I. Change in the Organisational Structure of KSMTF

An important change took place in the organisational structure of KSMTF in 1987. Kerala Swathantra Malsya Thozhilali Federation, as mentioned earlier, was a federation of independent district units. So it had a totally federal character. In 1987 it was converted into a unitary structure with all the district units becoming organisational units of the state level organisation. This significant structural change took place in the light of its experience of two long state level agitations.

There were mainly two reasons for this organisational change. It was found to be difficult to formulate a common ideology for KSMTF as all its units were legally and organisationally independent. Since a clear ideology was a must for a movement KSMTF could not achieve it with a loose federal system. Secondly, as a state-level organisation KSMTF had to be a coherent organisation for its members and for outsiders. Since the units tended to function as small kingdoms without a broad outlook for the state level organisation and its needs, KSMTF had difficulties to relate itself to the government and other organisations. (Vijayan, manuscript 1987)
In the light of these problems KSMTF had wide consultation with all its members on the issue and it introduced a unitary system first on an experimental basis for one year, and then made it permanent in 1988. Based on the unitary system all the registered district unions ceased to be separate entities and names legally and organisationally. Instead they became district units of the Kerala Swathantra Malsya Thozhhlali Federation. Fishworkers would be taking membership in KSMTF and not in the district unions as they did earlier. But at the same time the district units were given ample freedom to take local issues relevant to the fishermen and function on their own at the district level. Bylaws were amended for the purpose, new memberships were given and new office-bearers were elected. (KSMTF annual report of 1987-'88)

From the point of view of a social movement, this structural change was a process of growth for KSMTF. Organisationaly it grew from a local to a state level organisation. It was thus getting a macro dimension. At the district level some leaders were charismatic in nature. But at state level all these leaders were forced to function as a collective leadership. Thus the change helped KSMTF to grow into an ideological and democratic movement.

To facilitate the functioning of KSMTF in a unitary system with further ideological coherence KSMTF organised many training programmes in 1987. Five two-day seminars were
conducted for fishworkers on various themes like the growth of working class movement, problems of the fisheries, crisis in fisheries sector and policy formation, accounting and bookkeeping, the problems of inland fisheries, and marine fisheries regulation act and its implementation. Seven representatives of KSMTF participated in a three day national workshop organised by NFF in Bangalore on 'the problems of fishermen in India and planning of demands and agitations.'

II. Major Events of the Movement in 1988

The history of fishworkers' movement in 1988 was marked by a partial ban on monsoon trawling by the government, a long standing demand of KSMTF, and the first state convention of KSMTF. After the organisation was made a unitary model, it was felt that a state level convention would foster fellow feeling and comradeship among the fishworkers as participants of one movement. It would also be a public show of strength in preparation for the agitations ahead for KSMTF.

1. State Convention of KSMTF

The state executive committee of KSMTF decided to have a two day convention on 16-17th of April, 1988 in Kollam. On 16th evening the convention started with a demonstration of thousands of fishworkers through the streets of Kollam city carrying blue flags, long oars, and cultural floats, and singing musical slogans. Leading newspapers gave wide coverage on the
event. "KSMTF organised a mammoth demonstration to give a start to its state convention." (Malayala Manorma 24-4-1988) "It was an impressive rally with thousands of fishworkers including women and children." (Kerala Kaumudi 24-4-1988) The demonstration ended with a public meeting which was addressed by representatives of other fishermen unions apart from the leaders of KSMTF.

On the second day of the convention there was a conference for the representatives of KSMTF, which was inaugurated by Mr. Mathani Saldana, president of the Goa fishermen union. Two papers, one on 'our trade union work, its style, goals and limitations' and the other on 'Our role in fishermen’s cooperative societies' were presented. Based on the papers and discussion the convention passed a declaration on the problems of the fishermen, and the strategies envisaged by KSMTF for the forthcoming agitation. The last agenda of the convention was the election of the state office bearers of KSMTF by the general council. A twenty member state executive committee was elected with Mr. Lal Koilparambil as the state president, Mr. A.J.Vijayan as general secretary, Mr. Abdul Rasik as vice-president, Mr. J.Jerome and Mrs. Mercy Alexander as secretaries. (KSMTF annual report 1988-'90) The convention was considered a great success. "Being the first in the history of our movement, the state convention and its show of strength...gave a boost to the fishermen and their leaders." (ibid.)
2. Trawling Ban Agitation of 1988

After the state convention, KSMTF was in a much better position for an agitation on the issue of a ban on monsoon trawling. So the state executive committee chalked out a strategy of two stages— one in the districts from 1st to 15th of June and the other at state level with an indefinite fast in Trivandrum from 20th of June. An action council with Mr. Lal Koilparambil as convenor was constituted.

The tactics of the first stage consisted of the observance of a black day, route march and mass fast. A black day was observed in the seven districts with badges and black flags on the boats and buildings. Route marches of up to 25 fishermen lasting for three days covering the whole district were conducted in the districts. The march ended with demonstrations and public meetings. There was mass fast for a day, in which about 700 fishworkers participated in all the districts.

When the first stage of agitation did not bring any response from the government Fr. Thomas Kocherry, a leader of KSMTF, started an indefinite hunger strike in front of the secretariat on 15th June. Four hundred fishworkers greeted him on the occasion. On subsequent days a cycle rally, and a demonstration of women carrying fish baskets were held in
support of the fasting leader. In other districts torch light rallies were held in several places. (KSMIF executive committee minutes 1-7-1988)

In Ernakulam district a much publicised harbour picketing was organised in support of the fasting leader. About 1000 fishworkers in about 125 big country crafts surrounded the fishing harbour in Kochi from morning till afternoon. None of the mechanised boats ventured into the sea for fishing. All the newspapers gave wide coverage with pictures about this agitation. "This novel agitational strategy really created news." (Manorajyam, a Malayalam weekly, September 1988)

On 23rd June the government banned monsoon trawling throughout the state except at Neendakara in Kollam district, the biggest centre for mechanised fishing in Kerala. Making a statement in the state assembly Mr. T.K. Ramakrishnan, the minister for fisheries said that the ban was the fulfilment of the longstanding desire and demand of the traditional fishworkers. The decision was taken since the government accepted the claim of the fishworkers that "the trawlers were not only depriving them of their livelihood but also causing damage to the marine ecology." (Deccan Herald, 24-6-1988) The reason for exempting Neendakara from the ban, as in 1981, was that 'Karikadi', a special variety of prawn found only at Neendakara would be lost if not caught at the season of monsoon and that
the country would lose foreign exchange worth of Rs.18 crores. The announcement of the Minister was greeted with derision by the opposition members who charged that "the exclusion of Neendakara from the ban was for the benefit of the irrigation minister Mr. Baby John who owned some fishing boats." (Deccan Herald 24-6-1988)

The ban on monsoon trawling was declared when Fr. Kocherry was on the fourth day of indefinite hunger strike outside the state secretariat. In the light of the declaration KSMTF called off its agitation including the hunger strike and acknowledged its leading role to force the government to ban trawling and to accept its position that trawling was destructive for the fisheries and the fishworkers. The statement of KSMTF also accused the Left Front government for protecting the interests of the boat lobby and the export merchants by exempting Neendakara from the ban. (Alakal, Malayalam fortnightly, 24-6-1988)

The action council of the mechanised boat owners decided to observe a strike in Kochi against the government's ban on monsoon trawling. They also filed a petition in the high court of Kerala pleading that the order was biased since Neendakara was left out in the ban order. (Mathrubhumi 24-6-1988)
Many newspapers wrote editorials and articles on the issue of the ban on monsoon trawling. Mathrubhumi, in its editorial dated 25th June 1988 under the caption 'Peace should be maintained in the sea,' described the importance of the ban for the traditional fishworkers. "Since the fishermen have been agitating to get monsoon trawling banned the decision of the government is a welcome move. But exempting Neendakara area from this ban has created a dispute...If this is due to the political compulsions as alleged by the fishermen leaders the government has a duty to explain this allegation."

