

Exploring the Possibilities of Counter-hegemonic Globalization of the Fishworkers' Movement in India and its Global Interactions

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INTRODUCTION

The fishworkers' movement in India and abroad has come into its own over the last thirty years of the twentieth century. This was largely an outcome of certain technology-oriented growth processes that led to increased industrialization of the sector and in its course to over-fishing, depletion of the oceans, indebtedness of the fishworkers and an acute threat to the survival of fisheries in the wild in general and artisanal fisheries in particular.¹ State interference in the fishery rights of local communities, intended to enhance productivity, destroyed customary practices of sustainable interaction with nature and not only led to the depletion of resources but also to the destruction of local skills and knowledge systems. It led to a wild export-oriented growth of the sector that brought severe indebtedness and diminished returns for the mass of fishermen. By the end of the century, with liberalization, the state had entered joint venture agreements with foreign countries and abdicated its responsibility to control the industrial trawlers from entering the inshore waters. It is the artisanal sector that has been fighting back and, ultimately, the women in the artisanal sector who have been raising most sharply the questions of environmental sustainability and the protection of the lifestyles of the coastal communities.²

In this process, the organizational history is of great importance since it spans a wide range, from local to state and national levels and reaching, simultaneously, international struggles. Apart from the expanding geographical reach of the movement, the interweave of different identities at the local level, such as religious affiliations, class consciousness, caste and community identity and patriarchy in the widest sense (from the family structure via technology and the development concept to the whole question of ecological sustainability), is of crucial importance to understanding the organizational dynamics.

This chapter will follow the organizational process from its inception in the coastal villages in Kerala (South India), first through the process of co-operativization and then unionization at the national and international levels. It will then come back to the ruminations on identity politics in the fisheries sector at the end of the millennium and raise questions on how this identity politics fits in with the assertion of capitalism in the form of market fascism and the intended disintegration of class struggles. This requires a deeper analysis of the relationship between economic and cultural struggles and a more precise understanding of the relationship between caste and class and the functioning of patriarchy in both. We are consciously using here the category of patriarchy as it has been worked out sharply in a critique of science and technology,³ and which can therefore be related more effectively to caste, class and the state. We see the attempt to deflect the discussion into "gender" only as one of the strategies of hegemonic capitalism to use the process of "women's empowerment" for integration into the world market. This goes hand in hand with a larger cooptation process in the wake of the collapse of actually existing socialism in Eastern Europe, where international solidarity and funding shifted from the class perspective to the encouragement of a cultural identity politics of the most backward sections.

We raise the question whether the reevaluation of subsistence production⁴ and the production of life and livelihood as the base of all extended production can be effectively connected with the attempt to integrate class and caste struggles, economic survival and the cultural identity of coastal communities. If not, we may witness the death of fisheries in the wild, the destruction of the resource base and the cultural suicide of the fishing community in the name of imagined progress and caste- and religion-based identity politics.

It may be necessary at the outset to explain why fishworkers organized themselves primarily as a class or a subsector within the vast informal sector of Indian labor (which comprises 92 percent of the Indian working class). Fishing communities in India are from all religious backgrounds (Hindu, Muslim and Christian). Fishing communities are also not of a unified caste and within the community there can be numerous subcastes (from about eight to twelve). Religion can cut across subcastes and even within a single subcaste people can belong to different religions. Class organization appears therefore as an obvious way out of such fragmentation, while at the ground level a family using a shore-seine net may not marry into a family of catamaran fishermen because of different subcaste affiliations. However, with the marked rise of identity politics in India through the 1980s, the fishworkers, who had become very articulate during the 1970s, also got sucked into this trend, which was promoted by the "creamy layer" of the community (the educated, non-fishing members of the community who may own craft and gear). For example, the Mukkavars and Arayars, who are the main fishing

castes in Kerala, have numerous subcastes, some of whom do not go to sea but work as head loaders, barbers and in other occupations, while the upper layers are entrepreneurs who own big boats and gear. From the late 1980s onwards, there was an attempt to raise the demands of the "matsya thozhili samudhayam," the fishworkers' community—a non-existent entity that basically refers to the Latin Catholic group that straddles different subcastes but that makes room for the "creamy layer," while the mass of actually fishing workers are not represented in this articulation.

It is the contention of this chapter that social emancipation can only occur if the voices of the actual fishing population can make themselves heard, for it is they who uphold the skills of the trade and who have also the traditional knowledge and skill to fall back on once the technocratic, state-planned "development" process has come to its logical conclusion of depleting the sea. Within this sector, the voices of women have been of crucial importance, not because of any biologicistic disposition due to which "women are closer to nature," but because of the important social role of local marketing, keeping up social contacts and integrating the community on the shore with the inland. This importance of women can be found in artisanal communities in Asia, Africa and Latin America and has been crucial in the Women in Fisheries Program of the International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF), which will be analyzed further on. Obviously, it has been difficult to make such voices heard, as the organized working-class movement had great difficulties in understanding a form of labor that is not wage labor in the conventional sense but based on a share system of owner-operators who are basically self-employed. It has been more difficult to listen to the voices of women who are in vending and processing and have therefore had to struggle very hard even to be recognized as fishworkers.

While the narrative begins with the local organizational process in Kerala, and returns to it after proceeding to the national and international levels, it is expected that the analysis will have many parallels in other Third World countries where artisanal communities struggle for survival.⁵ In addition, we hope to contribute to the debate on "new social movements," which in India, in our contention, have combined class struggles and the struggle for cultural identity more consistently than in many other countries.⁶

THE IMPACT OF THE INDO-NORWEGIAN PROJECT

The development of fisheries in South India over the past thirty years has to be traced back to the history of the Indo-Norwegian Project, which first took effect as a tripartite agreement in 1953, signed in New Delhi by the United Nations, the government of India and the government of Norway (Kurien, 1987). This was part of the investment of a Social Democratic government in developing what was perceived as a backward economy. It was seen in

analogy to the Marshall Aid Plan, which went into the war-ravaged economies after the Second World War; it was also meant to compensate for, in the eyes of the Norwegian public, more problematic commitments such as the country's NATO membership. The emphasis was on technical assistance to promote economic growth. Socio-cultural and economic structures in India as well as administrative machinery were to a large extent beyond the comprehension of their Norwegian counterparts. As food production in a limited rural area had to be targeted, the Norwegians had to settle for fish, even though this went against their own initial intentions. The project was confined to Kerala in the erstwhile Travancore-Cochin region from 1953-1963 and was extended to Karnataka and Tamil Nadu in 1963-1973.

The early years were characterized by "teething problems" due to the incompetence of the Norwegian partners. At that time, rising catches were supposed to enhance the protein supplies for consumers within the state. This changed towards an export-oriented approach in the 1960s. The change was not necessarily due to the impact of the Indo-Norwegian Project (INP) as such but to the daring enterprise of some merchant capitalists who started to export frozen prawns to the USA and later to Japan. The INP helped by providing technology for more sophisticated harvesting and processing. Thus, the INP effectively strengthened such indigenous merchant capitalism. Beginning in 1963, the INP concentrated on developing "integrated fishing complexes" in Karwar (Karnataka), Cochin (Kerala) and Mandapam (Tamil Nadu). John Kurien has pointed out that the post-1963 period, which was entirely under Indian control, cannot be attributed to Norwegian "influence" as such. However, it was the INP that introduced a sharp dualism in the fisheries in Kerala, which led to the polarization and marginalization of the bulk of working fishermen in the state. John Kurien summarizes the situation as follows:

The state's attempt to continue linking the mechanization programme with the creation of producer's cooperatives was watered down to mere lip service. On paper the mechanized boats were issued only through producer cooperatives or to groups of fishermen. In reality however, the cooperatives, whose mere numbers increased rapidly, were dominated by financiers and middlemen and were indeed far away from being genuine fishermen organizations. (Kurien, 1987: 12)

Financiers and middlemen mediated between the new semi-proletarianized fishermen and the nouveau riche merchant class that had entered the prawn-export business. The state made investments in infrastructure, while the profit went to the private sector. The attempt by the state to control prawn exports by the Kerala Fisheries Corporation turned out to be an utter failure.

The effects of this polarization were sharply felt from 1970 to 1980. It led to a drastic decline in the overall catch. Oil sardines and mackerel, once the mainstays of the fishery, dropped to a low of 112,000 metric tons in 1975 from a peak of 250,000 metric tons in 1968, and reached a rock bottom of 87,000 metric tons in 1980. Fish production was 279,000 metric tons in 1980, the lowest since 1961. On the other hand, exports from Kerala increased from 22,792 metric tons in 1969, valued at Rs.277 million, to 31,637 metric tons in 1979, valued at Rs.1,096 million (Kurien, 1987:15).

