CHAPTER VII
EMERGING TRENDS IN
KERALA TRADE UNION MOVEMENT

This chapter tries to discuss the emerging trends in the trade union movement, in the context of rise of environmental awareness in the state of Kerala. A thorough examination of the world environmental movement indicates that there exist a difference between the movements in the North and South. As mentioned in the earlier debates, the movements in north seem to be a post-materialist, post-modern or post-industrialist development. Whereas in the South, they reflect the distribution conflicts over the use of ecological resources needed for livelihood. (Guha, 1997) Nevertheless, the experience from Kerala indicates that the movements in this region have produced the signs of both north and south. For example, the Plachimada agitation was predominantly an ‘environmentalism of the poor’ whereas, the cognitive dimension of the Silent Valley movement, on the other hand, makes it close to movements in the global north. In spite of these differences in the orientation of movements, the environmental activism in Kerala has been constantly in touch with the working class movement. A survey of the contemporary history of working class movement in the light of this conflict, presents three major inclinations viz. the efforts for a blue-green coalition, new trade union initiatives or the process of informalization and finally the efforts for trade union unity.

7.1 Blue-Green Coalition

Brian Mayor at University of Florida presents a case study of blue
green coalition in United States where he noticed a change in the working class behavior towards environmental issues. He observed, “Health issues are increasingly becoming the common ground on which blue green coalitions are developing across the United States. Recognizing that the same toxins that cause workplace hazards escape into surrounding communities has brought workers and environmentalist together to look out for everyone’s protection”(Mayer, 2010). In the midst of apparent clashes of interest between the trade union and environmental movements in Kerala there was also a continuous effort to bridge the perceptual gap between the two movements, which was mainly manifested in the form of an ideological debate for an amalgamation of the divergent interests. This idea was firstly advanced during the period of Silent Valley controversy, in a context where the differences of opinion between the workers of KSEB and the save silent valley activists intensified. M.K. Prasad, C.P. Narayanan, P.Govinda Pillai, M.P .Parameswaran, and E Balanadan were the important leaders who tried to bridge the gap between the blue and Green in Kerala. M.K. Prasad, the then president of KSSP; the main constituent part of save silent valley movement was a man of diplomacy. He maintained a healthy relationship with the trade unions leadership, which enabled him to interact with the working class in Kerala. The seminars, symposia, debates and workshops conducted in connection with the silent valley issue turned to be an ovarian duct for cross-pollination of environmental and trade union movements in Kerala. E. Balanadan, the all India President of CITU and Polit Bureau Member of CPIM was a man of integrity and was always receptive to divergent views. To quote his words, “The Campaign being carried on against silent valley Hydro Electric Project by a section of the science writers of Kerala deserves admiration in the sense
that it has focused public attention on the subject of ecological balance” (Balanadan, 1980). The importance of this comment by E. Balanadan is to be analyzed in the light of self-incriminatory revelations by some of the members of science community that the arguments against Silent Valley Project had no scientific relevance (Nair, 1980).

Marxist thinkers like P. Govindapilla, C.P Narayanan and M.P. Parameswaran deserves special reference as the main agents of this cross-pollination in the evolution of blue green coalition. For the first time in the history of Kerala, they made Marxian ecology a topic of open debate, which raised the level of environmental awareness among the Marxists. The call for a revisit of Marxian ecology received a positive response from the regular members of the party and its mass organizations. Moreover, the Official media of the main stream left produced valuable literature on Marxian ecology. All these led to a significant improvement in the level of environmental awareness among the working class and mainstream left in Kerala, which later culminated in a consolidation within the mainstream left in favor of environment protection. This perceptual change within the mainstream left inspired its leaders to play the lead role in agitations against land encroachment, Endosulfan, Coca Cola, and several others.

