CHAPTER IV

SOCIO-ECONOMIC SITUATION
OF TRADITIONAL FISHWORKERS IN KERALA

Since the thesis is on the fishworkers' movement in Kerala, it is important to know the background of the fishworkers and the fisheries in Kerala to situate the movement in its proper perspective. The fisheries economy has two sectors—traditional and mechanised. Since the study is concentrating on the traditional fishworkers, only the traditional sector is dealt with in this chapter. The mechanised sector will be treated in the next chapter. The traditional sector itself has two areas—the marine and the inland. Though most of what is explained here is applicable to fishworkers of both areas, a separate section on inland fishworkers is also given at the end. Thus the chapter covers the fisheries in Kerala, the economic, socio-religious, political, and cultural aspects of both the marine and the inland fishworkers of Kerala.

I. The Fisheries in Kerala—An Overview

Out of the 6000 kilometer sea coast of India, Kerala has a coastline of 589.5 kilometer which is 10% of India's
coast. (Department of Fisheries, Kerala, 1990) Kerala plays a significant role in the marine economy of India. The western coast of India is very rich in marine wealth with about three-fourth of the fish resources in the country while the eastern coast has only one-fourth. The high rate of rainfall and the innumerable rivers make the Kerala coast particularly fertile for fish. (Platteau 1985)

Kerala has an extensive fishing ground of 35,941 square kilometers up to 200 meters depth within the continental shelf. The fishing ground is not uniform along the coast of Kerala. The continental shelf is wide, shallow and sandy in the north Kerala, while it is narrow, rocky and steep in the south. The sea in the north is comparatively calm while it is rough in the south. These geographical differences have given rise to varieties of fish and different fishing implements in the Kerala coast.

One speciality of the Kerala coast is mudbanks, known in Malayalam as 'chakara'. It is the formation of clay and organic matters in the coastal waters often soon after the monsoon, with the result of a calm sea in the area and of good harvest of fish. Certain districts like Kozhikode and Alapuzhha are famous for mudbanks and their associated harvest of fish. (Platteau 1985)
The average annual fish landing in Kerala was the highest in India in 1970's accounting for 36.4% of the total landing in the country. The average share of exports of fish products from Kerala was 60.2% of the total marine export of India in the same period. (Government of Kerala 1977) The average fishing area per fisherman of Kerala is the lowest with ten hectares as against thirty seven per fisherman in India. It means that the fishing pressure on the Kerala coast is very high compared to that of other states. The main varieties of fish harvested in Kerala are oil sardines, mackerel, anchovies, catfish, ribbonfish, tuna, shark and prawns. (Dietrich 1989)

The importance of fisheries sector for Kerala can be seen from the fact that it is the source of livelihood for fishworkers and of rich protein for the people of the state. Fish constitutes 70% of the per capita annual protein intake in the state. The per capita annual consumption of fish in Kerala was 14.5 kilogramme in 1984, which was four times the national average. It provides 2% of the total income of the state and one-fourth of its foreign exchange. (Government of Kerala 1987,)
### Table No.2

#### Districtwise distribution of Marine Fishermen in Kerala in 1985-86

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>No. of households</th>
<th>Total No. of fishermen</th>
<th>No. of active fishermen</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Trivandrum</td>
<td>21731</td>
<td>144695</td>
<td>29337</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Kollam</td>
<td>11053</td>
<td>81222</td>
<td>14422</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Alapuzha</td>
<td>14680</td>
<td>96795</td>
<td>19818</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Ernakulam</td>
<td>10456</td>
<td>62856</td>
<td>14116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Thrissur</td>
<td>7552</td>
<td>60411</td>
<td>10195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Malaparam</td>
<td>9012</td>
<td>65426</td>
<td>12166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Kozhikode</td>
<td>11704</td>
<td>85809</td>
<td>15800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Kannur</td>
<td>6975</td>
<td>45575</td>
<td>19416</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Kasargode</td>
<td>5791</td>
<td>37571</td>
<td>7818</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>98954</strong></td>
<td><strong>680360</strong></td>
<td><strong>143088</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Estimated