If one looks at this record of state interference, there are two features that are particularly striking international aid, and the growth and decline of the fishing sector in Kerala. One feature is the enormous growth of investment despite stagnation in production. The total number of mechanized boats (small trawlers and purse seiners) was estimated at around 3,500 by 1979-80, double the number at the beginning of the 1970s. The other striking feature is that the artisanal sector, through the open access system itself, expanded drastically. From 1972-79, a 10 percent growth in artisanal fishing crafts can be observed (from 30,594 to 34,112) (Kurien, 1987: 16). Thus it is not only the phenomenon of the rich getting richer and the poor poorer, but the ranks of the poor artisanal fishermen are still swelling, probably due to displacement from agriculture and other development-related phenomena. A. J. Vijayan, a long-time trade union leader of the Trivandrum fishworkers, attributed the growth of output nationwide (from 7 lakh tonnes in 1960 to 13 lakh tonnes in 1981) mostly to the artisanal sector. The mechanized sector only accounted for 20-30 percent of the catch but cornered 50-60 percent of the value of fish. He points out that the total number of active sea-going fishermen in the artisanal sector all over India grew from 2.3 lakhs in 1960 to 4.5 lakhs in 1980. The total number of fishing craft rose from 90,000 to 150,000 during this period. He emphasizes that "what actually happened over the period of planned fisheries development was that the artisanal fishermen worked harder, their numbers increased, their investment and craft increased, they produced more but got less income and became more and more poor" (Delhi Forum, 1987: 3).

THE ORGANIZATIONAL EXPERIENCE: FROM COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION TO COOPERATIVIZATION

What happened at the ground level from the late sixties and early seventies onwards can be seen by following the experiences of a community organization that started in the coastal village of Marianad, an experience that was seminal in many ways for the process of cooperativization, on the one hand, and the self-organization of women in the fishing sector on the other.⁷ Looking at this history teaches us that the ways of counter-hegemonic globalization are unexpected and at times look rather bizarre. The above outlined

history of government-initiated international aid initiatives and the ensuing polarization of the fishery sector from 1960–1980 should not allow us to be surprised at the fact that the living conditions in the coastal villages were overcrowded (5,500 to 6,000 persons per km²), and unsanitary, and gave rise to frequent quarrels as well as fire accidents. This led the young Bishop of Trivandrum (the first Indian bishop in the diocese) to initiate the Trivandrum Social Service Society in 1961 in order to help the 150,000 members of the fishing community of this diocese to make boats and nets available through cooperatives. However, as the church was seen as a charitable organization, repayments were not taken seriously and the project failed. Simultaneously, the decision was taken to make a pioneering attempt in an uninhabited area called Allilathurai (literally, “shore without people”) in order to forge a community out of the spillover population of seven villages. Initially, fifty families came together and a team of foreign women belonging to an association of committed professional women (AFI) settled down for community development work. This team was later replaced by an Indian team consisting of a social worker, a young man from the fishing community, and a young male business manager. Many more young people subsequently joined this team. Over the years, ideological influences can be identified, from the liberation theology of Vatican II to the approaches of Paulo Freire, Ivan Illich, François Houtart,⁸ the heritage of the Indian Freedom Struggle, and the strong presence of Marxism in the political culture of Kerala. The Marianad team pulled out of the village by 1979 and contributed to the formation of the Program for Community Organization (PCO), an NGO outfit that supported the fishworkers’ struggle through research, documentation, training, and community organization.

The initial attempts of the Marianad team focused on community building: public health programs, nurseries and crèches, savings schemes. After seven years of such work in the late 1960s, the team began to realize that no amount of community organization could succeed unless the basic nexus of exploitation was broken. The artisanal fishworkers at that time were not poor because fishing was not lucrative but because they could not break through the nexus of exploitation from moneylenders and merchants. Interestingly, this realization about the economy was driven home by the very culture-specific desire of the local community to build a church, as they did not feel that their village was complete without a house of God. Having come from seven different villages, establishing a religious center appeared of great importance, much to the consternation of the team of social workers who were trying to underplay religious identity and were more prepared to take social justice issues head on. Ironically, it was in the process of trying to build a fund for the construction of a church that the fishermen, having to hand over part of their income (5 percent), realized the extent of their exploitation by the moneylenders and merchants. The initial Rs.1,000

collected for the church building were thus used to pay back some merchants and to start the cooperative in order to avoid indebtedness and to keep control over marketing. However, the sailing was not smooth as the moneylenders in the surrounding villages also used the church structure and their influence on the village priest to boycott the attempts of Marianad to become independent. Nevertheless, the fishermen of Marianad succeeded in fighting back, and Marianad became the first cooperative on the coast to be entirely controlled by active fishermen.

Although the Kerala government had earlier initiated a process of cooperativization, none of those cooperatives was actually people-controlled and none of them marketed the fish of their members. The importance of the Marianad cooperative was that it linked marketing to credit, not as the moneylenders did, but by facilitating daily small repayments at low interest rates. In this way, the fishermen began to realize their actual returns from fishing, and the money in the community increased. It was this surplus that then went into education and improved living conditions of the community.

By the mid-1970s, this village attracted fishermen from neighboring communities who wanted similar cooperatives in their villages. This led to the training of youth from other coastal villages who could get involved in similar mobilizing activities in their villages. By 1978 there was community organization activity in around eighteen villages in the Trivandrum district and cooperatives in six villages. The success of these cooperatives also attracted the attention of the government, as the fishermen from the cooperatives were also able to challenge poor government investments in artisanal fishing in favor of industrial fishing. The cooperatives threw up accurate data on fish catches, the earnings of fishermen and data on craft and gear. These facts baffled the fisheries department officials and an enterprising fisheries secretary then planned a remodeling of the organization of the fisheries sector on the basis of the Marianad model. Although the implementation of his proposal did not materialize until around 1982, the fisheries of Kerala were finally reorganized by legislation that registered all fishworkers as members of the cooperative and created fish-marketing societies all along the coast. This, for the first time, gave recognition to the fishworkers, both men and women, and facilitated the creation of the Fishermen’s Welfare Board a little later.

The cooperatives initiated by the people continued to function and, by the late 1970s and early 1980s, with the support of other NGOs, federations of cooperatives grew in the three contiguous districts of Quilon, Trivandrum and Kanya Kumari. They came under one banner called the South Indian Federation of Fishermen’s Societies (SIFFS). While the local cooperatives remained autonomous and concentrated on local fish marketing, this apex organization assisted in research and development in technology and the marketing of export varieties of fish. It was the research and development

in new craft design that equipped the artisanal fishermen to expand their areas of operation.

The collectivization of the fishermen also gave them greater strength and they were goaded into greater investments in their fishing in order to compete for the resources. This was accompanied by similar trends in central Kerala, where the artisanal fishermen using larger boats (vallams) began to use a ring-seine net that was highly efficient, though ecologically detrimental.

With the introduction of the ply-boats made by SIFFS in the three southern districts, the artisanal fishermen went into motorization. According to the craft and gear census made by SIFFS in 1998 (SIFFS, 1998) there was a slight fall in the total number of craft between 1991 and 1998, but the number of motorized craft increased by 38 percent. This indicates that motorization has come to stay, and while it is certain that this kind of motorization permitted the artisanal fishermen to remain in the fishery, the increased capital costs could be afforded only by the better-off fishermen, and a large number have been proletarianized.

Reference must be made here to similar changes that were taking place in other states of the country. Further up the west coast the extended continental shelf necessitated the existence of larger craft making longer fishing trips. The state initiated cooperatives in the northern states of the west coast of Maharashtra, and Gujarat facilitated the growth of the larger boat fishery in those areas, and the fishermen under the leadership of able community leaders were able to make maximum use of government inputs to develop their fisheries. Very early, in the mid-1960s, these boats were converted into trawl boats and, by the early 1980s, the major part of the catch in those areas came from the trawl sector; Gujarat peaked in fish production by the 1990s. Whereas the state-sponsored cooperatives were the base through which state subsidies reached the fishermen, the fishermen saw these cooperatives as their organizational strength. Nevertheless, none of these cooperatives handled the marketing of their fish or undertook any measures to manage the fishery.