The India Today of July 1988 in its article titled, 'Net loss, tension over excessive fishing' analysed the political implications of the ban on monsoon trawling. "Kerala's Marxist government is caught between the devil and the deep sea. On the one hand stand one lakh traditional fishermen who want trawling operations banned during the breeding season of monsoon. On the other hand is a powerful Minister who wants trawling activity to continue. In June the fishermen of the Kerala Swathantra Malsya Thozhilali Federation began picketing harbours demanding a stop to the trawlers. And when Fr.Kocherry went on an indefinite fast at the secretariat, the state government relented on June 25th." (The India Today July 1988)
fishermen and the trawling industry are on a collision course in Kerala' described the harbour picketing in Kochi and said, "Given the righteous militancy of the traditional fishermen and the recalcitrance of the mechanised trawlers, the sea is fast turning into a tense arena." (The Illustrated Weekly of India, 1988: 28-29)

Korakandy in his article under the title 'The Economics and Politics of the Ban on Monsoon Trawling' points out the significance of the ban and the role of KSMTF in the process.

"It, nevertheless, looks more than a decade for the traditional fishermen to force the government to pass legislation seeking to protect their interests...The present notification by the government banning monsoon trawling is a significant achievement for KSMTF and other organisations. More than the economic gain, it helped the traditional fishermen in establishing themselves as a political and economic force..." (The India Today, 1988: 28)

The significance of the government's decision to ban monsoon trawling for KSMTF was well described by the various newspapers and magazines mentioned above. It was because of a decade of consistent struggle by KSMTF that the government finally accepted the demand of the fishermen in Kerala to ban monsoon trawling. The issue was highlighted so much by the
fishworkers' movement that the very existence of the government was in jeopardy and so the government was forced to make a policy decision in its cabinet meeting. Thus KSMTF was recognized as an organisation representing the traditional fishworkers in Kerala. "We were able to make the government take a stand on this issue. Protection of marine resources as a policy has been accepted by the government...Thus we got the political recognition as representing the fishworkers in the state." (KSMTF executive committee minutes 1-7-1988)

III. Activities of the Movement in 1989

The three important events in the history of fishworkers' movement in 1989 were the involvement of KSMTF in the Kanyakumari March organised by the National Fishworkers' Forum, the total ban on monsoon trawling by the government and participation of KSMTF in the government sponsored fishermen's cooperative societies with the collaboration of unions of political parties.

1. The Kanyakumari March

The National Fishworkers' Forum (NFF) in its general body meeting on 13th December 1987 decided to organise a march to Kanyakumari in April 1989 based on the slogan 'Protect waters, protect life,' in collaboration with all possible organisations in India. The objectives of the March were "to widen people's awareness of the vital link between water and life and provide
PROTECT WATERS - PROTECT LIFE

THE KANYAKUMARI MARCH

NATIONAL FISHERMEN'S FORUM
encouragement to the people’s initiatives and struggles to protect waters, to form a network of all those who are concerned about the issue, to pressurise the government to evolve a sustainable water utilisation policy..." (brochure 1989:2) Thus to protect water from pollution and waste is essential not only for fishworkers who totally depend on water related profession but also for all people. The march, therefore, was to create awareness about this vital ecological problem and to bring together various environmental groups for solving the problem.

The Kanyakumari March started on 2nd and 3rd April 1989 from Calcutta in the eastern coast and Bombay in the western coast respectively to Kanyakumari. A team of fishermen and others travelled in vans campaigning on the issue of water. In the fishing villages they walked with the people. Public meetings, rallies, symposia and cultural programmes were organised along their route. The march was to end on 1st May in Kanyakumari with a rally and a public meeting (NFF brochure 1989)

Each state unit of NFF organised different programmes as part of the march depending on its environmental situation. KSMTF, a state unit of NFF, organised the march through the coastal region and the areas of inland fishworkers in Kerala. During the three months prior to the march a lot of propaganda
was made through seminars, workshops, camps, street plays and state level competitions in essay, paintings, poems and poster making on the theme of the march. One poster is shown on page No.243-A.

Throughout Kerala the march received good media attention, and aroused much environmental consciousness, through public meetings, a fishermen’s bandh and cycle rallies. In all, thirty six public meetings were held throughout the state creating a lot of awareness among the people about the life giving water. (KSMTF executive committee minutes 27-5-1989)

When the marchers from eastern and western coast converged in Kanyakumari on 1st of May 1989, thousands of people gathered to take part in the demonstration and public meeting to be inaugurated by Rd. V.R. Krishna Iyyer. After an exhibition on fisheries and cultural programmes, the rally started in the evening towards the seashore. As it was approaching the venue of the meeting some anti-social elements created problems at the rear of the rally. Police resorted to firing dispersing the crowd in panic and injuring three fishermen. Many buses were damaged during the melee. As a result the public meeting was cancelled. The event was reported in all the national dailies. "Police firing and the consequent injuries to three persons marked the completion of the month-long Kanyakumari march organised by the National fishworkers’ Forum. About 10,000 people including women from all over the country converged at
In protest against the police firing there was a mass 'dharna' in front of the collectorate of Nagercoil in Tamil Nadu. Fishworkers from Kerala participated in it in large numbers. Later KSMTF organised a demonstration and a public meeting in Ernakulam in which Rtd. justice V.R.Krishn Iyyer and many environmentalists took part.

The significance of the march is well explained by the Statesman. "The Kanyakumari march, organised by the National Fishworkers' Forum, is a trade union movement with a difference. Perhaps for the first time in the country, the issue of the rights of a community—small fishworkers in this case—is being linked to the demand for an environmentally sustainable developmental model." (The Statesman 3-4-1989) KSMTF had its evaluation about the impact of the march in Kerala. By participation in the march KSMTF members got a new awareness about the importance of water resources. Besides, they also gained many like-minded friends who are working in different areas." (KSMTF annual report of 1988-'89)
Encouraged by the Kanyakumari march KSMTF planned its agitation for the ban on monsoon trawling in May itself and elected an action council of seven members with Mr. A.J. Vijayan as convenor. After giving a memorandum to the fisheries minister demanding total ban including Needakara which was exempted in 1988. The strategy had two phases - agitations in the districts with torch light procession and the second phase with an indefinite fast accompanied by picketing of Neendakara and Kochi harbour.