The above discussion, however, does not mean a total change in their attitude towards environmentalism. On the other hand, it describes those attempts by a section of green Marxist thinkers to reorient the working class to avoid unnecessary conflicts with the environmental movements. The mainstream stream left, which is still under the strong influence of organized trade union movement, seems to be reluctant to accept the environmental
movements in the complete sense. There are efforts to admit the importance of environmental issues but not at the cost of working class. The political document approved by the 18th party Congress of CPIM vindicates this attitude. It reads, “The problems of deforestation, soil erosion, pollution of air and water resources are all contributing to the degradation of the environment with resultant adverse effect on the well being of the people. Government policy on environment often takes the wrong direction because it is not based on a people oriented development framework, which integrates environmental concerns. Instead of targeting the tribal and forest communities, the government has to act against the contractors and their patrons who are primarily responsible for the destruction of forest cover. Strict control must be exercised against industrial units using hazardous technology, which affects the health of workers and the neighborhood, rather than indiscriminately closing down factories in cities throwing out lakhs of workers from their jobs.” (Political document, CPIM).

In short, there is an element of disagreement among the mainstream left with regard to Blue-Green Coalition. The trade union movement in the organized sector seems to be less interested in the process of cross movement pollination, which reinforces the criticism that Marxism is ‘promethean, proto-technical and anti ecological’. The history of blue-green conflict in Mavoor strongly substantiates this viewpoint. The mainstream left in Kerala and its mass organizations found themselves indentified with the capitalist style of production with an inherent propensity to exploit natural resources. There are mainly two arguments explaining this situation. Firstly, it is attributed to that unholy relationship between the working class and bourgeoisie. To quote
Ram Mohan, “the trade union Bourgeoisie is comprador in character, its role as a Labour contractor has already been mentioned. It colludes with the bourgeoisie in several ways. Kerala’s recent labor history is replete with several instances of trade union bourgeoisie engineering strikes as a weapon of extortion, withdrawing strikes when its demands rather than the workers’ demands are met. It connives with the bourgeoisie and often encourages workers to accept voluntary retirement and even allow the close down of factories, collusion with the bourgeoisie often takes the form of being partners in outright anti social deeds”( Mohan, 1998).

The second argument describes the ideological limitation of the Marxist to acknowledge environmental activism. To quote Ramachandra Guha “Despite the importance of such conflicts(ecological), and the robust Marxian intellectual traditions of studying and explaining social conflicts, an ecological Marxism has scarcely existed………. With exceptions such as Raymond Williams, most Marxist chose to interpret environmentalism as frivolous upper-class fad. They only considered the environmentalism of the IUCN, the WWF and the Sierra Club. Some Marxist thought that environmentalism was a dangerous, romantic anti –industrial trend; for instance, they wrongly identified the German Greens with the ideology of Blut und Boden (blood and soil). Southern Marxist rejected environmentalist critiques because they thought it was a Western ploy to keep the third world underdeveloped. They implicitly accepted the thesis, which attributes environmentalism to prosperity. They could sometimes understand the struggles against the effluents of affluence, but they certainly did not understand the environmentalism of the poor.” (Guha, 1997). This
observation seems to be a reality in the context of blue green conflict in Kerala. The organized resistance against environmental activists in Eloor Edayar Industrial area in Ernakulum District, with the open support of the mainstream left tends to establish this ideological limitation.

Nevertheless, the green Marxist elements within the mainstream left have succeeded to cause a rethinking of official policy towards environmental issues. This has mainly resulted in a growing realization that the victims of environmental disaster in the third world mainly belong to the downtrodden classes. The political document adopted by the 19th Party Congress of CPIM became a turning point in the history of Blue- Green coalition. It endorsed the arguments raised by the environmental movements in different parts of the country particularly those in Mavoor and Plachimada. The sub title of the CPIM document ‘environmental issues’ reads,

“Environmental problems in India have been worsening and are reaching crisis proportions in several areas, with serious impact on livelihood, living conditions and health of the people, especially the poor and marginalized sections. These problems have been exacerbated by the policies of liberalization and globalization, by commercialization of common resources, and by the failure of government to regulate these sectors under pressure from MNCs, Indian Corporate and other vested interests. Huge tracts of forests lands are being diverted for mining, industries or commercial plantation at the expense of both the environment and livelihoods of tribals and other traditional forest dwellers. Water resources are being severely depleted due to overexploitation, contamination and release of untreated industrial waste and urban sewage. Ground water reserves are particularly
threatened by unregulated water mining for industries, for privatized tanker supply in urban areas and for the bottled water and aerated beverages industry, squeezing out both small farmers and the urban poor.” (Political document. CPIM)