THE ORGANIZATIONAL EXPERIENCE OF WOMEN⁹

Because the organizational experience started at the community level, women's participation was central from the outset. However, women's presence could not be taken for granted. As women are not allowed to go to sea (except on Christmas Day), they were not considered to be active contributors in the fishing community. The formation of cooperatives was a male-dominated affair from the beginning. The team of social workers in Marianad, despite having women members, also did not initially pay attention to the fact that women played a crucial role in the local marketing of fish. In reality it was the women who took over the fish once on land and who dealt with the cooperative. It was the women who resisted the attempt

of the moneylender to manipulate the cooperative. By the early 1970s, i.e., after ten years of the project, the women came together in an association that had a partly religious character (critical Bible studies, creation of a grotto) and partly served to discuss other topics of common interest. As their collective strength grew, they also ran an outlet of the public distribution system, which gave them a better understanding of the functioning of the government. To fight the corruption in this system they had to mobilize and oppose it. They also opposed the cooperative when it proposed to open outlets for marketing the fish in the city of Trivandrum. This, they said, would cut directly into their economic space.

Women's initial organizational experience revolved around the "life-world" of the village. Their activities pertained to health, education, crèches, savings schemes, and income-generating activity; when the team of social workers left the village in 1978, all of these activities were in the control of the local women's group. This made the men in the village and even the priest rather insecure. There was then a conscious attempt by the priest to take over the activities and, when the women refused, he not only saw to it that the women's association would be divided and destroyed, but he introduced a group of religious sisters in order to help domesticate the women. The dismantling of the women's autonomous initiative was completed by 1985.

Despite that somewhat negative outcome in the mid-1980s, the late 1970s to early 1980s had seen a growth in local women's organizations along the coast. People not only came to Marianad for training regarding the cooperative, they also learned about the women's experiences. By 1977, the social workers had created an NGO called the Program for Community Organization and undertook support work like research, training, and organization; as a result, not only the cooperative but also the women's organizations spread in other coastal villages. There were other socially committed priests and religious persons involved in the fishing community by this time. These organizations soon took up issues that were not "women's issues" as such but that pertained very directly to the natural environment and to fisheries. Women took part in an environmental struggle against air and water pollution that was caused by a titanium factory. The other major issue was the transportation problem that women fish vendors faced because they were not allowed onto public transport with their smelly baskets of fish. Women in the northern area of the district also took up a struggle against exploitative market taxes. The year 1979 saw the first ever march of women fish vendors with their fish baskets marching to the secretariat to demand the right to travel on public transport. "This was the first ever public demand of the fishworkers and fisherwomen at that, a demand that related to their working conditions. It was only in 1980 that the Independent Fishworkers Union was born" (Nayak, 1990: 27).

It is important to note that, at the end of the 1970s, women's organizations all over the country were sprouting up. The early 1970s had seen many "new left" movements such as the Shahada Movement, the Lal Nishan Movement in Maharashtra, the Textile Workers' Organization in Belgaum, etc., which brought forth strong women's participation. 1975, the year of the declaration of the National Emergency, coincided with International Women's Year and thus women's meetings were one of the legitimate democratic activities that could be carried out. The J. P. Movement in Bihar saw in its wake the struggle of the women in the Bodhgaya Movement for land (Sen, 1990: 82 ff.). In 1978, side by side with the building of the construction workers union in Chennai, Penurumai Iyakkam was formed. The years 1978/79 also saw the spontaneous struggle of fisherwomen against the introduction of machine-produced nylon nets in the Kanya Kumari District of Tamil Nadu, neighboring the Trivandrum District. In other words, women came into their own during those years, not so much because of any international impact but because their working conditions in agriculture, construction, and fisheries had reached a degree of marginalization and hardship that made it imperative to fight back. The impetus to form women's movements and unions in the unorganized sector was simultaneous and it took time and energy to work out the relationship between these two forms of organization. At the same time, the "autonomous women's movement" took off in the early 1980s with the struggles against rape and price increases (Kumar, 1993). Also, activists from the fishworkers' movement got exposed to the wider debates on patriarchy, caste and class and, successively, to the feminist critique of science and technology and environmental destruction as well. This larger debate on destructive development fed directly into the day-to-day survival struggles of the artisanal fishery sector and the experience of the marginalization of women in the marketing of fish and the increasing nutritional deprivation of the coastal population.

It is difficult within the confines of a brief chapter to make the full extent of women's awakening visible, not to mention the enormous difficulties that they faced in marketing, processing, net-making (West Bengal) and small harvesting activities (e.g., clam fishing). Competition, violence, and the distances that needed to be covered grew in disturbing proportions. Resistance within the family, in the community and in the union also had to be negotiated. It is only by understanding from a different perspective the emergence and growth of the union and the struggles to survive in fisheries as a sector that a feminist perspective on fisheries comes into its own. It is this conceptualization that during the 1990s contributes in important ways to counter-hegemonic global perspectives.

THE ORGANIZATIONAL EXPERIENCE OF FISHWORKERS' UNIONS

The experiences described above of government intervention in fisheries, which had the effect of enhancing the catch and finally destroying the resource base as well as traditional livelihoods and communities, had many parallels in other states. It is therefore not surprising that spontaneous struggles against trawlers erupted in many places during the late 1970s. As early as 1977, Goan fishworkers launched a long agitation against trawlers. This was facilitated by the particular fishing gear operating in Goa, the rampon nets, which required for one net around 100 laborers, who thus could be easily mobilized. The ramponkars argued that the trawlers cut and destroyed their nets and damaged the fragile ecology of the shallow waters, disturbing the reproduction of fish. They also alleged that trawlers that were supposed to fish in the deep sea were appropriating the catch of the ramponkars. The fishermen organized and maintained a chain hunger strike for over a year, demanding a Marine Fishing Regulation Act.

Tamil Nadu had seen clashes between fishermen and trawlers already in 1976. Many fishermen lost their lives but no action was taken because Tamil Nadu was under President's rule at the time. By 1978, fishermen started burning trawlers. At Tuticorin, 110 boats were destroyed and sixteen fishermen lost their lives. A first interstate meeting convened by Mathany Saldanha and Xavier Pinto from Goa brought fisher people from Goa, Tamil Nadu and Kerala together at Chennai in June 1977; realizing they had to struggle for legislation at the national level, they created the National Forum for Catamaran and Country Boat Fishermen's Rights and Marine Wealth. Before long the Forum comprised thirteen major regional fishermen's organizations that had either existed earlier or were formed in the course of the agitation for a Marine Fishing Regulation, as well as several individual supporters from the NGO groups working along the coast. As a result of the agitation, the Central Government appointed the Majumdar Committee to study the causes of the violence. The committee submitted a report in 1978 and proposed that Parliament enact a Marine Fishing Regulation in order to overcome the dichotomy between territorial waters (22 km off the coast) and national waters. Unfortunately, Parliament failed to pass the bill, but instead referred it to the state governments. By 26 July 1978, the representatives of the Forum convinced eighteen parliamentarians in Delhi of their demands and on the next day submitted a memorandum to the Prime Minister comprising nine common demands:

1. A Central Marine Regulation reserving 20 km of coastal waters for the artisanal sector.
2. A ban on night trawling (6 pm–6 am).

3. Divest funds from purse seining and trawling to the artisanal sector.
4. Nationalize deep-sea fishing and shrimp export.
5. Prevent the pollution of common water bodies.
6. Prohibit removal of sand from the beaches.
7. Stop licenses to the mechanized net-making factories.
8. Organize pisciculture to benefit traditional fishing communities.
9. Stop the eviction of fishermen in favor of tourism.

Continuous agitations and relay fasts took place to push for the Marine Regulation Bill. In 1980, the National Forum presented the Ministry of Agriculture with a model copy of a Marine Law. From 1981 onwards some state governments started formulating and passing Marine Regulation Acts, but these were opposed instantly by the Boat Owners' Associations, which started a long process of litigation between the state and the fishworkers. All over the country, local actions along the coast erupted again and again.