In all the five districts torch lit rallies were conducted on the 1st of June. On the next day picketing of government offices was conducted in four districts while 'dharnas' were organised in other two districts including the inland sector.

On 26th of June 1989 the expert committee headed by Prof. N. Balakrishnan Nair appointed by the government in January of the same year to study about the 'marine fishery resource management in Kerala' gave its report recommending among other things a ban on monsoon trawling. "In the interest of conservation of resources, it is suggested that a total ban be enforced on trawling by all types of vessels in the territorial waters of Kerala during the months of June, July and August. The impact of the measure on the conservation and optimum
utilisation of resources should be examined in detail and be subjected to close scrutiny and review in the next three years." (Nair 1989: 59)

After the expert committee report was submitted KSMTF intensified its struggle to put more pressure on the government to act on the report by starting an indefinite hunger strike by Mr. Lan Koilparambil, its state president, in front of the collectorate in Alapuzha on 12th July. As preparation was on, the chief minister announced the decision of the cabinet to ban the monsoon trawling from 20th July to 31st August (42 days) in the territorial waters of Kerala up to 22 kilometers and also stipulated conditions for those going beyond this limit.

In the light of the announcement of the government, Mr. Lal stopped the fast, together with all other agitations. Hundreds of fishworkers including women and children greeted with cheers the decision of the left government about the monsoon ban and held a public meeting in Trivandrum. (Deshabhimani 15-8-1989)

The total ban on monsoon trawling was a victory for KSMTF which was agitating for the demand for years. "When we evaluate the situation of fisheries and the activities of KSMTF what comes uppermost in our mind is monsoon trawling and its consequences. It is a source of great satisfaction and pride that the basic demand of the federation has been partly at
least accepted and implemented." (KSMTF annual report 1988-'90) The Kerala Malsya Thozhilali Ikavedi (TUCI) said that the ban on monsoon trawling was the fruit of ten years of hard struggle by the fishermen. (Statement by TUCI 1989)

The reactions of the boat owners to the ban on monsoon trawling were very strong and even violent. On 28th July during a big demonstration of boat workers at Saktikulangara near Neendakara to protest against the ban, the mob became violent. A government bus was stoned and set on fire. The police resorted to lathicharge. Pitched battle followed between the police and the crowd. When the situation went out of control the police first used tear gas shells to disperse the crowd. When this did not succeed to control the situation, the police opened fire at the crowd killing two persons and injuring about 200 others. Immediately the collector declared prohibitory orders for fifteen days, and the government ordered a judicial enquiry. (Deepika 29-7-1989)

There was a long discussion about the police firing, in the state assembly. But the fisheries minister defended the ban saying it was a long standing demand of traditional fishermen and was necessary to protect the fish resources. (Deshabhimani 6-8-1989) In spite of stiff resistance of the mechanised boats the government strongly enforced the ban order.
But in Kollam the government relaxed the ban five days before the expiry date with the result that some mechanised boats went for fishing.

The partial ban on monsoon trawling in 1988 and total ban in 1989 resulted in a lot of opposition from the mechanised boats. A further proof of the power of boat owners is the legal battle they waged to squash any law the government made to control mechanised boats. In 1989 also the boatowners of Kollam challenged in the court the order banning the boats to go beyond the limit of 22 kilometers. KSMITF joined as a party to the case with the state government. The appeal of the boatowners was rejected by the single bench of the high court. The observation of Mr. K.T. Thomas, the judge, was significant. "If the mechanised boats go beyond the inshore waters during the monsoon, it will affect the traditional fishermen unfavourably. It is a social problem which can create law and order problem. Since it can lead to serious conflict in the sea no government can ignore it. The objective of the government order is not to prevent the boats to pass through inshore waters; I am convinced prima facie that it is to prevent bottom trawling in the coastal waters." He then referred the case to the division bench.

(KSMITF annual report of 1988-'90)
3. Participation of KSMTF in fishermen's cooperative societies

The cooperation of KSMTF with unions of political parties in the fishermen cooperative societies is important since it has influenced the non-party character of the fishworkers' movement. As explained in the chapter on the socio-economic situation of the fishworkers, the existence of middlemen is one of the most exploitative factors in the lives of the traditional fishworkers in Kerala. They had no control over the marketing of fish except through the middlemen whom they were indebted to. One solution to this problem is cooperative societies, the aim of which is to remove middlemen in the marketing of fish. In 1980, the government of Kerala established 222 welfare societies which functioned as an agency to channelise government programmes for the fishworkers.

In 1987 the Left Front government converted these welfare societies into eighty one primary cooperative societies to make them function on cooperative principles. But all these societies got registered by CITU fishermen union of the Marxist party without giving any share to any other political parties. They also nominated members of the CITU union to the ad hoc committee meant to prepare for the election. When KSMTF and other unions objected to the undemocratic procedure, the Marxist party was ready to offer some societies and their board membership to other Left Front parties and KSMTF.
When the government announced the election to these cooperatives in 1987 KSMTF decided to join the election with seat adjustment with the unions of the left parties. The aim of KSMTF, according to its leaders, was to influence the Left Front government to make the societies democratic and thus to make them function effectively for the benefit of the fishworkers. A series of discussions between KSMTF and the unions of Left Front parties took place at state and district levels throughout Kerala. But the seat adjustment for the board members in each of the eighty one cooperatives was a difficult task. Practically in all the societies KSMTF members felt that they did not get their due share of seats. In some districts there was cooperation in all the societies, while in some societies of other districts there was no cooperation at all. In the district of Kozhikode there was stiff opposition to the Left Front unions from the district unit of KSMTF.

When the election took place in the cooperative societies, many fishermen challenged the election in the court due to widespread irregularities. The courts stayed the election in many societies in the state. As a result the whole process of the election got delayed or suspended. Finally when some societies started functioning with the newly elected board members, they did not work effectively due to lack of clarity about the objectives and programmes of the societies. The evaluation of KSMTF about the cooperatives is pertinent here.
It was reported from all districts that both ruling and opposition unions do not have any clear plans and programmes for the cooperatives, but they are eager to capture the power for themselves." (KSMTF annual report of 1988-’90)

The collaboration of KSMTF with left parties in the cooperatives was an important event in the history of the movement since there was a lot of criticism about it from within and from without the fishermen union. The main concern about the issue was whether it affected the non-party character of the organisation.