7.2 New Trade Union Initiatives

The workforce in the traditional and unorganized sectors seems to be the most affected sections of people in the process of development exercise carried out with the active support of the capitalists, whether Indian or foreign. Their condition became more vulnerable with the economic reforms, which began in 1991. There were expectations that the new reforms would bring higher growth in industrial production and greater employment opportunities. However, the process of ‘shedding the load of surplus workers’ and ‘the provisions of labor flexibility’ have resulted in a reduction of workforce in the organized sector. On the other hand there is an increase in the size of labor force in the unorganized sector. (About 93 per cent of the total workforce) Contrary to the increase in the strength of workforce in the unorganized sector, these workers are asked to accept humiliating conditions of work. The damages on environment caused by the corporate business strategies had negative impact on the life of thousands of traditional workers. The traditional trade union movement with its inherent limitation of being confined to organized sector, paid little attention to these new issues. The unwillingness of organized trade union movement to address the problems of traditional and unorganized sectors thus resulted in the formation of informal trade unions across the country. The new trade union initiative seems to be more receptive to the environmental issues.
7.2.1 Gwalior Rayons Organization of Workers (GROW)

The formation of GROW union was a reaction against the institutionalization of trade union movement in Mavoor. Despite repeated agitations, the workers in Mavoor failed to get even a minor part of their grievances redressed. In spite of their repeated demands to abolish the contract system, it continued. “The Mavoor worker found himself caught in a very unenviable position- between an unbending employer and a degenerate trade union leadership. As collective frustration with the leadership mounted, the more class conscious sections of the workers joined together to form a new workers union, the Gwalior Rayons Organization of Workers (GROW)” (Mohan, 1988). Thus GROW union seems to represent those frustrated and underprivileged sections of workers in Grasim Industries. It originated as a union of reserve workers - the victims of contract system. It had also represented those workers who found it extremely difficult to co-operate with the traditional trade union leadership. They had an ambition to revive the past glory trade union movement in Kerala. Ecological concerns tend to shape the perceptual gap between these two the trade union movements- old and new.

A Vasu, a former naxalite seems to be the prime force behind the eco friendly views of this new trade union. One of the national dailies in Kerala published a story about A Vasu, which seems to be relevant in the context of blue green conflicts in Kerala. The story is about his attachment to pet animals, which relive the loneliness of his bachelorhood. He had to part with many of his pet animals because of his heartless neighbors. The latest story was about his red squirrel, which was treated badly by his erstwhile ideological brethren. The news report reads,
“Vasu is appalled by the heartless manner in which some men treat animals. His pet red squirrel had one day strayed into the office of the CPIM next door. The young men there became so annoyed that they beat him up. Vasu found the squirrel a day later unconscious but much to his relief, still alive. ‘I nursed him back to health’. Said a beaming Vasu patting the squirrel on his back. His dreams of staging a revolution may have turned sour but in him the milk of human kindness has not dried up” (The Hindu, 1996). If not an exaggeration, this story indicates the perceptual gap between the mainstream left and the revisited Green Marxist tradition.

Vasu, who was in the forefront of the naxalite movement when it was in full swing in Wayanad, belongs to that class. He was jailed for seven years for attacking a police station at Thalassery. After the revolution failed, he became a part of the process of informalization in Kerala trade union movement, a reaction against the degenerated, institutionalized trade unionism in the state of Kerala. He was instrumental in organizing the working class in the unorganized sector.