In Thiruvananthapuram, after winning the struggle for transport, women also took up struggles against market taxes in March 1980. The fishermen in Anjengo, Trivandrum, also had organized to challenge the corruption of the government in its program of equipping fishermen with mechanized boats. These initial struggles gave way to a militant struggle in 1981, when the government of Kerala proclaimed a ban on monsoon trawl-fishing and then recalled it three days later, exempting Neendakara from the ban under pressure from the boat owners and the state finance minister, who had a big stake in the trawl fishery. This struggle caught everyone's attention because of its massive mobilization, which consisted of processions and the blocking of roads, railways and the airport. The large participation of women and the combination of discipline and militancy made a strong impression on the public, press and even the police. These struggles greatly strengthened the organization-building, in which the local parish priests also played an active role. But by 1982 differences had surfaced as to the character of the organization. Some members wanted to project it as a Latin Catholic organization while others, including leftist clergy, insisted on a class perspective. This led to a split in which the class perspective prevailed, and the Kerala Swathantra Matsya Thozhilali Federation (KSMTF) was registered as a trade union. In September 1983, the National Forum met once again in Bangalore. It decided to change its name to the National Fishermen's Forum (NFF), finalized the Constitution and elected Fr. Thomas Kocherry as the chairperson. It decided to call a national convention to finalize the National Manifesto and to request the FAO to provide know-how and funds to implement the Marine Fisheries Regulation effectively in Kerala, Goa, and Tamil Nadu. It was at this meeting that the Forum got to know of the proposed international meeting of the FAO to discuss the terms for the execution of the recently ratified Law of the Sea Convention and the 200-mile EEZ. The NGO supporters informed

the Forum that the interests of the artisanal fishworkers would not receive any attention at this conference and the Forum therefore responded to an international call from fishworker organizations and NGOs to see that the artisanal fishery make itself visible at this conference.

The agitations escalated in 1984. The NFF met in January of this year and decided to finally register under the Trade Union Act. The second major struggle against monsoon trawling took place and brought occasional clashes with the police. This time in Kerala, the women leaders, Sr. Alice in Kozhikode and Sr. Philomina Marie in Thrivandapuram, went on a hunger fast, together with other male leaders. Sr. Philomina Marie announced a fast until death, which was a major media attraction and led to a debate on liberation theology. The Church started to distance itself from the struggle and marginalized radical priests, including Fr. Thomas Kocherry and José Kaleekal. One of the outcomes of this agitation was the Recommendations of the Kalavar Committee, which made detailed suggestions for limiting trawlers and outboard motors.

FIRST INTERNATIONALIZATION: THE ROME CONFERENCE AND THE FORMATION OF THE ICSF

1984 also saw the first spectacular internationalization of the fishworkers' struggle. As mentioned above, the NFF had decided to support a call for an International Conference of fishworker organizations of the artisanal sector to be held parallel with the FAO conference in Rome in 1984. If one looks into the background of how this call came about, one sees quite an astonishing amalgamation of political events and personal contacts, and sparing use made of existing international networks. Knowledge of the FAO conference had come straight from a committed individual within the FAO who alerted friends working in the artisanal sector. Another important piece of background is that of the liberation movements and popular uprisings in the Philippines, Thailand and Sri Lanka throughout the seventies. Two people from the Marianad team had not only visited people's movements throughout India at the point of their pull-out from the village in 1977-78, but had also visited the Philippines, Thailand, and Sri Lanka. This had contributed to their politicization. There was an existing interaction between the revolutionary movements in these countries and certain NGO networks, as well as contacts with the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA). Contact with movements and NGOs working with fisheries were made in this context. Other contacts with the European fisheries sector were made through committed researchers. While the FAO was conducting its conference on the Management of the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) following the ratification of the Law of the Sea Convention without the presence of the artisanal sector, 100 fishworkers and their supporters from thirty-four countries had

gathered in a parallel meeting to make their voices heard. They had to overcome tremendous barriers of language, culture, religion, and civilizational adjustments, but were movingly one in their respect for nature and their artisanal way of life. The open letter to the delegates of the FAO conference read:

You gather here under the auspices of the FAO to formulate and endorse policies which will affect the lives of millions of fishworkers. Much of this takes place without their participation. We meet to assert our rights to share the experiences of our life and struggle and to expound our perceptions of fisheries development and to build new links of solidarity and cooperation. The world over and particularly in third world countries, fishworkers do not receive a fair share of the wealth they create. They are victims of development and in response have begun to organize to demand their rights. (Herklots, 1987: 192)

This conference, coordinated by John Kurien, a committed researcher and former member of the Marianad team, for the first time changed the terminology of the discourse from fishermen to fishworker, thus making visible the reality of the vast women's participation in the sector, and making it clear that it was women's largely invisible labor that made the artisanal sector viable. Thus, sustainable policies for coastal communities, including women and children, had to be developed. This could by no means be achieved by a single-minded export orientation. At the same time, the term fishworker also linked the struggle of the fishing sector with the class struggles of other workers in the informal sector and contributed to the broader perspective of artisanal production in the agricultural and forest economy context. All this happened at a time when the illusion was created that vast fish resources were hidden in the deep sea and that these could only be exploited by joint ventures, since the artisanal sector was supposed to be unable to handle them. This bluff has been called in the meantime, and the very same FAO that did not admit the fishworkers in 1984 (as the NFF was not considered a mainstream trade union) is now lobbying for a Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries incorporating many of the positions taken by the fishworkers in 1984.¹⁰

Another important outcome of the Rome Conference was the formation of the International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF), made up of academics, activists and members of NGOs. This was brought into being out of the follow-up activities of the Rome Conference and an international conference in Trivandrum hosted by SIFFS and the Center for Development Studies in November 1986. In this workshop, international participants interacted with the local union and the coastal fishing communities and visited sites of "development" of the Indo-Norwegian Project as well. As a follow-up, a campaign against faulty Johnson outboard motors was kicked off and the building up of South-South exchange between activists

and fishing communities began to be developed alongside a feminist perspective (Cure and Garbuth, 1987). The ICSF facilitates interaction on policy and other issues that national movements find difficult to tackle on their own. The coordinating secretariat functions from Chennai, South India. The ICSF, without speaking in the name of the fishworkers, has seen to it that the artisanal fishworkers' perspective remains on the agenda of international planning on fishing. It is committed to sustaining inshore fishing and to upholding the rights of the inshore fishworkers. It has worked through workshops, research and publication and has contributed to a great deal of data creation and consciousness-raising. While maintaining global links, the priorities of the South are deeply rooted in its agenda. South-South exchange and feminist perspectives on fisheries have been implemented throughout.

ALTERNATIVE DEVELOPMENT

Ironically, while the artisanal fishworkers fought against the trawlers, they themselves contributed to the bust by going increasingly for outboard motors and destructive gear (SIFFS, 1991). This increased indebtedness and competition among the fishworkers, destroyed the traditional skills of interacting with the resources, and put the community under enormous strain to sustain some of the traditional systems of redistribution (Vijayan and Kurien, 1993). It turned out that the fishworkers had entered a deadly rat-race of mechanization simply to stay alive and to sustain the artisanal sector as a livelihood. Once in this trap, those who could survive were forced into an increasing dependence on technological inputs, which gradually resulted in a denudation of their traditional skills in favor of technology. They considered it a gain that their work became physically less demanding, but simultaneously the women's labor in the marketing became all the more arduous, since they worked under conditions of greater marginalization and had to travel longer distances, stay in markets overnight under the threat of violence, and also face violence at home. In the meantime, the question of how to sustain fish resources was not addressed (Nayak, 1993). This raised the question of whether counter-hegemonic development was at all thinkable or whether the informal sector, driven by market forces, was unavoidably sucked into the self-destructive development trend. This debate went on in social movements in different parts of the country.

During the reflection process on the ten years of activities of the PCO in Trivandrum in the summer of 1987, activists of befriended movements had been invited to represent different struggles of workers in the unorganized sector, such as the power loom workers in Belgaum, Karnataka, the adivasi mineworkers in Chattisgarh in Madhya Pradesh, and slum dwellers and construction workers in Tamil Nadu. In this workshop, the results of a series of local discussions were shared in which over 200 fishworkers had taken part.

