CHAPTER II

TRADE UNION MOVEMENT IN KERALA:
TRENDS AND DEVELOPMENTS

Since the trade unionism in Kerala forms a part of national and international labor movements, any effort to study its origin, development and characteristic features would begin with a reference to those national and international developments, which induced the workers of Kerala to form associations for collective bargaining. Nevertheless, the movement in this state is unique for the way it influences the making of Kerala history. Its role in Kerala’s industrial development creates a mixed response. On the one side, it receives appreciation for a tremendous improvement in the physical quality of the life of working classes. At the same time there are strong reservations regarding the militant behavior of the workers. Critics argue that labor militancy is the main reason for the industrial backwardness of the state. The present chapter is an attempt to understand the working class movement in Kerala with a special focus on its unique characteristic features. The chapter is widely divided into two parts. The first part presents a brief introduction to the idea and evolution of trade unionism whereas the second part discusses the major trends and developments in the working class movement.

2.1 Introduction to Trade Unionism

The industrial revolution caused a number of structural changes in human relations. In the field of production, it completely changed the economic relationships that had existed in an agricultural civilization. The
change in the production technique gradually culminated in the divorce between labour and capital. In addition to the working class, a new class of entrepreneurs also emerged along with the process of commercialization. The new polarization in the field of production during the period of industrial revolution induced the workers to organize associations for the purpose of maintaining or improving the condition of their working lives. The organizations of workers, formed in a particular trade or profession, to represent their interests and deal, as a group with employers are called trade unions (Webbs, 1965).

The first person who wrote about trade unionism was Karl Marx. To him labor organizations are organized for resistance against capitalist oppression and exploitation. The birth of working class slowly led to the emergence of trade unions. Marx found labor organizations as an instrument to protect workers from capitalist injustice such as unemployment, low wages or long hours of work and ultimately to abolish the system of wage slavery. Marx says "the political movement of the working class naturally has its final aim the conquest of political power ... for this a previous organization of the working class is naturally necessary, which grows out of its economic force themselves" (Losovsky, 1942). Obviously, Marx did not consider trade unions from a purely economic angle. He considered them as instruments for larger political struggle.

Contrary to Marx's view, Lenin observed "trade union activity as an infantile disease of the working class and the faster they are cured of it the sooner they will reach adolescence and revolutionary maturity" (Macrids, 1980). He believed that workers bargaining with capitalist through their trade
unions would compel them to pay attention to improve their wages and them 'economists'. George Bernard Shaw had also held more or less same view. In his work 'Intelligent woman's guide to socialism etc' he said "trade unionists have no objection to the continuance of the capitalists method in industry, provided that labor gets the Lion's share"(Subramannian,1967).

The neo-classical approach treats the trade unions as an offspring of Industrial revolution. They used to reject the argument of Karl Marx that the trade unions emerged in response to Capitalism. The Neo-Classical thinkers like Clark Kerr, John Dunlop, Harrison and Myers hold more or less the same view. In 1960, Clark held that "industrialization everywhere creates organizations of workers, but they differ from widely in their function, structure, leadership and ideology"(Kerr,1960). Instead of international homogeneity theory of the classical thinkers, he stressed on the heterogeneous nature of international trade union movement. As a result, they observed five type of trade unions in the world namely-dynastic type, middle class type, revolutionary intellectual type, colonial type and finally the nationalist type.

While the dynastic type trade unions like to limit the union activity at the plant level middle class type seeks to expand the union activities among the people of 'job control'. The latter also prefers the regulations on management at the local and industry level. The revolutionary intellectual type considers the workers as a 'dependent class'. Here the trade union functions as the 'agents of the government' and 'instruments of party'. The colonial type union tries to organize indigenous workers and participates in the freedom struggles against the colonial forces. Finally, the nationalist type trade unions stand for patriotism and national development. Here nationalism
is the guiding principle and the union offers worker's support in the industrial growth.