In this study, A. Vasu and his trade union GROW presents a typical case of Blue-Green Coalition in Kerala, which could also be interpreted as a case of Red-Green Coalition. Before the formation of GROW union, Vasu had paid several visits to Vazhakkad along with a group of student activists from Calicut to extend support to Chaliyar movement. He could easily understand the environmental issues mainly because of his green Marxist perceptions, which he perceived during his early years of life. He made an unsuccessful effort to teach his men to look at the entire issues related to Grasim Industries, from a green Marxist perspective. He analyses the
environmental issues as a byproduct of capitalist style of development. Until and unless the mainstream left changes its capitalist perception on development, there is no redemption for mainstream trade unions. With the present perceptions, the trade union movement would never develop into a driving force in the society (Bappu, 2011).

It was in this circumstances, Vasu decided to invite the leaders of Chaliyar movement to the inaugural meeting of the GROW union, which became the first incident of Blue-Green Coalition in Kerala. This meeting provided the leaders of the two movements an opportunity to exchange their views. This happened mainly because of the realization that the environmental activists and the working class have a common identity. GROW rejected the idea of dividing the victims into workers and environmental activists. It was with the formation of GROW union many of the environmental activist who attained the freedom to move freely in Mavoor town. The labor movement in Mavoor was strong enough to ‘manage’ any kind of uprising against its collective interest. Chandran Mundumuzhi, a leader of Chaliyar Movement has revealed that it was the bold decision taken by GROW union to acknowledge the Chaliyar movement that actually changed the history of environmental activism in Mavoor. As a reciprocal response to this acknowledgement, the Chaliyar movement extended support to GROW in its historical against the unending closure of the factory due to labor strike (Vasu, 2011).

In short, the GROW union in Mavoor was a bridging factor in between the environmental and trade union movements. It tried to reduce the perceptional gap between the two movements. However, this effort failed to
produce any permanent change in the relationship between the two movements, mainly because of the non-involvement of mainstream trade unions, which were not ready to acknowledge either of the movements. The traditional leftist unions seemed reluctant to conceive those green Marxist perceptions. The condition of GROW union was also more or less same. Majority of its ordinary members found it difficult to take up the philosophy of the union. Moieen Bappu, second prominent leader of the GROW union, with a spiritual background, could hardly understand Marxian ecology. He was a great humanist with an inherent aversion to materialism. GROW, thus remained as an umbrella organization of frustrated workers (Ibid).

7.2.2 CEZ Workers Union (CWU)

There are mainly two reasons behind the formation of CWU in the Special Economic Zone, at Kakkanad in Ernakulum district. Firstly, it reflects the response of the working class towards the degenerated type of trade union leadership in Kerala. Secondly, it exposes the unwillingness of the organized trade union movements to represent the unorganized sector. A trade union formed by ultra leftist, CWU has a different story, when compared to other mainstream trade unions. As the ultra leftist found it difficult to run the new trade union, they decided to hand over it to Purushan Eloor, an environmental activist working in Eloor-Edayar Industrial belt. The election of Purushan Eloor as the leader of CWU became a milestone in the history of trade union movement in Kerala. He organized CWU units in six industrial units in Kakkanad Special Economic Zone with a total membership of about 500 workers. His main contribution was in the field of blue-green Coalition. The union took upon the responsibility to act as a watchdog against industrial
pollution. The members of the union have played an active role in various movements against industrial pollution in Eloor Edayar industrial belt. Rather than an association of workers for economic benefits, he found the trade union activity for raising the standard of general awareness of the working class. He believed that this would augment the bargaining power of the working class. He always insisted on a positive approach and called for a pro-active involvement in the public life. In short, the CWU presents a new trade union culture with an unprecedented commitment on sustainable development.

Nevertheless, the CWU experiment is on a verge of a collapse. The developments in the last couple of years indicate that the survival of an informal association of workers like CWU is difficult to succeed, particularly when it is set against the dominant trade union culture. Purushan Eloor, the leader of the new trade union initiative at Kakkanad is of the opinion that the management, traditional trade union leadership and the attitude of the working class are equally responsible for the decline of CWU. He described the present crisis in CWU with the help of an incident at Safe Shield industries where the working class succumbed to economism. The members of CWU voted for a special allowance as an alternative proposal for a daycare center, which was a pending demand for the last ten years. The workers opted for monetary benefits rather than permanent facilities for the welfare of female workers. This incident finally culminated in the dissolution of CWU at Safe field Industries. Purushan Eloor is of the opinion that the dominant culture is so strong to make any positive change in the present system. In another case, the management of Steris Farm actively involved in the
formation of a traditional union to resist the new trade union initiatives. Purushan Eloor is of the opinion that a change in the present system is extremely difficult. His decision to affiliate with AITUC seems to be a sign of retreat (Purushan, 2011).