(Government of Kerala, Kerala Fisheries - an Overview, 1987:40)

Fishworkers are an important segment of the population of the state. Kerala has the eighth position for the population of fishworkers among the fourteen coastal states. In 1985 there were 8.8 lakhs fishworkers who formed 3.2% of the total population in Kerala. The marine fishworkers constituted 6.8 lakhs (77%) and inland fishworkers 2.0 lakhs (23%). There were 1,43000 active sea-going fishermen in 1985, who constituted 2% of the total labour force in Kerala. (Government of Kerala, Directorate of fisheries, 1991)
Kerala was known for its fisheries already from the first century. The technology and skills of the fishworkers were much advanced with different crafts and gears suited for diverse species of fish and marine terrain. So also was proverbial their vast knowledge of the ocean, its winds and currents based on astronomy and meteorology. "The greatest asset of the fishermen of Kerala is their accumulated knowledge about fish, fish habits, waves, currents and stars which they have through a tradition of learning by doing, handed down from generation to generation." (Kurien 1985:3)

The fishing economy consists of three operations—harvesting, processing and marketing of fish. The analysis includes all the three aspects briefly.

1. Harvesting of Fish.

Harvesting or catching of fish constitutes 66% of the work force in the fisheries sector. Harvesting is related to the means of production and productive relations of those who are involved in fishing. The means of production are the crafts like boats and canoes, and gears like nets and hooks used to trap fish. The productive relation is concerned with relations of owners and workers in fishing operations. In the traditional fisheries of Kerala there are basically two types of ownership-individual and collective.
The individual ownership is found mostly in 'catamaram' which is a small canoe made of three separate logs used in south Kerala, in 'hook and line' and in 'canoe and net' in north Kerala. The ownership could be of an individual or a family. The distribution of earnings is done in the form of 'share' of the produce as is the case with all types of ownership in the traditional fishing operation. Unlike in agriculture and industry there is no wage system in this sector. The produce, the fish catch, is shared by all who work in a fishing unit. The number of crew can vary from one to twenty. The 'catamaram' with only one or two crew operate mostly as a family unit. In the 'canoe and net' with more crew, the total catch of fish is divided equally among the crew with one extra share for the owner. If the owner is also a worker he gets two shares including his share as a crew member. In the 'hook and line' fishing, the owner gets two shares, one for the craft and the other for the 'hook and line' which is costlier than nets. Other systems of sharing existed in different parts of Kerala depending on the size of the unit.

The collective ownership which exists mainly in large fishing units in central Kerala consists of several persons jointly owning a craft and its gears. The number can vary from five to fifty depending on the size of the craft. The members can have equal or different types of contribution to the total cost of the fishing equipments. The 'share' of the catch to
each depends on the proportion of contribution one has made. The membership in the collective ownership is restricted mostly to the kins of the 'headman' who is the leader of the unit, though, in principle, anybody can take a share in the unit. Hired workers are also employed in the unit either as contract or casual labourers. The contract workers agree to work for a period of time, and the unit gives advance payment and maintenance expense for his family during off-seasons. Violations of terms of agreement is punishable by the fishworkers' panchayat.