The workshop itself focused on Economy, Energy, Entropy and Equity (John Kurien), on technological changes and the labor process and women in subsistence fishing (Nalini Nayak) and on the future of independent unions (A. J. Vijayan) (PCO Centre, 1987). The questions raised by John Kurien related to the market-driven technology trend and the related question of energy and entropy, applying the logic of the first and second laws of thermodynamics to the drastic changes experienced in the fishing economy. He argued that the governing logic of a sustainable energy flow should move from the nature process, through the production process and into the circulation process.¹¹ However, under the impact of what we would call today market fascism, the circulation process determines the production process and dictates an energy use that is incommensurate with natural energy flows. He shows that high energy use from a certain level makes equity impossible and shows how beating entropy and inequality by higher energy use (high-tech gears, boats, motors) is a self-destructive reflex that fritters away the gains of the political struggle to assert rights of the artisanal fishworkers over coastal waters. The questions raised by Nalini Nayak and A. J. Vijayan pinpointed the socio-political difficulties in the fishery sector. Nalini, aiming at the valorization of the subsistence economy and questioning patriarchy and the sexual division of labor (reinforced by the policy of the state) as feeding into destructive technocratic options, was groping for forms of organization that would put the production of life and livelihood at the center of all socio-economic processes. Vijayan explained the difficulties of an independent union under the pressure of conservative Latin Catholic and Muslim and Hindu communal forces on the one hand and the established Left on the other. The Left, while mildly supportive of the fishworkers' struggle, had always considered artisanal fisheries a dying sector and, adhering to Lenin's insight that the revolution consisted of electrification and workers councils, had never entered more deeply into ecology and energy questions. These questions of sustainable development were not only discussed in small circles of environmentalists but arose in major ways during the coastal march, "Protect Waters, Protect Life," in 1989.¹²

The Kanya Kumari March, as it was called, converging at the southern tip of the country on 1 May 1989, was a momentous event throughout the month of April, linking the NFF with large numbers of unions in the unorganized sector, with environmental organizations, and with NGOs taking a stand on alternate development. It moved down the eastern and western coasts from Calcutta and Bombay, respectively, in two core teams, accompanied by local populations and movements in each state. The slogan "Protect Water, Protect Life" pointed at the center of people's survival needs, as water had become scarce and polluted all over the country due to deforestation, mal-development in the wake of the Green Revolution, tourism, rampant chemical pollution, military bases, and nuclear plants. The march took place

in a political climate of hope because a new and mildly socialist-inclined government had come into power at the center, which showed more openness to the organizational process and to the demands of people's movements, since it had a history of people's struggles itself during the national emergency in the 1970s. At the international level, the summer of 1989 appeared to be a period of hope as well, since the democratic process in Eastern Europe was still perceived as a chance for the renewal of socialism. It was only after the fall of the Berlin Wall in November and the ensuing collapse of actually existing socialism in Eastern Europe that the full onslaught of global capitalism became visible.¹³

There was thus at the time a perception that need-based, life-centered, counter-hegemonic development could be put on the political agenda. This was also expressed in the fact that the march took on extremely sensitive issues, like the people's struggles against the missile base in Baliapal-Bhograi and the Agni missile range in Chandipur in Orissa, the Kaiga nuclear plant in Karnataka, and the planned nuclear plant in Koodankulam in Tamil Nadu. Side by side with industrial pollution and tourism, the militarized tip of the iceberg of violent development was directly targeted. It is this type of peaceful militancy, in many places led by thousands of women that provoked a violent end to the coastal march. Just three days after the massive demonstration of 3,000 people at Ithintakara (a coastal village near Koodankulam), the march was disrupted by police fire, injuring eight fishermen during the final procession in Kanya Kumari. It has been documented that the final procession, three-quarters of which consisted of women, was entirely peaceful and was disrupted by stone-throwing hooligans in connivance with the police. Despite this bitter experience the mood remained upbeat: "Breakthrough Despite Breakup" (Dietrich, 1989). Ironically, the nuclear plant in Koodankulam afterwards fell off the government's agenda for about seven years due to the disintegration of the Soviet Union. It reappeared when the Russian economy was so ruined that its government was desperate to sell arms and nuclear installations. It was clear that the NFF could not sustain the full breadth of follow-up actions from the issues raised in the Kanya Kumari march. Strengthening the artisanal sector and the reconstruction of coastal eco-systems like mangroves, struggling against government-supported intensive aquaculture in the Chilka Lake, Goa, Tamil Nadu, and Kerala, as well as supporting local struggles against pollution and holding tourism at bay, were all more than enough to be aimed at. Nevertheless, the NFF, making maximum use of the very temporarily favorable political climate, came up with an approach paper on the National Fisheries Policy for Fuller Employment and Sustainable Development in the Eighth Plan (NFF, 1990).

The early 1990s brought incisive political changes. The Congress came back into power and threw the economy open to globalization and liberalization. Internationally, capitalism had never had it so good, since it benefited

from the TINA effect ("there is no alternative"). The fishworker movement had to concentrate on fighting the impact of the global market: foreign licenses and intensive aquaculture. It saw an important result of the struggle in the creation of the Coastal Zone Regulation Notification in 1991, issued under Section 30 of the Environment Protection Act of 1986. This gave legal ground for following up on many of the demands of the coastal march. However, violation of the notification remained the order of the day. The capitalist onslaught was overwhelming. Nevertheless, the groping for the alternative continued by strengthening the feminist perspective on fisheries.

WITHOUT WOMEN IN FISHERIES NO FISH IN THE SEA

The struggle of women in fisheries went on simultaneously at local levels, within the NFF, and at international levels, through the Women in Fisheries Program of the ICSEF. The struggle, which had started in the "lifeworld" during the 1960s and which was intensified by women's marginalization in marketing, was more and more carried into the union itself and acquired not only a class perspective but also a widening ecological awareness. From the early 1980s, members of the women's movement in India had interacted with the fishworkers' movement and vice versa.¹⁴ Several workshops had been conducted, combining social analysis on structures of caste, class, patriarchy, and the state with a critique of science and technology, ecology, and the production process, and male-female relationships in the fishworkers' struggle in the local community and in the family. Growing atrocities on women in Kerala elicited a response in the mid-1980s from the earlier-created Coastal Women's Front. This women's organization was a part of the KSMTF on the one hand, but also held common celebrations of International Women's Day with the women's front of the CPI-M. From early 1988 onwards, the NFF as well as the KSMTF took time to make special efforts through seminars and discussions to heighten a grasp on the women's question and to understand feminist perspectives on development. Workshops in the NFF took place in different states until the mid-1990s; one of them, planned in special ways by NFF General Secretary Harekrishna Devnath, lasted ten full days. Of course, these interactions led to emotional exchanges and even a major walkout from a general body meeting on the part of the women. As the development paradigm itself and the sexual division of labor in the sector and in the home were all heavily weighted against women, it became extremely difficult even to safeguard women's participation in the activities of the union, both at the local and at the national level. Even where women participated they often found themselves totally controlled by the men. Women's assertion was very multi-pronged. Alternative income-generation programs were tried and women got trained in simple home nursing and catering. The Self-Employed Women's

Association (SEWA) was created in Trivandrum in 1983 and had fully taken off by 1985. It had spread to Ernakulam by 1990. This led to a debate on the membership in the fishworkers union, on whether they were members of the community and part of the struggle, "housewives only" or creating income elsewhere. It remained difficult to integrate existing women's wings into the decision-making boards of the union, and even elected women members were sometimes boycotted (Nayak, 1992: 61). Tired of local power struggles over decision-making and male-female relationships, applying one's mind to a feminist perspective on fisheries appeared as some kind of relief.

The Women in Fisheries Program of the ICSEF, coordinated by Nalini Nayak, had its first phase from 1993 to 1995 with participating organizations from the Philippines, Thailand, India, Senegal, France, Spain, and Canada, and later went into a second phase, mainly with organizations from Ghana and Brazil. The published reports of this venture spread over 350 pages, which capture some of the spirit of the national and international workshops, public hearings and generation of data. In India, Aleyamma Vijayan and a number of committed women activists from the fishworkers' movement toured the coastal villages, markets and harbor towns in Gujarat, Maharashtra, Goa, Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Orissa, and West Bengal collecting and compiling first-hand data. A public hearing on the struggles of women workers in the fish processing industry in India was held in June 1995 (ICSEF, 1996 and Dietrich, 1995) in Cochin, which for the first time made the abysmal conditions in the prawn-peeling sheds and other processing industries visible, and shined a light on the scandalous living conditions of the young women who found themselves in a virtual state of bondage, violating the Contract Labor Act and the Migrant Labor Act. The NFF intervened with the labor department to get some of this corrected.

At the international level, the program enabled the building of strong South-South links, especially between India and Senegal. It also became clear that in the Northern countries, with the increasing industrialization of fisheries, women had undergone a process of "housewifization," while the fish resources had been exploited to exhaustion. Nevertheless, women intervened as wives of fishermen and members of coastal communities and therefore had a certain openness to the perspectives of the South, where women are still entrenched in the marketing and processing of fish and sustain the local community in crucial ways. The contact with India also helped women in Senegal to transcend the preoccupation with fair fisheries agreements under the auspices of the European Union and to explore new avenues in processing, union building and the development of nurture fisheries. An international workshop in Cebu in the Philippines in June 1994 helped to create a common perspective, and a summarizing workshop in Senegal on Globalization, Gender, and Fisheries in June 1996 concluded the first phase of the program. The formation of a strong women's core group in India did

make an impact on the NFF and its different member unions who, despite clashes with such vocal women, took it upon themselves to raise women's participation in fishery-related livelihoods as an important issue. In 1999, the NFF included in their major struggle agenda the demand of the government to recognize women fishworkers as entitled to the same benefits as the men. This took the legislators by surprise in states like Orissa and West Bengal, where fishing was still considered a male domain.