7.2.3 Kerala Swathantra Matsya Thozhilali Federation (KSMTF)

As the largest informal trade union movement in Kerala, the KSMTF deserves special reference, the formation of which is generally attributed to two factors; the negative impact of globalization on coastal Kerala and the failure of mainstream left to take up the problems of fishermen community as a special case. The policy of liberalization became a heavy blow to the traditional fish workers in Kerala. It allowed license to foreign Fishing factory Vessels for fishing activities in the Indian sea. The so-called development projects in the coastal Kerala have resulted in severe environmental issues. Illegal sand mining, construction works and dumping of urban waste into the sea were the main issues, which induced the fish workers to form a new platform. KSMTF is a community trade union in the sense it doest believe in the tradition idea on membership. It represents the interest of entire fishing community, which include even who do not go for fishing. Hence, the federation moves as a cross section of the entire coastal population, which includes all age groups. Some of the environmental issues taken up by the union are:

7.2.3.1 Trawl Agitations

An effective scientific control over trolling has been a long cherished demand of the traditional fish workers in Kerala. The expansion of bottom trawling in the seventies led to widespread protest by traditional fish workers
across the coastal line. The issue of trawling became more severe with the introduction of the policy of liberalization, which allowed mechanized vessels to engage in indiscriminate fish harvesting with an adverse effect on the stock of marine wealth. The government of Kerala had taken a decision to impose customary ban on trawling for a period 45 days during the monsoon season, which against a demand for trawling for a period of 100 days. Moreover, there was an alleged conspiracy between the government of Kerala and mechanized trawl boat owners association for an illegal trawling during the ban period. The KSMTF organized strong protest against this, which include militant action against the trawl boats.

7.2.3.2 Agitation Against Illegal Sand Mining

In 2008, when the illegal sand mining became an environmental issue in the coastal area in Thiruvanathapuram district, the federation started agitations against it, which led to a ban on sand mining in the area. Because of the support of traditional trade unions, the workers engaged in sand mining could organize an attack on fish workers, which led to an open conflict within the working class movement. The federation reacted to the attack on fish workers in a democratic manner. They organized a march to the state secretariat demanding immediate action against the culprits. Several hundred people belonging to angler community shouted slogans against the established trade unions and political parties in Kerala. This march finally succeeded to take action against the culprits.

Similar agitations were held in several other parts of the state. For example, the federation registered a protest against the decision of the Pattanakkad Grama Panchayath in Alappuzha district to issue license for sand
mining in the coastal area for the promotion of agricultural activities. The Federation started a campaign against the sand mining with a focus on its impact on coastal eco system. The federation has also organized an agitation against the Pallithara Clay Factory, which caused pollution in the coastal area.

7.2.3.3 Protest Against CRZ Notification 2011

The fishing community in Kerala has rejected the Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) Notification 2011 mainly for two main reasons. Firstly, it does not recognize the inalienable rights of fishing communities to their habitats. Secondly, it does not offer adequate protection to the coastal eco system. (Ravindran Nair, 2011). The KSMTF demands for an independent enactment on coastal zone regulation to project the rights and interest of fishermen and coastal communities(Peter,2011).

7.3 The Call for Unity

“The central part of our activity in the trade unions is directed towards uniting the working class, through growing trade union unity. All the talks of equipping the working class to play this historic role, leading people, is meaningless if the class does not get growingly united for its economic demands”(CPIM document on Trade Unions, 2002). The disastrous impact of neo-liberal policies and the rise of environmental awareness seem to be the two parallel forces spearheading the process of working class unity in the contemporary Kerala Society. The following discussion intends to facilitate a comparative analysis of these two parallels.