The collective unit is managed by the headman, who would be one joint owner with the largest share. He may or may not be part of the crew. The distribution of fish catch is done among members after deducting the capital expenses like cost on the operation of the unit, refreshment charge for the crew, payment to the rituals and charity to the widows, orphans and physically handicapped. Every member of the crew is entitled to have a small quantity of fish for home consumption. If the catch is below certain minimum, it is distributed among the crew. (Ibrahim 1986)

Certain observations could be made about the ownership pattern among the traditional fishworkers. Firstly, about 27% of the fishworkers' households do not own fishing equipment and so are employees or 'coolies'. (Nayak 1993) Secondly, there
can be six possible combinations in the ownership pattern in the traditional fisheries:

1. Individual ownership  
   owner worker  
   Non- owner partner

2. Collective ownership  
   owners workers  
   Non-owners partners

3. Individual ownership  
   Owner worker  
   Non- owners labourers

4. Collective ownership  
   Owner workers  
   Non-owners labourers

5. Individual ownership  
   Owner non-worker  
   Non-owners labourers

6. Collective ownership  
   Owners non-workers  
   Non-owners labourers

(Kurien 1978:35)

Thirdly, unlike in agriculture and industry, the ownership of means of production does not include sea which is a common property shared by all.

2. Processing of Fish

The second stage after harvesting of fish is processing which involves unloading, sorting, icing, curing and drying of fish and peeling of prawns. The processing which accounts for 7% of the workforce is dominated by women. There is no proper salary and service conditions for labourers in this sector. So there is a lot of exploitation especially of women and children in the peeling shed units in Kerala as well as in other states like Gujarat and Orissa. (Kurien 1985)
3. Marketing of Fish

The third stage before fish reaches the consumer is marketing which is, "the movement of fish from the sphere of production to that of consumption." (Beacon group 1979:17) It involves a quarter of the workforce in the fisheries sector. It is largely done by men except in a few southern districts of Kerala, where women as headload fish vendors sell fish to the local people.

Fish could be sold in the internal and external market. Internal market is for consumers in the state or the country, while the external market is for other countries through export. In olden times when transport facilities were meagre, marketing of fish to interior areas of Kerala was difficult and time consuming. So fish, being a perishable good, had to be preserved. Curing of fish by salting or drying was used to preserve fish before it was transported. Later ice and freezing plants were used to take fresh fish to distant markets. External market for fish in olden times was in countries like Burma and Sri Lanka to which dry fish was exported from Kerala. After the introduction of mechanisation, fish and prawns were exported to Japan and the United States of America.

As the internal and external market for fish developed, a new class of merchants from outside the fishing community emerged. They functioned as middlemen between the producers and
consumers. Slowly they started to perform the role of financiers to the producers. In order to guarantee regular supply of fish the merchants advanced money to the fishworkers to buy fishing crafts and implements. The credit-starved fishworkers were forced to borrow the money for the improved crafts and gears. Gradually the merchants controlled the price of fish and the market itself with a lion’s share of profit for themselves. The actual fishworkers, the producers, were thus deprived of the benefit of improved techniques and increased market. “Data calculated for one year (1975) in Kerala show that for every Rs.100/ worth of fish bought by consumers in Kerala only Rs.39/ reaches the traditional fishermen. The substantial amount (Rs.54/) goes to the big and small merchants. Moreover as the fish marketing is a breeding ground for middlemen, who live off both the fishermen and the merchants on the sea shore and the wholesale merchants and the consumers at the other end of the chain, they take this share out of these two sum and cut down the payment to the fishermen. (Kurien quot. Beacon group 1978: 18)

Gradually some of the merchants became exclusively money lenders with or without fish trade. Thus the middlemen emerged as a new class who became a source of exploitation for traditional fishworkers. In central Kerala the middlemen were called ‘Tharakans’ and in north Kerala ‘Kuttikaran.’ (Ibrahim 1986)
The exploitation of fishworkers by middlemen was at various levels. First of all fishermen were forced to sell fish only to the middlemen to whom they were indebted and thus they lost their bargaining power. Naturally the middlemen used to control the price to their advantage. Secondly, the interest on loan got accumulated so that the fishworkers were able to pay back only part of the interest leaving the capital intact. Unable to pay back the capital, they depended on the middlemen for generations as a debtor. Slowly it developed into a relationship of bonded labour in which the fishworkers had their financial dealings only with the middlemen. It also led to social and political dependence.