Based on the British experience, Sidney Webb and Beatrice Webb, famed historians of the British labor movement, jointly developed their theory on trade unionism. Webbs defined trade unions as "a continuous association of wage earners for the purpose of maintaining or improving the conditions of their working lives" (Webbs, 1965). Webbs argued that industrialization caused the divorce between labor and capital, which in turn resulted in the emergence of working class, and hence trade unions. To them the trade unions seek to protect the workers from the evil consequences of industrial competition. Among Webb's contributions to the labor movement, the concept of industrial democracy deserves primary importance. In their book, 'Industrial Democracy' Webbs explains the emergence of trade unions and its functional aspect, collective bargaining as the democratization of industry. Moreover, the emergence of the concept of collective bargaining opened a new chapter of functional analysis in the history of labor-management relations.

As per the provisions of the Indian trade Union Act, 1926 a trade union is defined as “any combination, whether temporary or permanent, formed primarily for the function of regulating the relation (a) between workers and employers, or (b) between workers and workers, or (c) between employers and employers or for restrictive conditions on conduct of any trade or business. It includes any federation of two or more trade unions” (Trade Union Act, 1926)

2.2 Trade Unionism in India

The waves of industrial revolution reached India, only in the second
half of the 19th century with the expansion of Jute and Cotton textile industries. The first cotton mill in India was established in 1851 at Bombay and the first Jute Mill in 1855 in Bengal. To some extent, like in the case of western experiences, the industrialization resulted in the structural changes of Indian Society. The new class of workers migrated from Indian villages, were compelled to live in the midst of problems. Fortunately, contrary to the colonial policy of British masters, the Secretary of States appointed a Commission to study the evils of factory system of production in India. Based on the report submitted by this commission, the government of India passed the Factories Act 1881, which was the first step towards Labor Legislation in India (Mathur, 1964).

The organizational history of Indian trade union movement started with the Bombay Workers Conference held in 1853. Narayan Meghaji Lokhandey, a social worker, was the main organizer of this first workers conference in India. It succeeded to adopt a petition demanding weekly rest, compensation for disablement and regular payment of monthly wages. Over 5000 workers, a cross section of Bombay working class turned up to sign the petition. When the representatives of the workers finally presented this petition to the commissioner of factories, it became the first incident of collective bargaining in the history of Indian labour movement (Karnik, 1966).

Later in 1864, Lokhandey himself organized Bombay Mill Hands Association, the first trade union in India. Though the association was organized for workers, it worked just like an organization for social welfare. It had limited qualities of a professional trade union and served the social cause instead. During the next few decades similar type of associations were
organized. The Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants of India and Burma (1897), Working Men's Institution, Calcutta (1905), Printers Union, Calcutta (1905), Postal Union, Bombay (1907) etc were the main worker's organizations of that time (Ibid).

The outbreak of First World War in turn resulted in the rapid growth of Indian industries. The increase in the demand for products caused more production and simultaneously more profits. Nevertheless, the wages remained more or less constant and due to the rise in the price level, the economic condition of the workers deteriorated day by day. It was in this crisis stage, B.P. Wadia, an associate of Annie Besant organized the Madras Labor Union (1919), which is regarded as the first modern type trade union in India (Arya, 1985).

In 1920, the first national organization of trade unions - All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) came into existence. Though this event had helped the trade union movement to co-ordinate its nationwide activities, it in turn resulted in the institutionalization of Indian labor movement. The decades to come witnessed a process of crystallization leading to inter-union and intra-union rivalries. For instance, as an impact of the conflicts inside Indian National Congress, the Nagpur session of the AITUC (1929) end up in controversy. The moderate group walked out of the AITUC finding it impossible to accept the new policies, which were forced up on the organization by leaders who were pro-communist. This finally resulted in the formation of Indian Trade Union Federation (Later National Trade Union Federation), a new central organization of trade unions for the moderates. Later in 1931, the communists had also formed their own central organization
viz. Red Trade Union Congress. Nevertheless, these two central organizations did not last for a long period. By the end of 1930’s, once again, AITUC became the sole representative of Indian trade union movement(Karnik,1966).