The post independence history of trade union unity, which started in 1980’s, was a protest against the liberal policies of Rajiv Gandhi Government.
The working class movement formed a Campaign Committee of Trade Unions for a joint struggle against the anti labor policies of this government, which was followed by the formation of a Committee of Public Sector Trade Unions (CPSTU). The LPG reforms introduced in 1991 further deteriorated the conditions of Indian working class leading to the formation of Sponsoring Committee of trade unions with all central trade unions except INTUC and BMS. The sponsoring committee launched its first All India Strike against the LPG reforms in 1991. In addition to this, a national Platform of Mass Organizations was formed for mobilizing public support in favor of the agitations. The trade union sponsoring committee could organize 12 all India strikes against anti labor policies of both NDA and UPA governments during the period 1991-2008. These strikes registered a remarkable growth in the number of participants (Habeeb, 2011).

Table 7.3.1: Details of All India Strike organized during 1991-2008 period

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl No</th>
<th>Date and Year of Strike</th>
<th>Participation of Workers</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>29 November 1991</td>
<td>1 crore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>16 June 1992</td>
<td>1.5 crore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>9 September 1993</td>
<td>2.5 crore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>29 September 1994</td>
<td>2.5 crore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>11 December 1998</td>
<td>2.5 crore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>11 May 2000</td>
<td>2.5 crore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>16 April 2002</td>
<td>Data not available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>21 May 2003</td>
<td>3.5 crore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>24 February 2004</td>
<td>4 crore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>25 September 2005</td>
<td>6.5 crore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>11 December 2006</td>
<td>6.5 crore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>20 August 2008</td>
<td>6.5 crore</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Data collected from CITU state Committee office, Thiruvananthapuram
The all India strike held in 2002 became a turning point in the history of trade union unity in India because of the participation of INTUC. The BMS, which abstained from the All India Strike, organized a separate rally against the policies of NDA government. The efforts for trade union unity by the CPSTU deserves appreciation in the sense that all major trade unions including INTUC and BMS have played an important role in fighting onslaughts against the Public Sector Undertakings in India. The unification work is active in sectors like insurance, post, telecom, Banking, coalmines and in State government departments. Because of the political party trade union nexus in Kerala, none of these strikes produces any remarkable achievement in relation to working class unity. The INTUC in Kerala seems to be reluctant to launch a joint action against the neo liberal policies of the central government mainly because of its political commitments. Nevertheless, the trade unions in Kerala, particularly in the organized industrial sector, have been treading a different path of unity ever since the birth of environmental activism in the state of Kerala. It is a joint movement to protect the industries in Kerala from the so-called eco–fundamentalism (Ibid).

7.3.1 Environmentalism and Working Class Unity in Mavoor

The enthusiasm shown by the working class in Mavoor irrespective of their political affiliation, to bury the issue of fish death, seems to be the first sign of working class unity in Kerala set against environmental activism. The realization that the environmental activism would lead to the closure of the factory and retrenchment of the working class, forced trade unions to launch a collective campaign against the so-called eco fundamentalism. In the process
of this campaign, the working class in Mavoor tends to achieve class unity overcoming sectarian barriers built by variables like party affiliation, caste, religion or place of birth. It was this unity of the working class, which marginalized the environmental activism in Mavoor for nearly three decades. The information collected from the field indicates that there was a kind of militant resistance against the environmental movement. This continued until the formation of GROW union in 1980’s, which was committed to blue green coalition.

The trade unions in Mavoor organized a collective move against the findings of the health survey conducted by Vazhakkad Panchayath in 1994, which revealed that 199 persons had died of cancer in the five years prior to the survey. It also exposed that there was a high rate of morbidity in the Panchayath area. The trade union movement on the other hand found it as a conspiracy against the factory and the working class, which finally resulted in a class consolidation. The trade unions reacted to the survey result with a counter propaganda that the increase in the number of cancer deceases was due to the use of pesticides in the agricultural farms. In this connection, they convened a press meeting and briefed the media that the survey was a planned movement against the interest of the working class(Manorama,1999).

