat of Liontailed Macaque nonviable and can lead to the extinction of the species in the valley, one of the last two viable populations surviving today.\textsuperscript{43}

It is really not possible to separate the environmental impacts like those on forests, wildlife, rivers, lakes and geology and the human impacts through settlement and other forms of intervention. Environmental impacts manifest themselves on plant, animal and human life and the ecosystem as a whole through several interconnected and complex interaction mechanisms.\textsuperscript{44} The study conducted by the KSSP experts stressed that the interaction problems will have a cascading effect resulting in irreparable damage to the ecosystem. No safeguards can prevent these adverse consequences. KSSP held that SVHEP has to be assessed not merely on the basis of ecological consequences but also techno economic and socio

\textsuperscript{42} KSSP, Janakeeya Sastrum – Kazchappadum Karma Paripadivum (Trichur, 1988); KSSP, Silent Valley Charcha (Trivandrum, 1980); KSSP, Silent Valley Padhathi – Parishathinte Nilapadum Visaderekaranavum (Trivandrum, 1980); Issac and Ekbal, n.32, p.35.

\textsuperscript{43} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{44} Report of the joint committee, n.38, p.13.
political considerations. This approach was emphatically announced in the very title of the KSSP study report.\textsuperscript{45}

The study of the KSSP team reveals that the significance of power generated by the SVHEP either in relation to the overall energy positions of Kerala or the southern grid, both in the long run and short run can only be marginal. The overall demand for energy in Kerala cannot be met from hydel sources alone; therefore it is important to diversify its electrical energy sources. The sole reliance on hydel sources can prove disastrous in the case of a monsoon failure even in the short run. The alternative suggested by the KSSP is the construction of super thermal stations at pit heads and supply through extra high tension transmission. Ecology and economics, both work against such a solution.\textsuperscript{46}

The controversy became a national and international issue and consequently the Silent Valley was declared as a National Park. Though started as an issue of preservation of tropical ever green forests, the movement has gathered momentum and assumed wider proportions. The KSSP holds that everything in nature and society is in a continuous stage of change. But these changes are law governed. The history of human kind is the progressive increase of the knowledge of these laws and practice informed by such knowledge. The scientific and technological revolution and the scale of contemporary man-nature interaction have increased the possibilities of unforeseen ecological imbalances manifold. The science of ecology helps us to understand them and take preventive measures. The

\textsuperscript{45} M.K.Prasad et.al., \textit{The Silent Valley Hydroelectric Project: A Techno Economic and Socio Political Assessment} (Mimeo) (Trivandrum, 1979).

\textsuperscript{46} Issac and Ekbal, n.32, pp.69-70.
profit calculus of the capitalist does not and cannot take into consideration the social costs neither in the long run nor short run. The claim that science has the capability to find solution for all the imbalances springs from ignorance. The demand for the preservation of the ecosystem was not made "for the sake of nature" but "for the sake of man". 47

Forestry

The main focus of the activities of the KSSP in this sector has been to create consciousness among the people about the importance of the forests and the need to protect them. The state level jatha in 1983-84 is a typical example of many of such campaigns conducted by the KSSP. The two-week vehicle jatha touring all the districts of Kerala was coordinated with Padayatras through the forest belts, collection of signature for a mass memorandum, dharnas before the forest offices, seminars and in the nature of exposure of illegal encroachment, logging and transfer of forest land have been organised. The 'Munderi March' 1985, in which KSSP volunteers marched at great personal risk into the forest area where trees were being felled illegally. 48 A conscious attempt was made to link up the demand for the protection of forests with other development slogans. Thus the 'Forest-Energy-Development Jatha' of 1986 was organised from September 1 to 7. There were two jathas: one from Madikkai of Kasaragod to Malampuzha and another from Ernakulam to Thiruvananthapuram. As the name indicates the jatha was-

47 Ibid.
48 KSSP, Vanasamrakshanam (Trivandrum, 1984); M.P.Parameswaran, Kudivelathinu Kadu Samrakshikuka (Trivandrum, 1987); M.K.Prasad, Kadum Nadum (Quilon, 1982); KSSP, Vana Samrakshanam Oru Jeevan Marana Prasanam (Trivandrum, 1984). (KSSP Pamphlets)
aiming at comprehensive development. In 1988, another forest protection jatha was organised between Muliyar and Muzhgakunnu of Kannur District. 49