The outbreak of Second World War created confusion within the national movement with an impact on trade union activities. The communists under the leadership of M.N. Roy used to explain the war as an antifascist one and decided to support Great Britain and its allies. They also formed a new national organization of trade unions -the Indian Federation of Labour. Moreover, they carried out nationwide propaganda in favor of Great Britain. Whereas, Indian National Congress launched famous Quit India Struggle against British colonialism. The difference of opinion between the nationalist and communist over the nature of Second World War gradually led to a vertical divide in Indian Labour Movement. Meanwhile the Delhi session (1947) of Indian National Congress decided to constitute a national organization of trade unions purely on congress line. As a result, the INTUC came in to the scene, which in turn resulted in a nationwide split of the Indian labour movement. The post independence period witnessed further divisions in the movement. This finally resulted in the formation of new central trade union organizations like Hind Mazdoor Panchayath (HMP), Bharathiya Mazdoor Sangh (BMS), Center of Indian Trade Unions (CITU), the Trade Union Co-ordination Center (TUCC), United Trade union Centre (UTUC), National Federation of Indian Trade Unions (NFITU), National Trade Union Initiative (NTUI) etc (Ibid).

The post independence decades witnessed a series of labour legislations. However, it was the Trade Union Act 1926, which for the first
time, recognized the right of workers to organize in trade unions for collective bargaining. The Industrial Disputes Act of 1947 was the main enactment of the post-independence period. The Act gave the power to the Government to refer disputes for adjudication to Industrial Courts. In addition, the act provided a permanent machinery of conciliation and adjudication. The other important legislations of this period were the Coal Mines Provident Fund and Bonus Schemes Act of 1948, the Coal Mines Labour Welfare Fund Act of 1947, Dock Workers Act of 1948, Employees State Insurance Act of 1948, Minimum Wages act of 1948, and Factories Act of 1948. In the fifties there were six labour Legislation Acts. Of these, the Employees Provident Fund and Family Pension Fund Act (1952) and Industrial Disputes (Banking Companies) Decision Act (1955) were more important. The sixties saw six major enactments viz., Payment of Bonus Act of 1965, the Maternity Benefit Act (1961) and the Personal Injuries (Compensation Insurance) Act of 1963. Industrial Disputes Act, Factories Act, Dockworkers Act, and Minimum Wages Act. "If these are spinal cord of labour legislation, its medulla oblongata is the Trade Union Act of 1926"(Pande,1974).

2.3 Trade Unionism in Kerala

Travancore Coir Factory Workers Union (TCFWU) was the first trade Union in Kerala. The union registered under the Travancore Trade Union Act 1937 had represented 90 percent of the total coir workers in Aleppey. In 1938, the TCFWU launched a strike, for a special allowance, which was the first general strike in Kerala. The 26 daylong strikes finally succeed to achieve a special allowance of 6.25 per cent of basic wages. In addition to this economic achievement, the strike prompted the Travancore government
to pass the Trade Union Dispute Act in 1938. Accordingly, the government appointed a Board of Investigation to conduct a detailed enquiry into the trade disputes. As a result, the government constituted negotiating machinery known as Industrial Relations Committee to deal with problems connected with labour and management. This was a turning point in the history of working class movement in Kerala because it created a permanent system for collective bargaining. After the Independence, this Committee became tripartite in nature when the government nominees became a part of the process. Later years saw the tremendous growth of Kerala trade union movement into a powerful force with significant influence in the socio economic and political system of the state (Nair, 1973). Majority of the Unions in Kerala have affiliation with Central Organizations such as All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC), Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC), Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU), Hindh Masdoor Saba (HMS), Bharathiya Mazdoor Sangh (BMS), United Trade Union Congress (UTUC) and National Trade Union Initiative (NTUI). Whereas some others are affiliated to regional organization of trade unions like Swanthra Thozhilali Union (STU) and Kerala Trade Union Congress (KTUC).