The unions in Mavoor had also made a joint movement against the Kerala State Pollution Control board (KSPCB) for allowing the factory to discharge effluents into the river Chaliyar, which was in the context of a chemical report that the pollution from Grasim industries was within the permissible limits. A team of union leaders representing the mainstream organizations paid a visit to state capital as part of lobbying against the
Since it was an all-union movement, they could brief a large number of decision makers including the Chief Minister, Minister for Industry, Minister for Health, Minister Labor, opposition leaders etc (Malayala Manorama, 1996).

Another landmark in the history of class unity in Mavoor was the creation of a Human Chain by the workers and their relatives. This was a unique experience in the sense that people from divergent groups, turned to be part in the human chain, a final struggle to protect Grasim Industries from those anti labor forces. It received massive support from the mainstream political parties like CPIM, INC, Muslim League, BJP and CPI. A galaxy of leaders closely associated with working class movement in Kerala turned up. In spite of the differences in political affiliations, the trade unions like CITU, INTUC, STU, AITUC and BMS came together to mobilize a strong public opinion in favor of the industry (Manorama, 1997).

7.3.2 The Working Class Unity in Plachimada

As a case of environmental activism set against industrial establishments, the Plachimada agitation seems to be a failure in strengthening class unity in the region, except in a few isolated situations. This exceptional behavior of working class is mainly attributed to two reasons. Firstly, out of the total (approximately 500) labor force in Plachimada, one third belonged to the category of permanent staff who could be transferred to other plants/units conveniently. These permanent staff of Coca Cola Company did not join either of the trade unions. They always remained as a part of the management. The remaining workers, relatively
small in number, belonged to the class of contract laborers of which majority of them were underemployed. The trade unionism in Plachimada presents a case of informalization with fragile organizational framework. Hence, the so-called working class in Plachimada succumbed to the environmental activism without treading a path of resistance. Secondly, the unexpected twist in the Plachimada agitation into a struggle against MNCs, in turn, marginalized the working class movement. The mainstream left in Kerala, the driving force behind the working class movement in Mavoor found to be a part in the anti-MNC agitation in Plachimada. This shift in the attitude of left towards the environmental activism seems to influence the working class unity in Plachimada.

In spite of these limitations, the environmental activism in Plachimada had an impact on class unity particularly during the initial period of the agitations. There were three major trade unions in Plachimada with affiliation to Indian national Congress, Communist Party of India (Marxist) and Janatha Dal (Secular), which were the prominent political parties in the region. As a reaction to the agitations against the factory, the trade unions in Plachimada collectively organized a few counter movements. However, this resistance by the industrial workers in Plachimada did not produce any noteworthy results as the mass movement against the forces of Globalization submerged their voice.

Here it is to be mentioned that the Plachimada agitation seems to spearhead class unity among the traditional workers. Most of the victims of ecological disaster in Plachimada were traditional workers. The environmental activism in the area tends to strengthen their unity. Bringing
unity among the most underprivileged sections of workers in the state, the Plachimada agitation provided them an opportunity to take part in the struggle against globalization (Unnithan, 2011).

7.3.3 The Working Class Unity in Eloor- Edayar Area

The agitation organized by Periyar Malinnekarana Virudha Samithi (PMVS) against industrial pollution has resulted in an unparalleled unity among the trade unions in this area. They have formed a standing council of trade unions to save the working class from the so called ‘eco fundamentalism’. They have organized several programmes against the PMVS, which includes a human chain on 24 October 2012. The presence of Ministers, elected office bearers of local self-government institutions and the leaders of all most all mainstream political parties seems to make it a state sponsored programme. Strengthened by the anti ‘eco fundamentalist’ feelings, the organized working class movement in Kerala seems to be intolerant to the environmental activism.