IV. Trawling Ban Agitation of 1990

The main events of fishworkers’ movement in 1990 were the state convention of KSMTF and the agitation for the ban on monsoon trawling. KSMTF organised a state convention similar to the one organised two years back, to plan its programmes and to hold its organisational election. The speciality of the convention was a discussion with the friends of KSMTF about its own functioning. They gave a good feedback which was useful for the movement. (Statement of KSMTF, 4-4-1990)

KSMTF started the agitation as announced in its state convention for its demands especially the ban on monsoon trawling. A demand day was observed with cycle rallies, demonstrations and public meetings in all the districts. On 1st
of June. Picketings were organised by fishworkers in all the district headquarters. In Alappuzha 10,000 fishworkers courted arrest while in Kochi 1000 picketed the taluk office. A ‘work protection day’ was observed by the Kerala Malsya Thozhilali Aikavedi, fishermen union of CPM(L), in support of the fishworkers’ demands. (Mangalam, a Malayalam daily, 2-6-1990)

Some Malayalam dailies like Malayala Manorama and Deepika wrote editorials on the issue. They urged the concerned organisations to come together to find an amicable solution to the problem. Many ordinary citizens were also responding to the issue of trawling through letters to the press. One such example was from Mrs. Sheela Bahulayen, a house-wife from Kochi. “I am for the ban as one who enjoyed the fruits of the ban as a consumer and not as an exporter... The state government has no reason to delay the ban...This is not only the voice of the traditional fisherfolk, but also of the fish-eaters in the state.” (Indian Express 14-6-1990)

On the 20th of June, the fisheries minister discussed with the leaders of political parties, and fishermen’s unions and the mechanised boat owners about the issue of monsoon ban. But as no decision was arrived at, Mr. Lal Koilparambili, the president of KSMTF, started an indefinite fast in front of the secretariat. An impressive rally of 1000 fishworkers preceded the inauguration. (Kerala Times 21-6-90) Meanwhile the Mechanised
Fishing Operator’s Association organised a demonstration and a 'dharna' with a 'bandh' at Neendakara against the monsoon ban.

On 23rd June KSMTF members picketed trains in Kollam. They were arrested and removed. In Alapuzha Fishworkers blocked the national highway. The inland fishworkers held a dharna and torch light rally at Mavelikara in support of the fasting leader. The president of the Malsya Thozhilali Ayikavedi, Mr. M. Gopalan, went on an indefinite fast in Alapuzha with the demand on the ban on monsoon trawling. (Deepika 24-6-1990)

As the agitation was going on the railway authorities announced that one boggy of a train would be set aside for women fish vendors from Trivandrum to Kollam, in response to the memorandum from KSMTF. (Malayala Manorama 22-6-1990) This was an indication of the concern of KSMTF for the needs of the women fish vendors, and the influence it had even on railways.

On 25th June, the fisheries minister, Mr. T.K. Ramakrishnan, announced in the state assembly that the monsoon trawling would be banned from 28th of June and that relief would be given to the unemployed boat workers. In the light of the minister’s announcement, KSMTF stopped all agitations including the fast by Mr. Lal Koilparambil
protesting against the minister's refusal to give the duration of the ban. It warned of another agitation if the ban was withdrawn before the due date.

As the ban on monsoon trawling came to effect the boat owners organised a 'bandh', a demonstration and a relay satyagraha at Neendakara. They also conducted a blockade of the country crafts there on the following day. (The Kerala Kaumudi 29-6-1990) They also challenged the government order on the trawling ban in the high court which sent a commission consisting of advocates to the sea to observe the fishing process of a trawling boat. Based on the report the court asked the government to reconsider the ban of mechanised boats beyond twenty two kilometers. Instead of following this directive the government withdrew the ban after 23 days. (KSMTF annual report of 1990-'92)

The agitation on the issue of anchoring of mechanised boats in Alapuzha was the main agitation the district units organised during the year. The Alapuzha district unit was opposing the anchoring of mechanised boats anywhere in the district. The struggle was going on throughout 1989 and was being continued till March 1990. There were various types of appeals and agitations against the anchoring. Many boats were set on fire. It brought about a polarisation among political parties, merchants and fishermen's unions. When there was a
huge demonstration in Alapuzha organised by KSMTF the government
called a meeting in Trivandrum. A committee was appointed to
study the issue. Though the problem was not permanently solved
boats were prevented from anchoring anywhere in Alapuzha coast,
while they were anchoring at least in two places earlier. (KSMTF
annual report of 1988-90)

The death of Mr. Joychen Antony, twice president of KSMTF
and its most dynamic fisherman leader, was a sad and shocking
event for the fishworkers' movement. He died on 15th May 1990
by an accident occurred in the sea during the process of
fishing. "In the history of KSMTF up to today how high his
position was, need not be explained. Being the secretary and
president of KSMTF for eight long years he moved around the
coast and inland shores to prepare the fishworkers for struggles
and to build up the organisation simultaneously. Being a
fisherman by profession he steered the boat of the organisation
and got endeared himself to all the fishworkers." (KSMTF 1990-
'92 report) His death anniversaries were observed by KSMTF, and
they were occasions to strengthen the movement by building
solidarity and unity. A special fund was collected by KSMTF
and given to the family of Joychen Antony. (ibid.)
V. Agitations of Fishworkers in 1991

In the general election of 1991 the Left Democratic Front was voted out and the Congress led United Democratic Front under the leadership of Mr. K. Karunakaran came to power. Though the monsoon trawling was banned by the previous government for three years, it was not made a permanent law. So in 1991 KSMTF planned for an agitation and gave a charter of twelve demands including the ban on monsoon trawling. The Kerala Swathantra Malsya Thozhilali Aikavedi also submitted a memorandum to the fisheries minister demanding a ban on monsoon trawling. Both unions argued that the fish production increased during the last three years as a result of the ban, and so it should be continued.

1. The Trawling Ban Agitation

The Ernakulam district committee of KSMTF declared a 'bandh' in which all fishermen's unions took part and organised a picketing of the fishing harbour in Kochi by country crafts. The government announced a ban on monsoon trawling for a month on the following day of the harbour picketing. "There have been persistent demand from the traditional fishermen for a ban on trawling during June, July, August on the ground that trawling had been badly affecting the conservation of fish wealth and their share of earnings from fishing. Statistical figures of marine landings for the last three years indicate a positive
correlation between imposition of the ban and quantum of marine
landings. Keeping this aspect in view, as also the need to
protect the interests of traditional fishermen and to avoid
possible law and order problems in the coastal areas and in the
sea, the government has decided to ban bottom trawling through
out the territorial waters of Kerala during the period from the
15th July to the 16th August 1991." (Kerala Gazette, Fisheries
and Ports Department, 12th July 1991)

The United Democratic Front Government also, in its above
given order acknowledged that the fish production in the state
increased as a result of the ban on monsoon trawling during the
three years and that it should continue for the interest of the
traditional fishworkers and the preservation of fish resources.
This was a clear vindication of the stand taken by KSMTF all
through the years. The agitation of KSMTF probably contributed
to a quick decision by the government on the issue. "The
trawling ban by the government follows agitations by traditional
fishermen under the auspices of KSMTF for the past many days in
various parts of the state demanding such a ban." (Indian
Express 14-7-1991)

Immediately after the ban on monsoon trawling the
mechanised boat owners threatened that they would violate the
ban, and picketed the national highway. They were later removed
by the police." (Mathrubhumi 14-7-1991) As they planned to go
ahead with the agitation the government called them for a
meeting and offered to reduce the duration of the ban. Accordingly, the government lifted the ban five days before the fixed date. The boat owners also challenged the order of the government in the high court with three petitions. But the court upheld the government order. (The Hindu 1-8-1991)