One consequence of middlemen was the heavy indebtedness which became a common feature of all fishing communities in Kerala. "The incidence of indebtedness is considerable in all the villages." (Platteeau 1985: 375) A study conducted in 1993 reveals that in spite of mechanisation in fishing there is an increase in the indebtedness of the traditional fishworkers. "There is no real change in the borrowing patterns of the fisherfolk despite access to new institutional sources such as banks. The local money-lenders still play an important part." (Nayak 1993: 11) "Consequently the fishermen are not only permanently indebted to the middlemen but also are subjected to heavy exploitation." (Government of Kerala, Fisheries 1978:9)
4. Economic Problems of the Traditional Fishworkers

The economic standard of the traditional fishworkers in Kerala remained very low because of the above reasons. "Socially and economically they belong to one of the most depressed classes... The fishermen particularly belonging to the traditional sector, live in utter penury." (Government of Kerala, Fisheries 1970:9) Their annual income and land ownership, and housing facilities were very low.

Table No.3

The Annual Household Income of the Fishermen in Kerala in 1979

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Annual income class</th>
<th>Percentage of households in the income group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Below</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rs.500</td>
<td>11.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rs.501-1000</td>
<td>38.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rs.1001-2000</td>
<td>39.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rs.2001-3000</td>
<td>7.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rs.3000</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Government of Kerala, Fisheries Census, 1982:12)

The table shows that 50% of the households earn less than Rs.1000/. The households having annual income of more than Rs.3000/ are only 3.1%. This is an indication of the acute poverty of these people who work almost sixteen hours a day.
The per capita annual income of fishworkers in 1985 was Rs. 991/ while that of the general population in the same year was Rs. 2196/). (Government of Kerala, Fisheries, 1987:11)

Unemployment among fishworkers is a major problem. A large section of women were engaged in fish sale, processing and net making. But the employment in these areas is decreasing with increased mechanisation of the fisheries. The employment opportunities for menfolk also are getting reduced with mounting pressure on the existing area and resources in the sea. Fishworkers are not educated enough for other jobs. Hence no diversification of occupation from fisheries to other sectors takes place as it happens among all other sections of population in Kerala.

Housing is another serious problem of the fishworkers in Kerala. "It is a well known fact that the housing conditions of the fishermen are extremely poor. Most of them live in thatched huts submitting their fate to rain and storm." (Government of Kerala, Fisheries, 1982:8) Fifty six per cent of marine households and 48% of the inland fishworkers live in huts while the rest in semi- 'pucca' pucca houses. (Governement of Kerala, Fisheries, 1990) Lack of land for housing is a major problem.
Table No.4.

Distribution of house sites among fishworkers’ households in Kerala (year 1979)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Size class of land owned (in cents)</th>
<th>Percentage of families</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 - 5</td>
<td>38.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 - 10</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 - 25</td>
<td>17.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 - 50</td>
<td>7.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51 - 100</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above one acre</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Government of Kerala, Fisheries census, 1982:8)

As the table shows 71% of the households have only ten cent of land. A large number of fishworkers (15%) do not have land of their own. They either live in rented house or Government land mostly on the sea shore.

Connected with housing is the problem of sanitation and electricity. "Only a few houses have any latrine facilities." (Government of Kerala, Fisheries, 1982:9) Of the 1.2 lakhs households 6064 only have latrines. For the rest open seashore is the place for toilet. It has special problem for women especially in urban areas. Nearly 90% of the households do not have electricity connection. Drinking water is not available for 67% of the families. (ibid.)
III. Socio-Religious Life of the Fishworkers in Kerala

The social organisation of fishworkers’ community in Kerala differs with each religious group, though there are similarities. Fishworkers in Kerala belong to three religious groups—the Hindus, Muslims and Christians. The Hindus constitute 51%, the Christians 23% and the Muslims 21% of the total population of fishworkers. Each religious community has distinct social set-up and stratification, and mostly live in separate places. So there is need for treating the social organisation of each religious group.