Social Forestry

Since 1980, the KSSP has been active in the area of social forestry. The 1982-83 Annual Report mentions that a pilot project in social forestry begun in 17 panchayats in Thrissur district in 1981-82 was extended to another 17 panchayats in 1982-83. The project was undertaken with the complete cooperation of the Department of Forests, Government of Kerala. The KSSP also experimented with developing nurseries and distributing saplings independently. 50 In 1986, the KSSP formally disassociated itself from the social forestry programme in Kerala which, by then, had been converted into a World Bank sponsored programme. 51 The KSSP published a detailed critique of the scheme. The tone of the critique is evident from its introductory paragraph. 52

The Kerala Sastrà Sahitya Parishad (KSSP) had been an active promoter and collaborator of the Social Forestry (SF) Programme of the State Forest Department from 1982 onwards. KSSP is extremely conscious of the degradation of the forests in Kerala and also about the growing shortage of timber and firewood. It had, however, serious differences of opinion about the very meaning of social forestry in the Kerala context, about the species selected and about the method of implementation. The experience of the past two-three years especially in the context of the present World Bank aided Kerala Social Forestry Programme (KSFP) had corroborated the fears of the KSSP. The programme is detrimental to the interests of the state both by omission and by commission. The assumption, on

49 KSSP, n.23, p.35.
52 Ibid.
which the project is build up, is wrong. The targets are unattainable; the economics is baseless; the entire project is highly dubious.footnote{53}

A state-wide user's survey conducted by the Parishad proved that (a) the estimate of demand for the saplings was grossly exaggerated and (b) unlike what was stated in the scheme, the performance of the people was for the native fruit tree saplings. The Parishad also questioned the advisability of introducing alien varieties of trees on such a massive scale as was envisaged in the project. The scheme has become a byword for corruption.footnote{54}

In the year 2000, KSSP organized a number of seminars in connection with the 'environment day'. The various topics of the seminars conducted at the Environment Centre Trissur, Law College, Ernakulam and University College, Trivandrum were 'Environment and Climate Changes', 'Law and Contemporary Environmental Issues' and 'Forest Resources and Environment'.footnote{55}

KSSP sees the environmental struggle as a part and parcel of general social struggles. It joins with and supports the like-minded movements' and struggles when they assume wider proportions. For instance KSSP has participated in the 'Narmada Sangarsha Parikramum', organized by the Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA) which opposes work on the Sardar Sarovar Dam and demands rehabilitation of displaced persons. R.V.G.Menon, K.Sreedharan and T.P.Kunhikannan the three senior most leaders represented KSSP in the agitation programme organized from 4 to 10 April 2001. It has also decided to sponsor one of the workers of NBA, and for

footnote{53} KSSP, n. 51. pp.18-23.
footnote{54} Ibid.
which funds have been raised through personal contributions from some of the senior leaders.\textsuperscript{56}

It must be noted that the activities of the KSSP is not limited to industrial pollution but to the pollutions caused by pesticides and fertilizers also. The KSSP demands an epidemiological study on the 'endosulphan issue'. Spraying of endosulphan in the lands owned by the Plantation Corporation has become a major health hazard in Kasaragode, Manjeswaram blocks of the Kasaragode district. The KSSP is also very sensitive to the issues like QST lake issue in Alappuzha and the eco-tourism programme in Kollam. The environmental centre of the movement has extended technical consultancy in these two cases.\textsuperscript{57}

At the initiative of the KSSP, an organization of lawyers, scientists and environmentalists, namely Enviro-Legal Cell has come into being. The objective of the organization is to make a combined effort to deal the environmental issues involving complex technical and legal questions. It is also intended to impart environmental awareness among the practicing lawyers on the one hand and on the other providing environment-related legal information to the activists of the KSSP. This is very significant and relevant on the eve of environmental issues are being taken to the consideration of courts of law.\textsuperscript{58}

A project known as 'Jaiva Dhana Padhathi', for the protection and preservation of the native natural vegetation have been formulated and realized. It

\textsuperscript{56} KSSP: 39\textsuperscript{th} Annual Report (2002), p.79
\textsuperscript{57} Ibid., p.80
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., pp.81-82.
is decided to cultivate 150000 saplings of mango tree in five northern districts of the state. \[59\]

To equip the teacher-trainees with environmental awareness, KSSP has organized a workshop in collaboration with the Centre for Development Education, Bangalore. The Principals and teachers of various teacher training colleges were invited to attend the programme and the workshop adopted a new curriculum to include environment as a major subject of study for teacher-trainees.