2. Fish Disease Agitation

The agitation on the issue of the fish disease organised by KSFMTF in 1991 was an important event in the history of the fishworkers' movement as it focussed on the problems of the inland fishworkers in Kerala. "The most important event during the year was the struggle demanding compensation for and prevention of the fish disease which struck the inland waters in Kerala." (National Fishworkers' Forum, annual report of 1991:20)

A mysterious fish disease which was technically called as 'episeutic ulcerative syndrome' and popularly known as 'cancer of the fish' appeared in most of the rivers, lakes and backwaters in Kerala. Certain red spots appeared on the skin of the fish causing decay of the flesh and subsequent death of the fish. The disease caused large scale mortality of fish, and tonnes of dead fish floated in the inland waters. As a result fish was not available for catch and what was caught had no market as the people were afraid to eat the affected fish. This was due to the rumours spread by the media and scientists. As
the fisheries department of Kerala admitted, "The disease has caused panic among fishermen, those who eat fish and among those living around inland waters." (Department of fisheries, Kerala, 1991: 2)

The disease made about 50,000 inland fishermen with their two lakh dependents jobless for four months with the result of starvation and suffering. The whole industry of inland fisheries in Kerala, a major source of employment was hit and its future in jeopardy as the disease spread to the remaining parts of the state. The state government was not doing much to stop the spread of the disease and to help the fishermen, though it admitted the seriousness of the issue in the state assembly. (The Hindu 17-3-1992)

KSMTF took up the issue and gave a memorandum to the fisheries minister demanding to give due compensation for the fishworkers, to purchase the fish at fair price from the inland workers and to take precautionary measures to forestall the spreading of the disease.

As part of the agitation picketings and dharnas were organised in all districts. In Alapuzha district the fishermen had picketing of the national highway in which hundreds of fishworkers participated. In Kollam a picketing was organised in front of the collectorate. In Trivandrum, Ernakulam and Kozhikode mass 'dharnas' were conducted. Later relay hunger strike was organised for several days in all district
headquarters. It created a lot of support for the cause from various groups and environmentalists. From October 26th-30th there was a campaign jeep rally from Wynad district in north Kerala to Trivandrum in the south. Passing through five districts of the state the rally helped the general public and the fishermen to be aware of the plight of the inland fishworkers and their demands. But there was no response from the part of the government. (KSMTF annual report of 1991)

The focus of agitation was directed to the secretariat in Trivandrum when Fr. Jose Kaleekal started an indefinite fast on 1st November. To complement it, different modes of agitation were organised throughout the state. Hundreds of women and children had a mass 'dharna' for days together in front of the secretariat cooking food in pots there. About fifty women organised a starvation march on foot from Chenganacherry to Trivandrum covering a distance of 200 kilometers. This dharna was inaugurated by Mrs. Asa Niyogi, wife of Mr. Sankar Guha Niyogi a trade union leader who was murdered for his union activities. She greeted Fr. Jose and asked the government to find a solution to the fish disease at the earliest. (Kerala Times 7-11-1991)

On 12th November hundreds of fisher women marched towards the residence of the fisheries minister with diseased fish in their hands. When they were stopped by the police, they sat in the middle of the road until they were arrested and removed. (Kerala
The children of the fishworkers celebrated the ‘children's day’ on 14th November with the new slogan of a ‘hunger day’.

Many organisations came out in support of the agitation. About thirty Catholic priests had a one day solidarity fast with Fr. Jose in the satyagraha 'pandal'. (Deshabhimani 8-11-1991)

About a dozen socio-literary leaders put out a statement asking the government to find a solution to the problem through negotiations. Besides, about fifteen organisations and fifty more prominent citizens declared support to the agitation of the fishworkers led by KSMTF (KSMTF annual report of 1991)

As the fast reached its 7th day mass media like doordarshan, radio and newspaper published many news and features about the fish disease. But it was the newspapers which responded to the issue with all its seriousness. Many papers wrote editorials asking the government to find a solution to the problem at the earliest. Kerala Times of 7-11-1991 in its editorial under the title 'fish disease more watchfulness needed' described the suffering of the fishworkers due to the disease and wrote, "Since the authorities have not taken any serious measures to protect the inland fisheries sector, we request them to take efficient and speedy steps to solve the problem."
In the thick of the widespread agitations and the theoretical controversies about the disease, Fr. Jose on the 10th day of his fast, was forcefully removed by the police to the hospital. He refused to take any food or injection, and continued his fast in the hospital. He was released from the hospital after two days, and he came back to the 'pandal' and continued his fast. At this time a large number of inland fishworkers from various districts started a mass fast by the side of the satyagraha 'pandal'.

On 15th of November the chief minister called the leaders of KSMTF and other fishermen's unions for a conference, in which he assured that he would declare compensation and relief measures within two days. Based on the assurance Fr. Jose called off the fast together with other agitations. On the following day the chief minister announced compensation of Rs.150/ each for the affected inland fishworker, and free ration for a week. (Kerala Kaumudi 16-11-1991)

The agitation on the fish disease was a landmark for the inland fishworkers of Kerala. KSMTF, in its evaluation specially mentioned about the tremendous enthusiasm the agitation generated among the fishworkers. "The agitation created tremendous enthusiasm among the fishworkers witnessed in the struggle of 1984." (KSMTF annual report of 1990-'92) There was organisational growth for KSMTF as a result of this agitation,
through the addition of two new district units of Pathanamthitta and Thrissur. Another important achievement of this agitation was the big support it got from the public. Many prominent citizens came out in support of the struggle." (ibid.)

Apart from pressurising the government to take action on the fish disease, KSMTF collected a relief fund on its own to help the inland fishworkers affected by the disease. At the initiative of KSMTF the International Collectives in Support of Fishworkers (I.C.S.F) organised an international seminar in Trivandrum in May 1992 to discuss the various aspects of the fish disease. (KSMTF annual report, 1990-92)

The major events of the fishworkers' movement in 1992 were the state convention and joint agitation to ban monsoon trawling. After KSMTF became a unitary organisation, it was having a state convention every two years. The theme of the convention held in Trivandrum was the impact of the new economic policy of the central government on the fisheries sector. Apart from an impressive rally and public meeting, the election of the office-bearers of KSMTF took place during the two day convention.
VI. Joint Agitation of fishworkers of Southern States

The speciality of the trawling ban agitation of 1992 was that it was a joint struggle of fishworkers’ organisations of Tamil Nadu and Kerala under the auspices of the National Fishworkers’ Forum. Since the problems were similar in both states and since a joint effort would give a boost to the fishworkers of both the states, the National Fishworkers’ Forum took this initiative.