1. The Hindu Fishing Community.

The Hindu fishworkers are mostly found in central and northern Kerala. They belonged to the cast groups of 'arayans', 'velan', 'mukkuvas' and 'marakkans' which were considered 'polluting caste' groups and so had a low social status. The Christian and Muslim fishworkers were converts from these Hindu castes. These castes were later grouped together under the name of 'Dheeveras' to get the benefit of reservation of the backward castes. Most of them worship ‘Bhagavati’ or ‘Kali’ near a totem tree. (Abraham 1993)

The Dheeveras have a patrilineal social set up and are more homogeneous than Christian fishworkers who have class distinctions. Though there is a village chief who functions as a headman, it is the 'Karayogam', the village committee, which
makes decisions concerning the village. The committee consists of legislative and executive councils composed of village elders who are elected or nominated by the people. They are democratic and autonomous bodies of the village which preserve the culture and official records of the village. Due to political differentiation the functions of 'Karayogam' are getting reduced to the village festivals. Women are not members of these village committees, though they are allowed to take part in their meeting.

Compared to Christian fishworkers, the Hindus are less daring and innovative, though they are a peace loving people. They have less social mobility than their Christian counterparts due to the impact of the caste system.

2. The Christian Fishing Community

The Christian fishworkers are concentrated in the southern and central parts of Kerala. They belong to the Latin Catholic Church. The Catholic fishworkers are converts mostly from 'Mukkuva' caste which had fishing as their main occupation. So they are at the bottom of the occupational and caste ladder.

The church is the central institution around which the social organisation and community identity of the Christian fisherfolk are built. The priest is the leader of the village not only for religious matters but also for socio-economic concerns. In olden times the priests used to give instruction
about which party the fishworkers should vote for. The fishworkers contribute 5% of their daily fish catch to the church. The massive churches along the coast are built and maintained by this income. The contribution which is called 'Kuthaka' in Malayalam is collected generally by a merchant who takes it by auction for a period of time with a commission. He wields a lot of economic and political power in the community.

Though the Latin and Syian Christians are in the forefront of education and health services in Kerala, the Catholic fisherfolk have not benefited from these efforts. Earning wealth through hard work is a value and source of status for the fishing community. Though Catholic fishworkers are poor they are adventurous, aggressive and creative compared to those in other religious communities. Drinking habit is very common among the Catholic fishworkers.

3. The Muslim Fishing Community

The Muslim fishworkers live mostly in the northern districts of Kerala. Like Christian fishworkers they have a strong organisational set up with social cohesion and class differentiation. Though the Muslims are a trading community, the fisherfolk are considered low in their socio-economic status.

The community is built around the mosque, and its council elected by the people decides on ethical matters of the community. The imams who conduct prayers have an important
place among the Muslims. Besides the mosque councils, there are the 'madrasa' committees which are in charge of the schools for religious instructions, and councils of elders which take decisions about village affairs including the fishing operations. The members of both these bodies are elected by the fishworkers who maintain the mosque and the 'madrasa' by their regular contributions.

The Muslim fishing community is patriarchal with joint family system which is getting disintegrated in recent years. Submission to authority is expected of all members. Unlike Christian and Hindu fishermen, the Muslim counterpart do not take liquor which is forbidden by their religion. The Muslim fishermen in general do not show much dynamism and innovative spirit in their occupation.