The KSSP has taken a very solid position on the relationship between environment and development. It does not pose the issue of Environment vs. Development. It believes that it is useful to consider the complex interactions between environment and development on the basis of their impact on human conditions. In our context environmental problems can only be understood as an aspect of broader reality and not as an isolated element. A systematic enquiry and analysis of all the interpinnings of the total societal relationship is inevitable.

The KSSP believes that vested interests are benefiting from environmental degradation and most often they are protected by the government. It holds that conservation of the environment is not possible unless people’s struggles are channelled to counter the policies of the state and the power of the vested interests. The KSSP’s consideration of environmental issues in development highlights two sets of conflicts. On the one hand, there is the conflict between different social groups and on the other hand between growth and consumption and sustainability. The first step towards the achievement sustainable development with participatory

\[59\] Ibid., p.80.
mobilization is creation of environmental awareness among the people. The primary concern of KSSP is towards this direction.

**KSSP and Women**

A brief discussion of KSSP and women is incorporated in this chapter. Though this discussion is made not as a part of the discussion on environment, one cannot reject the special relationship between women and the environment. The plight of women reflects human environmental degradation mediated through physical environmental damage as well as neglect of 'basic needs' in investment priorities. Some of the strands of environmentalism cast exclusively as victims of ecological degradation. Other strands of environmentalism see women in an apparently more positive role in nurturing biological diversity.

Traditional development indicates suggest that the status of women in Kerala is extremely good, especially in comparison to the situation of women in most other parts of India. Kerala is the only Indian state in which there are more females than males. Women make up 51 percent of Kerala's population. They have higher literacy rate and fewer children. They marry later and live longer. Female children survive more than do males, in direct contrast to the all-India situation. Slightly over half the students enrolled in colleges are women. Despite their impressive gains, Kerala's Women suffer from many of the traditional problems of women in other Indian states and also from problems that may be associated with misdirected development. Probably the most serious is unemployment. They enter

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jobs such as teaching, nursing, social work and related fields. However, many of
the state's poorest women must still look for income in the critical agricultural
labour sector. Agricultural labour accounted for 44 percent of all women's paid
labour in Kerala. The decline in the sector is especially serious for women.61

It is to be noted that the progressive organizations and programmes in the
state, involved in promoting female literacy, education, economic welfare etc do
not seem to have gender on their agendas. A great deal remains to be done in terms
of women empowerment. Kerala witness the high rate of mental illness and suicide
among women. Kerala has until recently been relatively free from dowry killings,
but there is evidence that they are becoming slightly more common. Women of the
state like other Indian counterparts are often subjected to sexual harassment, known
as Eve-teasing. This phenomenon is a constant source of tension on the streets and
other public places. The curtailment of freedom and mobility of girls and the
reasons underlying the restrictions placed on them are extremely important issues
which shackle girls and prevent them from realizing their full human potential.
Another area of discrimination is the gender-based division of labour, with the
burden of house-work exclusively reserved for the female members of the family.
Gender relations and sexuality are two related areas in which girls in Kerala do not
seem to be better off in any way than girls elsewhere. The whole question of gender
relations - going beyond sex and sexuality to encompass the equally complex areas

61 Ibid., p. 106.
of love and romance, understanding and respect, freedom and responsibility, equality and equity- goes largely unaddressed in Kerala. 

Even though the KSSP was formed in 1962, the Women's wing started functioning only in 1980. Like many other movements in Kerala, the KSSP too is male dominated. Several attempts have been made in the past to develop women leaders but not with much success. Out of the total membership about 10-25% are women and of the leadership only less than 10%. A number of measures were seriously adopted to overcome this disparity. It included the creation of a state level separate sub-committee of women (1980) and separate women's forums (1984-85). The book 'Women and Society' was published in 1985. During 1985-86, 26 science monthly classes were organized. In 1986-87, 13 regional Parishad Schools for women were organized. Certain types of activities like organization of children's clubs were also stressed as important areas that could attract women activists. The slow progress in this direction initiated serious debate within the organization on the women's question. A detailed document, 'The Parishad and the Woman Question' was drawn-up through a series of workshops organized in 1987. The document noted that the low participation of women in social movements is not an issue peculiar to the KSSP. It is a general phenomenon which can be understood only through an in depth study of the socio-economic structures that maintain the relations of male dominance. The mobility, apart from going outside job is limited.