Conceptually, the feminist perspective on fisheries goes along with the feminist critique of destructive development and the exposure to the patriarchal and colonial character of Western science and technology.¹⁵ It establishes a link between violent, market-driven technology and energy use and the rising levels of violence in local communities, especially against women. This position incorporates the first and second law of thermodynamics as the scientific underpinning for the spontaneous perception of the connection between "the rape of the sea and the rape of women."

The feminist perspective on fisheries valorizes women's labor in the artisanal sector and their contributions to the survival of the fishing community. It insists on the protection of subsistence production and sees all extended production only as built on subsistence production; it also denies the legitimacy of a production process that destroys the livelihood of coastal communities as well as fish resources. Women advocate nurture fisheries in the control of local communities in contrast to intensive aquaculture in private capitalist hands. To achieve a comprehensive change in fishing policies, women's participation in union building and struggles is of crucial importance.

UNION INTERNATIONALIZATION

The 1990s saw the epic struggles of the NFF in the face of the renewed onslaught of globalization. The initial international impact had come in the form of development aid and technological upgrading of the sector. The new onslaught came much more directly as a result of changing international equations. Two major issues emerged: the struggle against joint ventures and the struggle against intensive aquaculture.

The New Economic Policy (NEP) in the early 1990s promoted a heavy export-oriented type of development. By-catch from trawlers was converted into fishmeal that then served as feed for intensive aquaculture. Local fish consumption of cheap varieties became nearly extinct. The new deep-sea policy was clearly not in the interest of the Indian fishing community. The assumption that there were substantial fish resources in the deep sea that could not be accessed by Indian vessels was totally misguided. Yet the Ministry of Food Processing and Commerce, which promoted the foreign licenses, caved in to international pressures. John Kurien explains this puzzle

lucidly: since 1989, global marine fish catches had stagnated at 85 million metric tons. Distant water fishing fleets, partly developed with heavy state subsidies, had become useless unless redeployed. The Indian offer appeared to be a boon, since the EEZ had been made an open-access regime and the resources were up for grabs. There was thus a scramble for entry in order to obtain profit on an investment made. Every bait to attract foreign investment was provided: subsidized fuel, one hundred percent export for permission for trans-shipment at sea, no compulsion to dock at any Indian port, permission to use any foreign port as a base to fish in the Indian EEZ (Kurien, 1997).

It was clear at the time that the Indian fisheries sector was perfectly capable of accessing any deep-sea fish. The FAO had published a report in 1992 that identified the over-investment in the shrimp business and, subsequently, over-fishing of the target resource as the main problem of Indian fisheries (Guidicelli, 1992). The need of the hour was not further investment but resource management.

By 1993, the total marine catches were 27.2 lakh tonnes and the total catch, including inland and aquaculture, was 47.68 lakh tonnes. The proportion produced by aquaculture was on the increase. Yet there were over 1 lakh traditional vessels and about 20,000 mechanized vessels in operation, with lakhs of people being dependent on fishing for a livelihood (Kurien, 1994b). The sector was set and ready, with some minimal assistance, to harvest the deep-sea resources on its own. Through its cooperative network, the small trawling sector in Maharashtra took the lead in demanding a ban on the new fisheries policy of the Ministry of Food Processing and Commerce.

Beginning in February 1994, the NFF launched a nationwide struggle against licenses for joint ventures. It took a position that many of the species are straddling stocks that move in and out of the inshore, offshore and the deep sea at different points of their lifecycle. Harvesting the offshore would thus affect inshore harvesting. On 4 February 1994, for the first time, a total fisheries strike was declared which was a full success. With no fish on the market, the consumers too were made aware of the situation. Many of the movements involved in the coastal march supported the agitation. In May 1994, the National Action Committee against Joint Ventures was created by leaders from the artisanal and mechanized sector from all over the country, with Thomas Kocherry as its chairperson. It was led by the NFF but was comprised of all the leading trade unions in the country. In the same year, Harekrishna Debnath, the co-chairperson of the NFF, was present at the UN conference on straddling stocks and had the opportunity to make an intervention and call attention to the intrusion of foreign vessels in the Indian waters.

Another all-India fisheries strike, on 23 and 24 November 1994, prepared for multi-pronged interventions in Parliament and led to a freeze on the

issuing of new licenses. The P. Murari Committee was appointed on February 7, 1995 to review the situation. As the Murari Committee included only government representatives, the National Action Committee continued the agitation and the national convener went on a hunger strike in Porbandar in Gujarat, while mass satyagraha went on in Delhi on 2 May 1995. There was massive response via demonstrations in all the coastal states. Finally, the Minister for Food Processing and Commerce withdrew the licenses, reconstituted the Murari Committee and changed its terms of reference. Sixteen MPs belonging to different political parties were inducted into the committee, and members traveled all along the coast to hold public hearings with local people. Due to this, the Murari Committee came up with pro-people recommendations in February 1996, which, however, were stalled and then only partially implemented after yet another hunger fast. Even today, the implementation of the Murari Committee's recommendations is a major demand of the NFF. This struggle, while spectacularly successful, also created many internal conflicts in the movement, as the artisanal sector had to ally with the trawl owners, whose boats they had earlier burnt. Besides, the broad alliance with established political parties raised many questions about priorities and style of functioning.

The struggle against joint ventures elicited support in different countries from fishing communities and organizations that had also been hit by the global crisis in fisheries. The Canadian Council of Professional Fish Harvesters decided to invite fishworker organizations from other parts of the world for the Fiftieth Anniversary Celebration of the FAO with a conference on food security in Canada. This contact led to the decision to form the World Forum of Fishworkers and Fish Harvesters in New Delhi in November 1997.

The other major on-going struggle during the 1990s was the struggle against intensive aquaculture. It had started in 1991, when the Chilka Bachao Andolan had protested against the privatization of Chilka Lake in Orissa for shrimp aquaculture. By the time that intense aquaculture was promoted in India, the boom and bust phenomenon of intensive shrimp farming had already hit Taiwan, Indonesia, China and the Philippines. Government-sponsored intensive development of aquaculture farms took place on a large scale in Andhra Pradesh and coastal Tamil Nadu. As water resources and agricultural lands were ruined the impact was felt not only in the fishing community but also among farmers and agricultural laborers. This led to alliances outside the NFF with S. Jaganathan of the Gram Swaraj Movement on the lead, supported by two campaign outfits and Vandana Shiva, together with the Third World Network.

A landmark judgment of the Supreme Court in 1996 ordered the demolition of existing aquaculture farms due to the fact that they violated the Coal Zone Notification of 1991. The judgment also demanded that the GOI

should constitute an authority under the Environment Protection Act of 1986.¹⁶ This authority to protect the CRZ was to be constituted before January 15, 1997. Instead, the state governments together with several multinational companies, filed petitions in the Supreme Court to obtain a stay order. The Agriculture Ministry of the Central Government, instead of carrying out the instructions of the Supreme Court, drafted an Aquaculture Authority Bill in great haste, tabled it in the Rajya Sabha on 19 March 1997 and had it pushed through on 20 March without even making mention of the Supreme Court judgment.

After this, the NFF formed the National Action Committee Against Industrial Aquaculture (NACAIA) and organized two yatras from Porbandar and Calcutta. In the meantime, fishworkers in Kerala, especially women, also struggled for compensation after aquaculture induced the EUS disease, which caused massive losses in inland fisheries. The struggle for compensation was successful. The struggle against the introduction of the Aquaculture Authority Bill is still in full swing and has widened into a struggle against the liberalization of import policies, supported by movements and unions in the informal sector.