KSMTF and the Bay of Bengal Fishermen Union in Tamil Nadu together planned and executed the agitation. The strategy of the agitation consisted of a campaign rally from Kasargod in Kerala to Madras, relay satyagraha in district headquarters in both states, hunger strike of leaders from 1st of June in Madras and Trivandrum. A joint action council submitted a charter of demands to the state fisheries ministers of both states and the central fisheries commission. The demands included a ban on monsoon trawling, strict enforcement of marine regulations especially connected with the mechanised boats, cancellation of licences granted to foreign vessels for deep sea fishing, reduction of prices and import duty of outboard engines of the traditional fishworkers. (Statement, Action council, 20-4-1992)
The first stage of campaign started on 26th of April from Thalaserry in Kerala with representatives of Tamil Nadu and Kerala. A well-rehearsed street drama on the problems of the fishworkers accompanied the troupe. About one hundred receptions were organised for the campaign march together with torch lit rallies and public meetings, throughout the states. The campaign march which ended in Madras on 21st March after a three week journey through Kerala and Tamil Nadu, created a lot of awareness about the problems of the traditional fishworkers among the public and the fisherfolk.

The next stage of joint struggle was relay satyagraha which was conducted in six districts together with demonstrations, poster publicity and fund collection. The third phase of the joint struggle took place from 1st to 14th June with hunger strikes in various districts. An indefinite hunger strike was started in two districts of Kozhikode and Ernakulam by Mr. Abdul Rasik and Mr. F.V.Wilson respectively, who drew the attention of the public on the problems of the fishworkers. The district units of KSMTF organised rallies, mass picketings and hunger strikes as part of the agitation.

The fourth phase of the struggle consisted of an indefinite hunger strike by Mr.Lal Koilparambil started in front of the secretariat on 15th of June, together with supportive agitations in various districts. In Alapuzha district,
demonstrations and public meetings were held throughout the coast in solidarity with the fasting leader. About seventy-five women had a twenty-four hour fast in front of the medical college, Alapuzha. The coastal roads were also blocked. But the notable of all was a series of picketings on the national highway. One was organised for two days continuously. Another lightening picketing was conducted without any prior warning to the authorities in three places. The traffic system was in total confusion. The strikers spent hours together boiling coffee and 'kanji' (rice with water) in the middle of the national highway. The people were surging enthusiastically to picket and get arrested. This type of agitation created real headache to the government which hastened to take a decision on the issue of monsoon trawling. (KSMTF annual report 1992)

As the agitation was getting intensified, the fisheries minister called a meeting of traditional fishworkers and the boat owners to discuss the issue of trawling. On 19th June the minister announced the ban on monsoon trawling with immediate effect until the 3rd of August for forty-four days. (Mathrubhumi 20-6-1992) "In the light of the trawling ban, KSMTF has stopped all the agitations throughout the state. Mr. Lal Koilparambil who has been fasting for the last five days ended the fast on the same day. The union protested strongly for not extending the ban until the 31st of August." (ibid.)
On the same day of the ban the Mechanised Boat Owners' Associations organised a 'dharna' and a demonstration which disrupted the traffic on the national highway in Kollam for three hours. (Mathrubhumi 26-6-1992) The ban did not last since the high court passed a judgement permitting the mechanised boats to go beyond the territorial waters without fishing in the coastal areas. The court's intervention made the ban ineffective. KSMTF, therefore, decided to join as a party to the case in the high court for its final hearing.

The Alapuzha district committee of KSMTF organised a long agitation in 1992 against corruption in Malsyafed, the apex body of the fishermen's cooperatives in the state. At one stage of the agitation there was police firing and lathicharge on the crowd. As a result the agitation got the attention of the state as a whole. (KSMTF annual report 1992-'94) The state executive committee members undertook a one day fast in front of the Malsyafed office, Trivandrum, on the same issue. On the basis of this the prolonged agitation in Alapuzha was withdrawn. (KSMTF executive committee minutes, 7-11-1992)
VII. Activities of KSMTF in 1993

The history of fishworkers' movement for the year 1993 was marked by agitation for the ban of monsoon trawling and its legal battles.

1. The Trawling Ban Agitation

KSMTF took up the issue of monsoon trawling as the government did not ban monsoon trawling on a permanent basis. After a press conference to highlight the issues, the organisers gave a memorandum with eleven demands including a ban on monsoon trawling. On 25th May a twenty-four-hour fast was organised by district council members of KSMTF in all the district headquarters. (KSMTF annual report 1992-'94)

On 2nd June Mr. N.V. Pankajakshan, the convenor of the action council for the agitation began an indefinite fast in front of the secretariat in Trivandrum. On the same day a demonstration and a dharna were conducted. (Malayala Manorama 4-

A new state level organisation of prominent citizens named 'Council of Protection of Fish Resources' was formed with Rtd Justice V.R. Krishna Iyer as its convenor, and it asked the government to ban the monsoon trawling. They also planned several publicity campaigns. (Mangalam 3-6-1993)
On the 3rd June the government declared a ban on monsoon trawling for a month. In the light of the order, KSMTF stopped all its agitations including the fast of Mr. Pankajakshan.

After the ban the government permitted the mechanised boats to go beyond 22 kilometers as directed by the high court. Immediately the action council of KSMTF declared an agitation. "KSMTF is starting again on 15th June the agitation which we stopped on 3rd June. We are forced to start the agitation as we see the trawling ban only a farce." (KSMTF statement 12-6-1992) Malsya Thozhilali Aikavedi also threatened that they would seize the boats violating the ban. (Madhyamam, a Malayalam daily, 13-6-1993) Forseeing trouble in the sea, the government hired speed boats and additional police force to enforce the ban (The Hindu 14-6-1993)

Mr. Lal Koilparambil started an indefinite fast on 17th June in front of the medical college, in Alapuzha, demanding the government to prevent the mechanised boats from going for fishing during the period of the ban and to ban monsoon trawling permanently. (Kerala Kaumudi 18-6-1992) The fast continued for over two weeks accompanied by picketings, forceful entry of women to fisheries offices, 'gherao' of the fisheries minister, burning of boats and rallies in various districts. Finally, in the light of the decision of the mechanised boats not to go to the sea, Mr. Lal Koilparambil ended his fast. According to KSMTF the
agitation was a success because it stopped the boats from going for fishing and it brought to light the political games of the ruling parties. (KSMTF annual report 1992-'93)

As part of the fishworkers' movement many smaller agitations were organised in various districts in 1993. In most districts picketings and other agitations were organised to get pension for the fishermen. As a response to this agitation, the government distributed the overdue pension. Women in Kollam put up a good agitation carrying water pots to get drinking water for the fishworkers. It was successful as the municipal authorities took necessary steps to provide drinking water. Agitations were organised in all the districts demanding adequate supply of kerosine for the outboard engines of the country crafts. As a result the government maintained the kerosine quota for the fishermen. (KSMTF annual report 1992-94)

2. The Legal Battles of KSMTF in 1993

Together with various agitational strategies, KSMTF was also using legal means to get their demands met. It was necessary since issues like the ban on monsoon trawling were legal issues and KSMTF was all through working for legal changes. Whenever the government banned monsoon trawling as a result of the agitations of KSMTF, the boat owners challenged it
in the court. Then it was KSMTF which was pressurising the government to go for appeal. Invariably in all such cases KSMTF was a joinder of parties in the case with the government.