Among the various studies on Kerala trade union movement, the work “the history of trade union Movement in Kerala” by Ramachandran Nair deserves special reference. It presents a comprehensive documentation of the history of the trade union movement in Kerala. To avoid unnecessary repetition, the present analysis is limited to those trends and developments, which are relevant to the subject matter of this study. Still these trends and developments constitute a vast area of information the discussion is
specifically limited to issues such as labour militancy, social movement unionism, informalization, class co-operation and the issue of trade union-political party nexus.

2.3.1 Labor Militancy

Labor Militancy is, perhaps the most controversial issue in the development discourse in the state of Kerala. The term labor militancy represents two divergent ideas. In the positive sense, it describes the qualities of a well-organized well-disciplined and a well-motivated trade union. It includes qualities like vigor, social commitment, sincerity, sacrifice, team spirit, fighting spirit etc. The advocates of this argument hold the view that it is with these qualities, the trade union movement in Kerala brought about such a miraculous changes in the field of labor management relations. It was with the help of this fighting spirit of the working class, the common people in the state achieved many of its rights (Cherian, 2012).

Nevertheless, there is another argument that the ‘trade union movements in Kerala, backed by political parties organized agitations and successfully pushes up wages and other emoluments of the labor employed in the organized sector’(Planning Board, 1999). The militant behavior of labor in Kerala has thus disturbs industrial production with the result that the comparative cost remains non-competitive and the region remained unattractive for industrial investment as compared to other parts. There are several stories exposing the negative mindset of the working class in Kerala. For example, the Workers at Indian Rare Earths Ltd near Kochi went on a
strike protesting that the pappadams served with lunch at the canteen had shrunk in size.

The trade union leadership, particularly leftist leaders generally disagrees with this argument. They are of the view that the so-called labor militancy in Kerala presents an exaggerated image of Kerala trade union movement. They argue that there is a relatively higher degree of political awareness and mobilization among the working class in Kerala as compared to most other states in the country. The labor force in Kerala is more conscious of its rights. Presumably, there may be differences of degree in approaches in dealing with stiff-necked employers as compared to elsewhere. The workers in Kerala are generally capable of reacting favorably and performing well when led by a strong but sympathetic management.

Some labor economists hold a different view on labor militancy. Their argument is that the data on wage rate, labor productivity or industrial disputes does not support this thesis. Labor militancy, according to them, would naturally result in high wage rate, low productivity and higher number industrial disputes etc. A study on development experience in Kerala for a period of fifteen years (1971-86) ended with a conclusion that the industrial disputes in Kerala was on decline during the period. Similarly, the wage rate in Kerala was always below the national average. There was lag in labor productivity, which was attributed to the relatively low level of wage rate(Subramanian, 1990). This viewpoint builds its argument based on the data provided by the Central Statistical Organization (CSO).
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Kerala WR</th>
<th>Kerala LP</th>
<th>Tamil Nadu WR</th>
<th>Tamil Nadu LP</th>
<th>Karnataka WR</th>
<th>Karnataka LP</th>
<th>All India WR</th>
<th>All India LP</th>
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<td>25617</td>
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Note: WR= wage per worker (Wage Rate), LP=value added per worker (Labor Productivity).