The broadening of the struggle nationally and internationally has taken place on many fronts. The NFF, together with the Narmada Bachao Andolan, has been one of the leading organizations to form the National Alliance of People's Movements, which actively resists destructive development by means of "Sangrash aur Nirman" ("struggle and constructive work"). The NFF has also formed units of inland fishers at Bhargi dam, one of the core areas of the Narmada struggle against big dams. The formation of the National Alliance of People's Movements has brought together environmental movements, workers in the informal sector, peasants, dalits, women, and adivasis. This has broadened class alliances between organized and unorganized labor, workers and peasants, coolie workers and small farmers, and different cultural identities (adivasis and dalits). The struggle of the Narmada Bachao Andolan against big dams has had its international dimension carried into the World Commission on Dams. The battle of Seattle against the WTO in early December 1999 was an expression of a newfound solidarity among social movements, which brought together a very wide range of working-class organizations from all over the world. Thomas Kocherry of the NFF and Sanjay M. G. representing the NAPM were major voices against the hegemonic development concept and for quitting the WTO. The struggles of workers in the informal sector, expressed in the formation of the National Center for Labor (NCL), has tried to give voice to the informal sector as a whole, while the campaign to protect street vendors also has international dimensions. The NFF had been a major component in the formation of the NCL, together with the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) from Ahmedabad. SEWA, in turn, has taken up the vendors issue locally, nationally

and internationally, and also has linked up with the fishworkers' struggle in Trivandrum, where women squeezed out of the sector have created self-employment alternatives. This shows that local, national, and international levels have constructed common perspectives in many different situations all over the country.

As we noted at the outset, the rise of the fishworkers' struggle into public consciousness through the new trade union movement has put fisheries on the map as a national and international issue. It was the class organization of the active, sea-going, artisanal fisherpeople (men and women) that overcame subcaste fragmentation and posed the question of the sustainability of fisheries and of non-destructive technologies. While modern technologies, like outboard motors, electronic devices, echo sounders, GPS, etc., have made their inroads, their effect is ambiguous. There is a large sector of fishing people who cannot afford this investment, and thus there is polarization within the sector. Besides, under an open-access system, such technologies are not viable because they deplete the sea.

In such a desperate situation, the temptation to opt out of the sector and to fall back on the identity politics offered by caste and religion is great. This is the reason why the rising climate of communalism in politics, demands for a political and educational reservation for the "matsya thozilali samudhayam" ("fishworkers' community"—in effect meaning Latin Catholics) have come to the fore. This, however, does not solve the problem of the laboring masses to whom the sea is the only fallback. To them, the community means the actual, working fishermen. At the same time, the creamy layer in the community uses the term "matsya thozilali samudhayam" to assert their rights over the resources. The fact is that the state, with its innovative policies, has systematically broken down the old community controls. The union struggle has therefore been vital in protecting the right to life and livelihood, while politics based on caste and religious community are bound to benefit only a privileged section in the community.

CASTE, CLASS AND POWER: ENTERING THE MAINSTREAM OR REDEFINING IT

While the organizational process of the fishworkers' movement in India has grown energetically, many questions remain to be faced at the local level. Some crucial questions are: who and what defines the fishing community? What is the role of caste and religion in it? How do these factors relate to the building of class-consciousness? Can patriarchy in the family, in the community and in the various technological options be broken down? Can artisanal fisheries in the wild survive?

Further, how sustainable are the gains of a social movement union that relies on constant mass mobilization much more than being answerable to

individual membership? This requires charismatic leadership patterns that may not always be conducive to democratic functioning. It also makes a clear focus on counter-hegemonic development hard to sustain.

The importance of these questions can be traced in developments at the local level. While Kerala is a state that has become renowned for a more equitable model of development in terms of health, education, and nutrition, despite relatively low levels of income, it has been pointed out (Kurien, 1994a) that, together with the adivasi community, the coastal fisherpeople have been kept out of this mainstream in terms of higher child mortality, adverse sex ratio, and less access to housing and education. John Kurien has noted as well that the sea was seen as a "common property" of the fishing community, to which the individual fisherman had "open access." Dependency on the market is also high per definition, as any surplus needs to be sold instantly and all other goods except fish have to be acquired by exchange. This has made the community more vulnerable to the adverse patterns of development when the state redefined open access to mean higher capital investment in exploitative technology. Community control over the first sale of fish, social control over export, blending traditional knowledge with appropriate modern technology, resource management, alternative income generation—all of these have to come together to help the artisanal sector to survive. How can this be achieved?

There has been a trend over the last decade throughout the world to discard class analysis and to play up cultural and religious identities. This trend was clearly visible in Eastern Europe after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, and in India it has taken the shape of building up religious nationalism and minority fundamentalism, on the one hand, and of asserting caste identities on the other (Dietrich, 1994a and 1994b). While the fishing community in India consists of Latin Catholic Christians, Muslims, and Hindus, religious divisions have not plagued the NFF. In this respect, the decision to stick to a class perspective has been proven to be viable. At the same time, caste consciousness has been asserted in local organizations, especially the PCO and the KSMTE. This found first expression during the tenth anniversary workshop in 1987, where caste was identified as one of the factors to be studied (PCO Centre, 1987: 65). A study project on caste did not bring forth any significant research results and identity was not spelt out in terms of the Mukkuvar caste as such. However, Latin Catholic vs. Syrian Catholic identity (both being caste specific) was articulated, and in the PCO as well as the local union the commitment to sustainable development has again and again given way to the craving to "enter the mainstream," irrespective of the fact that it has been mainstream development that has destroyed the resource base and the local system of redistribution in the first place. The appeal is to pursue the welfare of the "matsya thozilali samudayam." This in itself is in tune with the realization that caste, which is based on endogamy,

functions basically as an energy-capturing system (Klass, 1980). As the fishing resources have become limited, "energy capturing" takes the form of competition for the limited resource of scholarships and alternate employment. Success in this rat race alienates the elite members of the community from the mass of people who have to stick it out in the artisanal fishery for sheer survival. Voicing the concerns of the masses left behind remains the responsibility of the supporters. This is not easy, as the elite of the community alienate the supporters in the name of community politics. One of the major struggles of the artisanal fishworkers was the demand to enact legislation mandating that only active fishermen could own fishing crafts. This became a reality in the beginning of the new century, when MLAs exposed to the debate created such legislation. Paradoxically, at this point in time, the KSMTF made the demand that right to ownership should be with the community, thus, in effect, abandoning the class perspective for caste identity. It is an aggravating factor that even NGO aid funds have been channeled, during the 1990s, to favor the exploration of identity politics in contrast to class-based mass movements.

Nevertheless, it is a sign of strength that the movement has survived. The question is how counter-hegemonic development can be asserted in more effective ways. It has been shown in this chapter that both women fishworkers and women activists and supporters have been in the forefront of the struggle for alternative development. Their struggle has been weakened by the assertion of religious and caste identities. Subsuming women under such identity politics has been a strategy the world over for reasserting patriarchal controls. At the same time it is clear that the counter-hegemonic struggle for alternative development cannot be carried out by women autonomously. On the contrary, autonomous women's struggles have been quietly co-opted into mainstream development, diverting the "empowerment" derived from self-help groups and savings schemes into the policies of the World Bank and multinational corporations.

If we return to the overarching question of social emancipation, we can conclude that the building of a social movement union at local, national and international levels has definitely contributed to the emancipation of the toiling workers of the sector, men and women, and has helped drastically to review the concept of development envisaged for the sector by state and national governments and international organizations like the FAO. A case has been made for community management that is emancipatory and ecologically viable vs. the destructive industrial management based on individual and transferable quotas. This approach has also been vindicated at international levels if one takes the Canadian experience into account, where the "scientifically managed" cod fishery completely collapsed, while the community-managed inshore lobster fishery of the Maritimes survived and grew.

There is no question of romanticizing or idealizing the traditional sector. It is not ideal, as it is extremely hard and laborious work and presently caste-defined. But with the large number of people who are dependent on it, it can be viable and sustainable if people organize to manage it and defend their spaces. This is emancipatory because it forces people to find new, democratic forms of organization such as unions, cooperatives, and women's organizations at the local, national and international levels. The emancipatory quality becomes particularly visible in the central role that women play despite their social exclusion from going to sea. It is women's organizations that have put forward the conceptualization of the production of life and livelihood vs. production for profit. A crucial condition for emancipation is that it is followed through meticulously at all the different levels, from the family and the village to the unions, cooperatives and all the processes of alliance-building at the national, international, and inter-sectoral levels. Compromises along the lines of caste politics and religious identities, while giving short-term advantages, ultimately weaken the emancipatory process. Alternative development is a burning question in the agricultural sector as well, where the rights of peasant communities over the land, the water and its resources need to be defended against industrial technocratic methods and market fascism. This is why the alliance between the fishworkers' struggle and the adivasi and non-adivasi peasants of the Narmada valley is such a telling example of social emancipation. This is why the struggle of the National Alliance of People's Movements gains importance as it gradually grows all over the country.