7.4 Social Movement Unionism

The shift from the class content to the non-class content of workers struggle has a strong tendency to transform the nature of old working class movements into worker’s new social movements. Social movement unionism calls for widespread support from workers in various industries to work in solidarity with community groups and other movements and to engage them in alliance in an overall struggle for justice. It recognizes the importance of drawing third parties into the trade union movement. Thus, it provides a large role for students, youths and other activists in the working class.
movement. The social movement unionism thus forges a multi class and multi identity coalition.

The best example for social movement unionism in Kerala was the final phase of the struggle by the workers at Grasim Industries, Mavoor; a struggle to save the working class from miseries caused by the unending closure (1985-89) of the factory due to labor dispute. When 13 workers committed suicide due to unemployment, the working class movement in Mavoor slowly transformed into a social movement which was unheard in the hitherto history of working class movement in Kerala. This stage of the strike saw the withdrawal of traditional trade unions from the forefront of the struggle. Gwalior Rayons Organization of Workers (GROW) an informal and independent trade union led by A. Vasu a former naxalite emerged as the leading organization of the working class.

“The civil rights movement would not have been successful if a significant number of non-blacks had not worked in solidarity with African Americans” (Carty, 2006). The indefinite hunger strike by A. Vasu and Moieen Bappu highlighted the severity of the problem and served as a “pull factor” in this movement (Walsh, 1981). The hunger strike was able to draw other individuals and organizations into the movement. The Strike Aid Committees (SAC) were constituted in different parts of the state with a variety of organizations. In Calicut, organizations like CRC (ML), the CPI (ML), Lohia Vichar Vedi, Gandhi Yuvak Mandal and Bodhana, the socialist feminist organization led by a former naxalite leader K. Ajitha played the key role. Though the leadership of mainstream political parties and trade unions in the state abstained from this movement, its regular members became a part
of it. This was an unusual development in Kerala as it cut across the conventional trade union bases and appealed to the general psyche of the public. People who never supported a union and who were resistant to the idea of collective bargaining were on the support line. Social activist like Justice V. R. Krishna Ayer, George Fernandez, K.P.R. Gopalan, S.E.S. Menon and P. Balagandara Menon came forward to help the workforce in Mavoor. The efforts of V.R Krishna Iyer, a retired judge from Supreme Court of India and a prominent social activists deserves section mention particularly for his activities in connection with the formation of strike aid committee in Ernakulum area. Seventeen leading artists, writers and academicians issued a joint statement calling up on the public to postpone all literary and cultural functions and celebration in Calicut until the withdrawal of the hunger strike. Bodhana, the feminist organization led by a former naxalite, K. Ajitha mobilized the women and children, dependents of Mavoor workers, and observed a mass Solidarity fast at the closed factory gate. Meanwhile the activists of Bodhana disrupted a flower show, organized by the Rotary Club of Calicut. As days passed the physical conditions of the fasting leaders deteriorated. On 3 February 1988, police arrested the leaders and after registering a case for attempt to commit suicide, removed them to hospital. Though the police carried out the arrest at night, the news spread like a wildfire and thousands of workers and their family members swarmed the hospital where the leaders were admitted. In the next day of the arrest, the people of Kozhikode expressed solidarity with fasting leaders by observing a hartal. People all over the state staged similar kinds of protests (Vasu, 2011).

The role of students and youths in the movement deserves special reference. The call by the students Action Council to boycott classes on 10
February 1988 evoked enthusiastic response. The members of *Keraleeya Yuvajana Vedi* and *Yuvajana Vedi*, (pro naxalite youth organizations) expressed their solidarity by observing hunger strikes at the district capitals. On 18 February 1988, the five districts in northern Kerala (Kazargode, Kannur, Wayanad, Kozhikode and Malappuram) observed a bandh in which the public life came to a standstill. In spite of the fact that the working class struggle met with complete failure, the new strategy of social movement unionism in Mavoor finally succeeded to save the workers from a complete devastation. Similar movements have become common across the state particularly in traditional sectors (Manorama, 1988).

These discussions in the preceding chapters end up with some findings and conclusions. Moreover, it also presents some suggestions for future study and research. The next chapter presents the final conclusion of this study.

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