Source: Subramanian, K.K., Development Paradox in Kerala, Economic and Political Weekly, September 15, 1990.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<td>1</td>
<td>Number of dispute pending at the beginning of the year</td>
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<td>Number of dispute that arose during the year</td>
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<td>8577</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Number of disputes settled during the year</td>
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<td>a)</td>
<td>By voluntary negotiation by the parties</td>
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<td>2381</td>
<td>1340</td>
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<tr>
<td>b)</td>
<td>By conciliation</td>
<td>1611</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>1829</td>
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<td>c)</td>
<td>By withdrawal</td>
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<td>2538</td>
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<td>d)</td>
<td>Referred for arbitration</td>
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<tr>
<td>e)</td>
<td>Referred for adjudication</td>
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<td>501</td>
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<td>f)</td>
<td>Total number of dispute settled</td>
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<td>7437</td>
<td>5766</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Number of disputes pending</td>
<td>4861</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Number of disputes led to</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a)</td>
<td>Strike (including pending previously)</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b)</td>
<td>Lock outs (including ending previously)</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>27</td>
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<tr>
<td>c)</td>
<td>Total (a+b)</td>
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<td>59</td>
<td>53</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Number of workers affected due to</td>
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<tr>
<td>a)</td>
<td>Strike</td>
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<td>b)</td>
<td>Lock out</td>
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<td>c)</td>
<td>Total (a+b)</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Man days lost</td>
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<td>a)</td>
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<td>561283</td>
<td>185223</td>
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<tr>
<td>b)</td>
<td>Lockouts</td>
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<tr>
<td>c)</td>
<td>Total</td>
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<td>2368678</td>
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Source: (Ibid)
Interestingly, the leftist governments in Kerala tend to agree with the argument that there is labor militancy in Kerala. For example, the labor policy documents issued by the LDF Government (2006-2011) led by V.S Achuthanandan indirectly refers to the issue. It reads,

“It is a fact universally acknowledged that one of the impediments to the growth of investment in Kerala has been the poor image still subsisting from the years of Kerala’s labor militancy. Even though this appears largely a thing in the past, this residual perception hampers industrial development. We are in an era when the various states and regions are in intense completion for attracting investment. The states youth have paid a heavy price because of inadequate employment creation arising from the very low levels of investments in Kerala. Given the relatively high knowledge levels, skills and adaptability of the worker in Kerala, labor should be projected as positive factor while considering Kerala as an invest destination. Hence, government would endeavor to promote ideal employer - employee relationship and to curb undesirable practices and adversarial labor relations through suitable legislation, through conscientization, awareness raising and appropriate administrative interventions”. It further added that all ‘restrictive practices including intimidation, “gherao”, harassment of managers and their families, and extortion of any kind shall be treated as a criminal offense and dealt with accordingly’(Labor Policy- 2010, Government of Kerala).

2.3.2 Political Party-Trade Union Nexus

Another interesting peculiarity of Kerala Trade Union movement is its close relationship with political parties. There are mainly three important
dimensions in this relationship. Firstly, it exposes the plan of political parties
to use the trade unions for their ideological purposes. Here the trade unions
naturally would become the feeder or auxiliary organizations of political
parties. For example, the communist parties look at the trade union movement
as instruments of class revolution. The CPIM document on trade union
movement seems to support this argument. “For the Marxist- Leninist party,
the tasks on the trade union front is do not compromise only the tactical line
of running the trade unions, as organs of daily struggle for the effective
defense of the economic interests of the working class under given conditions.
While defending the daily interests, they aim at organizing a disciplined
working class, with revolutionary consciousness, drawing it nearer the party,
with its best elements joining the party in hundreds enabling the class as a
whole to play its historic role in the revolutionary struggle”(CPIM Review on
Trade Union Front, 2002).

Secondly, the trade unions in Kerala have developed a culture of
associating themselves with political parties for better leadership and
eventually better bargaining power. Thirdly, the political parties may like
associations with trade unions for electoral purposes. The support of workers,
whose votes along with those of their family members and sympathizers may
account for a sizable democratic force to reckon with.