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63 M.P.Parameswaran, Letter to Kenstin Bennett Administrative Director,Right Livelihood Award Foundation (Trissur, 23 August 1996), p.3.
by social norms. In addition, the double burden of house work and outside employment restricts the scope for women not only to attend meetings but also to undertake serious study. The document points out that what is required is not a separate forum for women within the KSSP or selection of specific areas of activity but the need to raise the gender issue in every area of activity that KSSP is involved in and formulate slogans that are more specifically related to the problems of women in each of these areas. The whole movement of the KSSP, not women alone, will shoulder the task of campaigning for these demands.  

On 8 March, 1988, KSSP organized a number of seminars in connection with the observation of 'International Women's Day'. The same year witnessed the first agitation of the women's wing, when it organized procession and sit-in strike against the exhibition of obscene cine postures. Two workshops were also organized—one on 'Women and Economic Structure' and the other on 'Women and Health'. The topics of the workshops in 1989 were 'Women and Energy' and 'Women and Media'. The Total Literacy Campaign of 1989 in Ernakulam district was an inspiring and encouraging event to the Women's wing activities. Two-Third of the instructors and illiterates participated in the campaign were women. 'The Vanitha Kala Jatha', a very unique and thought-provoking campaign was organized by the women's wing of the KSSP from 30th September to 22nd October 1989. Previous to this, a few women of KSSP had participated in the All India Jan Vigyan Jatha in 1987.

65 KSSP, Parishathum Sree Prasthanavum (Trivandrum, 1988).
66 KSSP, n 23, pp. 78-79.
Beginning on October 2, 1989, two Vanitha Kala jathas travelled throughout the state presenting folk plays, skits and songs on women and equality. Apart from the starting and terminating points, the jathas visited 130 centres in 14 districts. On October 27, the two jathas converged at Thrissur, bringing the three-week campaign to an end. The use of folk-art forms and street theatre was nothing new to the KSSP's campaigns. The Science-thru-art-jatha of 1980 was perhaps the first large-scale experiment in this direction. The jatha consisted of a group of science activists who toured the length of Kerala for 37 days.\(^6\)

The Vanitha Kala Jatha also followed roughly the same format as the former science cultural jathas. But there were very decisive differences. The members of the Jatha were largely women with just two male members. The Key slogan of the former jathas was 'Science for Social Revolution' - this time was an additional slogan: 'Gender Equality for Social Change'. The stress of the jatha was clearly on women's issue - the varied forms of gender exploitation that permeates our society.

To quote Dr. Lakshmi Sahgal, “The Vanitha Kala Jatha 1989 was organised with the idea of graphically bringing home to the people-women and men- the plight of women and the urgency to drastically change society”.\(^6\) According to Gangadharan and Radhamony:

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On the whole, the jatha was an effort to revive the thrust towards equal rights for women which was so much a part of the political and social movements in Kerala in the preceding decades. It forms an important element in the move to salvage and re-sharpen weapons of the progressive tradition we possess. This becomes all the more significant against the backdrop of rising social and communal revivalist tension which are steadily but subtly eroding the gains made by all oppressed sections of society including women. The call to sharpen our weapon and remain vigilant thus becomes central to our struggle.69

In 1990 the KSSP Women's wing organized its fifth workshop, in Cochin University of Science and Technology, namely on 'Women and Law'. The Government of Kerala observed the same year as the year of girls and the KSSP had been invited to present cultural programmes in the governmental functions organized in this regard. The Sixth workshop was on 'Women and Women's Movements' organized in Pattambi (Palakkad) in December 1991. An organization camp for workers of the women's wing was organized at the IRTC in October (14,15,16) 1992. It was in 1993, the "Samatha Kala Jatha" (Equity Cultural Jatha) was organized at the All India level.70 The participation of the KSSP in the programme was negligible as only 12 women attended the valedictory function in Jhansi in April 6. It was a programme attended by 600 women from all over India. In the same year the KSSP Women's wing organized the seventh workshop in Panthalloor (Thrissur), this time on 'women and environment'. As a measure to

69 Gangadharan and Radhamony, n. 67, p. 2.
fight with the increasing violence against women, a series of workshop on 'Women and Law' was organized in 1994. In the year 1996 the women's wing became very active. This accounted for two reasons. (1) Elections to the Panchayat Raj institutions and the involvement of women in it. (2) The KSSP had to host the 'All India Samatha Vignanotsav'. The Vignanotsav was organised with an intention of encouraging the process of social-searching and empowering. Participatory programmes and classes were conducted on, Personality Development, Education, Health, Kitchen, Environment, alcoholism, atrocities towards women, Human Rights violation, Cycling, house hold production etc. A workshop on Information Technology was organized in 1997.71