In most of the cases the verdict of the court was favourable to the traditional fishworkers. But in 1992 the verdict was against them. The high court of Kerala approved the mechanised boats to go beyond 22 kilometers for fishing during the period of trawling ban saying that the area was beyond the jurisdiction of the state government. Since the limit was not strictly enforced by the government, permission for the boats to go beyond 22 kilometers was in effect nullifying the ban on monsoon trawling. This caused a lot of conflicts between the mechanised boats and the traditional fishworkers as mentioned earlier. Since it was a vital issue affecting the very law of ban, KSMTF gave an appeal to the supreme court employing two famous advocates Mr. Santi Bhushan and Mr. Prasnt Bhushan. It also pressurised the government to go for appeal. When it did, KSMTF was a joinder of parties in the case. The state government kept a total silence on the high court verdict for almost three months. (Indian Express, Pune, 4-8-1993)

Finally the supreme court gave a verdict on 2nd November 1993, by which it upheld the government ban on monsoon trawling. A summary report was given by a Malayalam daily. "The supreme court approved the ban on monsoon trawling, purse-seining etc.
by the government of Kerala. It declared invalid the earlier judgement of the high court of Kerala nullifying the government order and allowing modern fishing beyond ten kilometers. After a long-drawn out battle at the appeal of KSMTF and the government of Kerala, the supreme court came out with this judgement. The court approved the argument of the government to protect the interest of traditional fishworkers of whom 90% are below poverty line. Uncontrolled mechanised fishing will affect the fishermen. They destroy the young ones and cause depletion. The right of fishermen to live according to section No.46 of the Constitution is to be ensured. The right to do any work and business according to the section N.195 is not by destroying the means of livelihood of other sections of the people. The trawlers and purseiners are for profit, while the traditional fishermen work for their livelihood." (Mathrubhumi 12-11-1993)

The importance of the verdict of the supreme court for the fishworkers and for fishworkers' movement was well given by KSMTF. "After a long legal battle the victory in the court is a great achievement for the fishworkers in Kerala especially for KSMTF which played a significant role in arguing out the case. Advocate, Santi Bhushan and Prasant Bhushan who, as a free service, worked to get this historic judgement for the fishworkers, will be ever remembered by the fishworkers." (KSMTF annual report 1992-'94)
I X. The Struggles of Fishworkers in 1994

The history of fishworkers' movement in 1994, the last year as recorded by this thesis, is significant for three events – the state convention, the trawling ban agitation and the agitation against deep sea fishing. These events are explained in this concluding section.

The state convention of 1994 focused on the slogan, "No need, the foreign ships which destroy our oceans", referring to the issue of struggle against the joint venture deep sea fishing. The convention adopted a resolution giving full support to NFF agitation against joint ventures in deep sea fishing and asking the government to cancel all licences given to the foreign companies for deep sea fishing. At the end of the convention the election of state office bearers took place. Mr. T. Peter was elected as state president, J. Jerome as general secretary, Mrs. Chinna Joseph as vice-president, and P. P. John, Abdul Rasik, N. V. Pankajakshan as secretaries (KSMTF annual report 1992-'94)

1. Trawling Ban Agitation

Agitation to ban mechanised trawling started with a blockade of the mechanised boats in the Kochi harbour by fishermen of Ernakulam district unit of KSMTF. It created a lot of tension and possibility of confrontation. Then KSMTF declared that Mr. T. Peter, its President would go on an
indefinite fast in front of the Secretariat to press for the demand of ban on monsoon trawling. As the threat of intensified agitation by KSMTF was in the air the government banned the monsoon trawling for forty five days." The hunger strike to be undertaken by Mr. Peter is abandoned in view of the government’s announcement. But the union protested against not announcing permanent ban with a long duration." (Malayala Manorama 7-6-1994)

2. Agitation Against Joint Venture Deep Sea Fishing

The significance of the year 1994, the last year for this study was the participation of fishworkers in Kerala in the first ever national fisheries bandh and agitation organised by the National Fishworkers' Forum, (NFF), a national organisation of fishworkers. The main issue of the agitation was the deep sea fishing policy of the Central government. The agitation was organised at two phases - the one day all India bandh in February and a two-day fisheries bandh in November 1994.

A. The first Phase of the Agitation

The all India bandh called by NFF on 14th February as the first phase of a national agitation was to oppose the policy of the Central Government on deep sea fishing. The deep sea fishing was conceived by the government of India as part of a scheme of the eighth Five Year Plans with the objective of increasing fish production and export of sea food. With the new
economic reforms and licensing policy, the government opened up the sector for multinational companies for joint ventures. Accordingly, the government of India issued seventeen licences and signed memorandum of understanding on three joint ventures with foreign companies.

According to the NFF the joint venture effort at deep sea fishing was harmful to the country. For the foreign vessels would tend to overexploit our marine wealth, and to encroach upon the inshore waters threatening the fishermen and fish resources there. This would lead to depletion of fish. Since the deep sea fishing by foreign vessels went against the interest of the nation and the traditional fishworkers, the NFF, together with over a dozen organisations of fishworkers called National Fisheries Action Committee Against Joint Ventures gave a memorandum to the central government with the following demands:

1. The present policy of investment support to the big business houses and other merchant capitalists should be curbed.
2. The deep sea fishing policy should lead to increased supply of fish for domestic consumption.
3. The government of India should confer suitable legal rights and reserve exclusive fishing zones for small-scale artisanal fishermen at least up to the contiguous zone.
4. Ensure adequate measures for proper resource management to protect our fishery wealth at suitable levels, avoiding overfishing and depletion. (NFF statement 4-2-1994)
As per the announcement of bandh on 4th February 1994 all fishing activities like fishing, fish landing and fish selling were stopped for a day throughout India. Not only the traditional fishworkers but also mechanised boat operators joined the bandh by not going for fishing.

There was a good response to the bandh throughout the country especially in Kerala. The Economic Times gave the following newsreport. "Fisheries harbours were deserted. Fish markets were empty. Wholesale fishmarkets in Bombay, Gujarat, Sealdha, Howrah, Diamond Harbour, Palayam all were empty. The protest evoked 'total' response as all fishermen joined and supported the call made by NFF with various other organisations against giving license to foreign companies for deep sea fishing." (The Economic Times 4-2-1994)

The bandh in Kerala was qualified by the press as 'fishing activities suspended' (The Hindu 5-2-1994) and 'the fisheries bandh total.' (Mathrubhumi 5-2-1994) The description of the event by another English daily was that, "Hundred of fishermen staged protest rallies in front of the secretariat even as the fisheries sector by and large remained paralysed in the state to mark the countrywide fisheries bandh on Friday." It further added that, "both traditional fishermen and the small mechanised boat operators have united in opposing the opening of the deep sea to the foreign or joint plunder." (The Indian Express 5-2-1994)
POSTERS USED FOR THE AGITATION AGAINST
JOINT VENTURE DEEP SEA FISHING

STOP ENTRY OF FOREIGN FISHING VESSELS
NATIONAL FISHERIES ACTION COMMITTEE AGAINST JOINT VENTURES (NFACAJV)

CONTINUING STRUGGLE

COASTAL PEOPLE VOW TO RESIST DESTRUCTION OF LIVES, LIVELIHOOD AND ENVIRONMENT
Several newspapers wrote editorials on the all India bandh. The Kerala Kaumudi (4-2-1994) under the title, 'an extraordinary bandh' said, "It is a quite different all India bandh which takes place today from many others. It is organised by lakhs of fishworkers and their owners in protest against the policy of the government to give license to about 2000 foreign vessels in 'deep sea.' The Mangalam, a Malayalam daily, (4-2-1994) in its editorial under the title, 'don't sell the fisheries sector' wrote, "The government should have a policy which does not destroy Indian seas and which protects the interests of fishermen depending on this sector."