The most crucial question seems to be how to valorize the contribution of the working class in the informal sector worldwide and to give it a unified voice. This voice has to have a feminist perspective, since most women in the Third World or the Global South are working in the informal sector. From this point of view, the experience of the NFF is encouraging as its leadership has been willing to create space for a feminist perspective on fisheries, while the women involved, despite much hardship, have not given up asserting themselves in a heavily male-dominated environment. However, this alternate perspective on the interaction with nature, energy use, subsistence production as a base for extended production, and the production of life and livelihood as a central concern has not found support from any of the mainstream trade unions. This can be explained by the fact that organized trade unionism had its origin in the very concept of industrialism, which has turned out to devastate the resource base. Organized labor has the same insensitivity to the informal sector and resource management as patriarchy has had towards women's housework and other subsistence labor. Even in Seattle, the unions of the organized sector deflected the mass struggle against the market fascism of the WTO by demanding that the WTO include the social clause. The position in India is that the social clause must be separated

from trade agreements. This need not be construed as a rift between the workers of the so-called "developed" nations and Third World nations. If the "developed" countries can afford protectionism, why not the poor nations? It seems to be difficult to comprehend internationally when workers in the formal sector defend their spaces tooth and nail and even vociferously clamor for development alternatives.

It is difficult to decide in these circumstances whether the apparent disorganization and disintegration of organized labor is only a disaster or whether the growth of the informal sector worldwide can also create new opportunities for class-consciousness and working-class organization.

The other question is whether a class-conscious women's movement, rooted in the survival concerns of the global South, can help to entrench the production of life and livelihood at the center of the production process. This requires massive participation of women in the decentralized planning process and a perspective that abandons "more of the same" in favor of a focus on the Alternative:

Notes

- 1 "Fisheries in the wild" refers to fishing as a hunting activity (capture fisheries) as distinct from aquaculture or mariculture, which result in harvesting. However, this is not the only important distinction. The artisanal fishworkers movement has conceptualized "nurture fisheries" as distinct from aquaculture. Nurture fisheries would include hunting activities that are not indiscriminate and ruthless and allow the stock to replenish, as traditional sector fisheries had always done before fisheries became an entirely market-driven activity. It would also include non-intensive aquaculture in the control of local communities (which was also part of the traditional sector). The critical problem with intensive aquaculture is the privatization of land and water resources and the environmental pollution that results from intensification. Another problem created by intensive aquaculture is the use of fishmeal as feed, which withdraws cheap fish from coastal consumption.
- "Artisanal fishing" means subsistence, traditional, or small-scale fishing, often based on family units or communities where the men go to sea and the women do the processing and marketing. Artisanal fisheries are based on small, open crafts, simple nets and lines, and simple engines (like outboard motors). However, in competition with trawlers, even artisanal fishery has contributed to the depletion of resources (Sann, 1998).
- 2 The emergence of a feminist perspective in fisheries, which will be dealt with more extensively when explaining the Women in Fisheries Project of the ICSEF, is one of the most striking phenomena in the process of counter-hegemonic globalization. Despite geographical, technological,

and social differences between global North and South, the coming together of women in the sector, despite their widespread exclusion from capture fisheries, is significant.

- 3 Regarding the critique of science and technology, the most seminal books have been Vandana Shiva's *Staying Alive* (1988) and Carolyn Merchant's *The Death of Nature* (1980). For connecting this conceptualization with caste, class, and the state, see G. Dietrich (1992) and Chhaya Datar (1995, 1998). The connection between the subordination of women's labor, environmental degradation and destructive development has been worked out by Datar (1995). The substitution of patriarchy by the conceptualization of gender in the context of the development debate is lucidly summarized in N. Kabeer (1994). The popular feminist conceptualization of patriarchy can be found in K. Bhasin (1993).
- 4 The term "subsistence production," disavowed by traditional Marxists, has been validated in a new way by Maria Mies and the feminists of the "Bielefeld School" whose conceptualizations were developed in India and Latin America (Mies, 1991; M. Mies, V. Bennholdt Thomsen and C. von Werlhof, 1980). G. Dietrich (1992) has modified some of these conceptualizations and the fishworkers movement has applied them practically.
- 5 While the term "Third World" is outdated following the collapse of actually existing socialism and the end of the Cold War, there is still a need to acknowledge that the "Third World," in the sense of non-aligned countries and also in terms of "mixed economy" development policies, historically carried the implication of a "Third Way." Uplift to the levels of Western capitalism was not the primary agenda. This created some free spaces, politically, which allowed people's movements to struggle for development alternatives. The term is therefore not obsolete, as Mark T. Berger (1994) has pointed out. The "Third World" or the Global South faces the problems of a vast informal workforce and an onslaught on the resource base. Not addressing the survival problems of workers in the unorganized sector and the impact of environmental degradation is one of the sources of instability in South Asia (Gordon, 1993).
- 6 This was pointed out in the lectures of the section on Social Movements and Collective Action at the Sociology Congress of the IIS in Tel Aviv in June 1999, which had the title "Multiple Modernities" (Dietrich *et al.*, 2000).
- 7 A self-reflection of the founding group of this organization can be found in PCO Centre (1975). Other parts of this history can be found in Nalini Nayak (1992), which refers to other experiences of women in the fishworkers movement. A third document building on this history is PCO Centre (1987). The PCO Centre, an NGO for support of struggles of the fishing community, was founded in 1977, partly by the members of the team working in Marianad.

- 8 Progressive Catholic Social Thinking and Marxist Analysis were inculcated by the Indian Social Institute in Bangalore in the early 1970s. In 1973, the First Asian Seminar on Religion and Development was held at the NBCLC in Bangalore by François Houtart and Geneviève Lemerminier. This promoted Social Analysis among activists in South India. Since the mid-1980s, the Center for Social Analysis, in Madurai, has played an important role in ideological formation and in building links with movements.
- 9 This is based on Nayak (1990).
- 10 See the FAO Code of Conduct.
- 11 Kurien has pioneered making the insights on entropy applicable in fisheries (PCO Centre, 1987: 26ff). The first and second laws of thermodynamics can be summarized as follows: the total energy of the universe is constant and the total entropy (energy going from usable to disordered, unusable state) is constantly increasing. Energy cannot be created or destroyed, it can only be transformed. Entropy is a measure of the amount of energy no longer capable of conversion into work. For a popularizing exposé of entropy and development, see J. Rifkin (1980).
- 12 The march was documented by Aparna Sider and published by the NFF in October 1989. Apart from upholding the demands of the NFF to ban purse seining in territorial waters, night-trawling, and all mechanized fishing during the monsoon, the march wanted to create an awareness of water as a survival issue, build networks among environmental movements, urge the government to develop sustainable water utilization policies and democratize management agencies, assess and counteract environmental damage, revive traditional water conservation practices, and regenerate fishing technologies. On the police firing at the end of this completely peaceful mass-mobilization event, see G. Dietrich (1989).
- 13 In India, the significance of 10 November 1989 was the stopping of the march on Ayodhya, led by Hindu communal forces to destroy the Babri Masjid. Though the central government under V. P. Singh could have prevented this national outrage, it still took place on 9 December 1992. The fall of the Berlin wall on November 10, 1989, was in a way relativized by the temporary victory of secularism and sanity regarding the internal Indian situation.
- 14 Some of these were Chhaya Datar, Nandita Gandhi, Vibhuti Patel, Ilina Sen, and Gabriele Dietrich. Nearly all of them had a history of involvement with working-class organizations but were simultaneously part of the autonomous women's movement, which grew by leaps and bounds in the early eighties.
- 15 This position has been worked out first by Vandana Shiva (1988), who also bases herself on M. Mies (1991). The central distinction that these authors hold in common may lie in the insight that a biologicistic view

of women as "natural ecologists" needs to be avoided. Likewise, drawing heavily on the Hindu philosophical/religious concepts of Shakti (V. Shiva) becomes problematic in a climate of increasing communalization of politics. It is women's *social* roles as nurturers, often enforced by violence, that have helped communities to survive. Under globalization and the mechanization of fisheries, this role comes under severe strain (Ram, 1991). The point is to put the social responsibility for the nurturing of life and livelihood at the center of the economic restructuring of society (Dietrich, 1992).

- 16 Judgment in the Supreme Court of India, Civil Original Jurisdiction, Write Petition (Civil) No. 561 of 1994, S. Jaganath, Petitioner Versus Union of India & Ors, Respondents.

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