(Dietrich 1989)


In spite of differences there are many similarities in the social life of fishworkers of the three religious communities. They are:

a. The pattern of living for all fishworkers is similar. Life in the villages is centred around the fishing seasons which determine the rhythm of the fishworkers' life, the fish they catch and the technology they use. (Velacherry 1982) Quarrels regularly occur in the fishing communities especially among
Catholic fisherfolk. Communal clashes occasionally flare up for silly reasons resulting in death and destruction of property.

b. Fishworkers in general are deeply religious-minded. They fully depend on 'Kadalamma', the mother-sea who provides their livelihood and protects them. They know her with all her varying moods as no other children know their mother. Their lives have been inextricably interwoven with her benevolence or fury." (Murickan 1987:1) The deep attachment of fishworkers to the sea is expressed in their religious faith. The uncertainty and risk in their work make them appease nature with various religious ceremonies, and even superstitious practices. They spend money generously on religious celebrations especially those connected with birth, death and marriage. Such religious practices form the basis of their social matrix. (Dietrich 1989) "Religion and religious festivals continue to play an important cohesive role, subsuming even an under-current of dissent." (Nayak 1993:iv)

c. Though a sizable section of women in fishing communities has an active role in the economic life and all of them bear the burden of the household work, their role in social life is minimal. They do not share the decision making process of the village, religious bodies and in many cases even of the families. Women are supposed to be loving, docile and faithful. Their life in all religious groups is of hardship and drudgery. (Houtart 1988, Kurien 1985)
IV. Political Life of the Fishing community

Fishworkers were a marginalised group in the political life of Kerala. They were mere votebanks of the political parties. But none of them did anything substantial to improve the lot of the fishworkers. "Despite the fact that the fishing communities have been consistently faithful to their respective political parties very little has been done for them." (Houtart 1988:10)

The researcher in his experience of working with the fishworkers observed a traditional political structure among the fisherfolk of north Kerala known in Malayalam as 'Kadakody' meaning marine court. It worked as a local regulatory authority or a panchayat which enforced norms about fishing and resolved disputes about it among the fishworkers. The authority was based either on one religious community or on the representative body of both the Hindus and Muslims. With the political consciousness, this traditional institution is dysfunctional except at Quilandy in Kozhikode district, where it is still functioning nominally.

The level of political consciousness is very low among the fishworkers while it is very high among the general public of Kerala. According to a study, the fishworkers are aware of the fish resources and its destruction by mechanised trawling. But those who actively participate in political affairs are still a small minority. (Nayak 1993)
V. Cultural Life of the Traditional Fisherfolk

The cultural life of the fishworkers is closely related to their religious belief and practices which have already been explained. "Religion has been the most important cultural channel for the fishworkers." (Houtart 1988:74) The belief in a God who protects human being and intervenes in their daily life, and their closeness to the mother sea are expressed in various cultural symbols.

Culturally fishworkers' community is very much different from other sections of the society in Kerala. One reason is their distinct mode of production. "Today the fishermen in Kerala are still marginalised and isolated by the economic system; for, if land can become a commodity, the sea cannot." (Houtart 1988:71)

Mechanisation and modern education have been the principal means of socio-cultural change in other communities in Kerala. But the fishing community has not experienced this change because mechanisation has not radically affected the mode of production of the traditional fishworkers, and modern education has not touched them at all. The educational standard of fishworkers is very low, with highest rate of illiteracy among them after the tribals in Kerala. Even the small minority who has education are not able to climb the socio-economic ladder as it happened in other sections due to lack of diversification of occupation. No wonder culturally and
VI. The Socio-economic Background of the Inland Fishworkers in Kerala

As already mentioned, there are marine and inland fishworkers in Kerala. The marine sector has already been dealt with. The inland sector is being dealt with briefly in this section.

The inland fishworkers are defined as, "those workers who earn their livelihood by catching fish or shell fish in inland waters or sell fish on cycle or by headload." (leaflet, Malayalam, on two-day seminar on inland sector 1983:5)

About two lakh people belonging to 33,000 households work in this sector. There are 96,000 actual fishermen and 3000 women fish vendors. They live in 141 fishing villages spread out in thirteen districts of the state. Ernakulam and Alapuzha have the highest number of inland fishworkers. (Kaleekal edit. Mal. 1991)

Kerala has 44 rivers which are life source not only for agriculture but also for fishworkers. The backwaters of Kerala, fresh water lakes, ponds and dams are other sources of inland fisheries.