In the year 1999 a number of women's study camps were organized on a variety of topics such as organization, education, law, media, environment, health, development and yoga. Each camp ended with a study tour and a 'grama jatha' (village procession).72

Integrated Rural Technology Centre (IRTC) of the KSSP has undertaken a number of projects on women studies. This is to provide knowledge base to support the wide range of its activities. The summary of five recent projects is as follows. The first four are sponsored by KRPPLD (Kerala Research Programme on Local Level Develop Centre for Development Studies) of CDS and the last one by World Health Organization (WHO) and Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MHFW).

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71 KSSP, n.23, pp.76-84.
1. Local History of Women's Participation in the Freedom Movement and Socio-Political Movement in Kerala—Analysis and Documentation

Women are invisible in history writing due to many reasons. Major reason is that history writing is androcentric; existing methodologies are traditional and insufficient for writing women's history. Women entered the socio-political field due to various reasons, which have been analyzed. Women were not taking up women's issues but they were all human and social issues and their intervention was felt necessary.

Fifty women were identified from the five northern districts of Kerala, who have participated in freedom struggle, peasant struggle and social reform of different occasions. A cross class analysis was done to prove the nature of the movement and participation. All the 50 women were documented giving their biodata and contribution. Also a documentary short film was proposed with 9-11 women giving a piece of their heart in the background of the Kerala society of early 20th century. The final report was submitted in February 2002.

2. Programme to Study the Successful asset Management Models and Women Enterprise at Local Level

The major objective of the project was to study and evaluate the process involved in asset management of successful women enterprises at local level and to document the process of assessing its sustainability for adoption as an intervention programme. The project also aimed to initiate an action research programme in a selected block panchayat to evaluate strength and suitability of the successful

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models and to assess the impact of this programme in the process of empowering women at local level.\textsuperscript{75}

3. Micro Analysis Problems of Displacement of women Agricultural Labourers with special Reference to the Pokkali Fields of Vypinaka

Pokkali paddy field conversion will result in loss of jobs of women agricultural labours, who are also traditional hand pickers of fish in the area. This will aggregate the gender inequalities existing in the area and their economic and food access will be decreased. The project was aiming to analyze the specific impact of the conversion of Pokkali paddy field in Vypin Island into permanent export oriented aqua-culture farms, on women agricultural labourers related to their food supply, health and economic access and to investigate the relation of paddy conversion and consequent decrease in earnings of women and resultant aggravated gender inequalities. It also aimed to investigate the impact of modern aquaculture farms and their fishing method on traditional fish pickers.\textsuperscript{76}

4. Gender, Poverty and Health of Women in the Unorganized sector-a case Study of Agriculture and Construction Labourers in Kodumbu Panchayat

96\% of the women workers in our country are employed in the unorganized sector. Agriculture is the main source of livelihood which is characterized by low wages, employment insecurity and poor work condition. Wide-spread discrimination exists against women workers at various levels. It was felt that an exploration of the linkage between the socio-economic conditions, health problems and accessibility and availability of health services will help to develop an

\textsuperscript{75} IRTC, n.73, p.45.
\textsuperscript{76} Ibid., p.46.
integrated conceptual framework in formulating community development programmes. Kodumbu panchayat, one of the most backward areas in the Palakkad district, and where a concentration of agricultural labourers is found, was selected for the study. 77

5. Building Capacity of Women Groups on Women’s Health

The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Govt. of India, initiated a programme on Women Empowerment through health activities. In Kerala, the KSSP had been entrusted with the responsibility to carry out the scheme. The project aimed at building up different capacities like acquiring knowledge of different medical health practices and access to and availability of government medical care for the betterment of common man.

It can be revealed that the activities organized by KSSP in the women's front are two fold. (i) The woman should be empowered so that they become aware of their problems and be able to tackle them successfully. (ii) Society should be gender sensitized so that woman is recognized as individuals and their rights are considered as human rights.

Various activities like publication of books and leaflets, organizing 'Vanitha Kala Jatha' 'Samatha Vignanotsav', series of workshops, etc. were taken up with this end. Training for employment and income generating activities like production of soap, rabbit rearing, mushroom cultivation etc are also being provided to women. Even a small income of their own, results a much desired change in the status of women in family and society.

77 IRTC, n.73, p.47, Ibid., p.48.