In the meantime the central minister of state for food processing industries denied the charges that joint ventures would adversely affect the traditional fishermen. He also added that only seventeen vessels were employed under the joint ventures. (The Indian Communicator 20-7-1994)

B. Second Phase of the Agitation

As there was no positive response from the central government after the one-day bandh, the National Fisheries Action Committee, the coordinating forum of all fisheries organisations in India including NFF, declared a two-day fisheries strike on 23-24th November 1994 against giving licences to the foreign companies. (Malayala Manorama 6-11-1994)
The two day bandh had a tremendous impact all over India especially in Kerala. The Indian Express (25-11-1994) reported from Delhi, "Fishing activities in nine marine states in the country came to a standstill on Wednesday as fishermen struck work and took out demonstrations to protest against the decision of the central government to issue licences for deep sea fishing to the Indian companies and their multinational collaborators."

In Kerala the two day national coastal strike 'paralysed the fisheries sector.' (Indian Express 24-11-1994) In Trivandrum the district fisheries action committee staged a massive march to the secretariat. Prominent religious and political party leaders including M.Ps and M.L.As addressed the rally. The trading of fish came to a standstill as fish markets remained closed. In the coastal villages rows of country crafts remained idle." (The Hindu 24-11-1994) With a big picture of the demonstration of fishworkers in Trivandrum, Malayala Manorama(24-11-1994) reported that the fishermen created blockade of the secretariat with the surge of tidal waves. "The excitement of old fisherwomen in the rally was a new experience for the city." (ibid.) Deepika, a Malayalam daily, in its editorial article of 3-12-1994 wanted the government "to withdraw its policies and cancel the decisions of ransoming our sea to the foreign capitalists."
There was widespread support from the public for the agitation of the fishworkers against joint venture. The government of Gujarat in a memorandum to the central government wanted the new policy of opening up our economic export zone to foreign companies be withdrawn. The governments of Maharashtra, Kerala and West Bengal also lodged strong protest against joint ventures in the deep sea fishing. (The Times of India 22-9-1994)

The Bishops of all Christian denominations in Kerala asked the central government to withdraw the decision to permit foreign factory ships which would endanger the employment opportunities for lakhs of fishermen. (Malayala Manorama 13-12 1994)

C. Discussion in the Parliament about the deep sea fishing

Though the central government did not give any response to the national level agitation of fishworkers, the issue came up for discussion in both the houses of parliament. The Economic Times (13-12-1994) under the caption 'Furore in the Lok Sabha over deep sea fishing by multinational companies' wrote, "The government faced a volatile Lok Sabha for permitting the multinationals to fish in the deep sea. Cutting across party lines, the members demanded that the licences to the multinational be cancelled immediately and that no fresh licences be given to them. Members from treasury benches supported the opposition. They asked the minister for food processing to make a detailed statement on the issue and assure the house that the interests of the fishermen will be
protected."

Members including opposition leaders like Mr. Atal Bihari Vajpai, Mr. L.K. Advani, Mr. Chandrasekhar, Mrs. Gita Mukherjee, Oscar Fernades and Mamata Banerjee questioned the need of foreign vessels to exploit our seas, while our fishermen and technology were capable of doing so. Mr. Ram Naik, M.P., drawing the attention of the government on the ongoing agitation of the fishermen held that they lost their livelihood due to sophisticated trawlers. (ibid.) In response to the concern of the members about the issue the state minister Mr. Santosh Mohan Dev said, "The government would make a statement in the house on this subject on Tuesday" and he admitted that "the fishermen's agitation was one of the issues in the assembly election of Karnataka where the Congress-I suffered a jolt." (The Indian Communicator 13-12-1994)

As promised by the minister in the Lok Sabha, the government made a statement in which it announced its decision to stop giving license to foreign companies to fish in deep sea. The Indian Express in its editorial of 25-11-1994 wrote, under the caption 'fishermen's protest' about the significance of the fishworkers' strike. "The two-day national strike by fishermen not merely marks their collective protest against the permission granted for joint ventures for deep sea fishing, but, more importantly, drives home the fear that there may now be fewer fish in the sea than ever came out of it. The
resounding success of the strike should make New Delhi rethink its hasty decision to open up our exclusive economic zone for joint ventures in an apparent bid to boost marine exports.

An article in 'the Week' termed the fishworkers' strike as a 'freedom fight.' "The threat of having to share their sources of livelihood with aliens has turned these fisherfolk in Trivandrum a new class of freedom fighters. The threat from the foreign enemy has united the different organisations of fishermen and boat operators in Kerala." (Abraham, The Week, January, 1995) The Pioneer, in its editorial of 8-5-1994 wrote, "A storm has broken over the high seas, with fishermen once again stepping up their agitation against promotion of foreign capital in deep sea fishing."

The fact that NFF which is an organisation of the most unorganised artisanal groups in the country, was able to rally together all the organisations in this sector and to force the central government to change its decisions is not a mean achievement. That the fishworkers' organisations were able to make the joint venture an issue for the election in Karnataka is also very significant. Thus the organisation of NFF was a means of structural change in a big country like India. Since this event is significant for the organisation of fishworkers in India, the researcher chose 1994 as the cut of year for the present study about the fishworkers' movement in Kerala.
Conclusion

The history of the fishworkers' movement in this chapter has covered the study of the growth of KSMTF, the organisation of traditional fishworkers, which spearheaded the movement, its continuous agitations for seventeen years and its impact on the fishworkers and the public. Since the organisation was important for the success of this movement, the history has described how, as a non-party political organisation, evolved itself from district level unions to a state level organisation, and from a federal to unitary organisational structure. It has also described the continuous saga of struggle of one of the most marginal groups in Kerala to protect their livelihood and the fish resources from destructive mechanisation in the fisheries. Since the fishworkers got organised on the issue of mechanised trawling, the agitation to press for the ban on monsoon trawling almost every year was the connecting thread of this web of history. The agitations of 1984, 1985, and 1994 on the joint venture deep sea fishing were the most significant and so were highlighted in details. Through consistent agitations through well planned strategies the fishworkers’ movement succeeded to get various marine regulations especially the ban on monsoon trawling enacted, and thus was able to bring about social change. The history also has shown how the movement received wide support from the public and political parties, and thus emerged as a significant event in the socio-political scenario of Kerala.