The fish production of inland sector in 1986 was 28,959 tons which was 12% of the total fish catch in Kerala and 3% of

educationally the traditional fishworkers have remained at a very low position in the society.
inland fish production in India. (Sebastian, Kaleekal, edit. 1991)
It is interesting to know that the marine and inland waters are closely related. The inland waters deposit in the sea a lot of bio-mateirals which provide food and habitat for marine fish. Besides, inland waters are nurseries for most varieties of marine prawns. The prawns lay their eggs in the inshore waters of the sea. When they are hatchd out, the young ones move out into the coastal lakes and return to the sea after they have grown to their maturity. The inland waters are also used for fish culture, though it has not developed as much in Kerala as in other states like West Bengal and Andhra Pradesh.

There are three ways of harvesting fish in inland waters. Catching of fish by hands, poisoning or draining water without using any instruments. Secondly, catching fish or prawn by collecting their seedlings in enclosed inland waters during high tides and harvesting them once they are grown. The process is called in Malayalam 'Chemmeenkettu'. The third method is fishing with different crafts and nets. There could be nets which are fixed in one place like 'china nets' indicating its origin from China, and 'Kuttivala', stake nets blocking river mouths to catch the fish moving with the currents. Then there could be different types of crafts and nets depending on the seasons and nature of water and of fish. (Kaleekal edit. 1991)

Problems of Inland Fisheries
There are many problems faced by the inland fishworkers. Firstly, people who are not fishermen are entering and capturing
the sector for profit-oriented business. The traditional fishworkers are being pushed out of the sector. Secondly, the area of inland waters is decreasing year by year. It has already decreased by 43% in Kerala due to reclamation and soil erosion from forests. Thirdly, depletion of fish resources is creating scarcity of fish in inland waters. The reasons are overfishing, destructive fishing methods, pollution of inland waters by industries, construction of dams and bunds.

Because of these reasons the inland fishworkers are facing serious crisis. They are not able to make a living out of their traditional occupation. Neither are they equipped to switch over to other occupations. (Kaleekal edit. 1991)

The socio-economic and cultural life of inland fishworkers is very much similar to that of marine fishworkers. In the economic sphere the means of production like crafts and gears are owned by individuals and groups. The produce is given in 'shares' to the crew as in marine fishing units. The marketing is done in some places by women fish vendors, but mostly by merchants and traders from outside. They also advance loans to fishworkers to purchase fishing equipments. So there is the problem of middlemen and indebtedness. The economic life of inland fishworkers is of low standard. Per capita income is very low like that of marine fishworkers. Most of them have 'kacha' houses. About 48.4% live in huts while 51.6% in some semi-'pucca' pucca houses.
Conclusion

The fisheries sector plays a significant role in the socio-economic life of Kerala and its people. It provides rich protein to the vast majority of the people and sustains the fishworkers by providing for them employment. It is a major source of income and foreign exchange for the state. The traditional fishworkers are the backbone of Kerala fisheries. Yet paradoxically they have not got any benefit from this sector. They are the most backward section of the population after the tribals in the state. Economically, socially and politically they are at the bottom position. Most of them are living below poverty line. They have no influence on the government or political parties who have ignored them. They are treated as low and even 'impure' in social life.

The traditional fishworkers in Kerala are thus socially marginalised, and geographically isolated and pushed to the outskirts of the state's sea shore. In short, they do not have any share in the economic and political life of the state. In this sense, they are truly the 'subaltern' class in Kerala. When most sections of the people of Kerala got organised and politicised the fishworkers have remained one of the most unorganised groups in the state. It is in this socio-political background that the fishworkers' movement in Kerala emerged as a beacon of hope for this marginalised people.