The main allegation against AITUC, the first central trade union
organization was that the communist had an upper hand in the organization.
This induced various political parties to form their own trade unions. In 1944,
the supporters of Indian National Congress in AITUC formed Hindustan
Mazdoor Sevak Sangh (HMSS). Mahatma Gandhi himself was in favor of this decision. To quote him,

“The Hindustan Mazdoor Sevak Sangh will guide the activities of all congressmen, who engage themselves in labor work. The Sangh will provide for the training of congressmen desirous of taking up trade union work. The Sangh will have its provincial and local branches to guide the work of congressmen occupied in the labor movement in particular areas. The Sangh will exercise influence on the labor movement through its members, working in the various unions. It will not directly handle trade union work. The Sangh will introduce a membership pledge to ensure quality of its membership” (Ramanujan, 1986, uncorrected quotation).

Nevertheless, this idea did not flourish as expected by the party leadership. It was in this context the HMSS made a fresh call for a frank appraisal of the existing situation and for taking necessary steps to protect and promote the interests of both working class and the country. Consequently, a two-day session of HMSS was held on May 3, 1947. In his Presidential address, Sardar Vallabhai Patel said:

“The debt that the AITUC owes to the congress is immense. Many eminent Congress leaders were associated with the AITUC for several years from the beginning. of the prestige that it now enjoys arose from its association with such congress leaders as Lala Lajpat Rai, C.R.Das, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose and others, who have been its Presidents on various occasions”(Ibid). Gunzarilal Nanda further explained
the reason for the formation of a new trade union with an affiliation to India National National congress. To quote Gunzarilal Nanda, Secretary, HMSS,

“The policies pursued by the AITUC under communist leadership which functions in its name, stand in sharp and total conflict with our aims. Their ways threatens the security and welfare of the community and are inimical to the best interests of the workers themselves. The bulk of the working class is opposed to the political philosophy of the communists. This is amply borne out by the results of the election to the legislative Assemblies in the country from the various labor constituencies. The workers have had enough of the loss and suffering which are inseparable from methods adopted by the communists in dealing with the difficulties of the working class. But the presence of congressmen and others in AITUC in subordinate association with the communists creates the wrong impression that the present policies and the leadership of AITUC reflect the mind of entire working Class. The urgent need of the moment is, therefore, to provide machinery for coordinating the scattered forces of those who are in fundamental opposition to the communists, in their approach to labor matters” (Ibid).

It appears that the traditional communists had used the trade unions for political purposes. They treated the trade union as an auxiliary organization of party. They always opposed economism for making them the driving force in the process of revolution. The Communist advised the workers to involve in the socio-economic-political life of the country (EMS Nambuthirippad, 1988).

It seems that there is a change in the attitude of communists towards the trade union movement. EMS Nambuthirippad, communist ideologist from
the state of Kerala, mainly supported disaffiliati on. In a conference organized by Non-Gazetted Officers Union (NGO Union) held at Thiruvananthapuram, he denounced the manner in which the political parties manage trade unions. He called upon for a new political culture where the trade unions would no longer remain as a pocket organization of political parties. He said that the system prevailing in Kerala would destruct the unity of working class. Inter union rivalries would weaken the collective bargaining power of the working class. Therefore, he emphasized the immediate need for disaffiliation. These arguments stood contrary to that of the traditional Marxist who firmly advocated for a strong relationship between the party and the trade union. (Malayala Manorama, 2 October 1992)

Narasimha Reddy attempts to study the impact of political party-trade union nexus on bargaining power with the help of a case study of government employee’s strike in Kerala. The government employees in Kerala went on a strike in 1971 for interim relief. To begin with, various organizations of the government employees and teachers in the state independently raised the demand for interim relief. The state government paid little attention to this, which finally resulted in the formation of a Joint Action Council (JAC). As negotiation failed, 0.33 million non-gazette officers, teachers, and the staff of local self-governments went on a Strike. The government retaliated to the strike mainly in two ways. Firstly, it decided to organize public rallies and demonstrations to turn the public opinion against the strike. Secondly, it decided to “bring round service organizations over which the alliance parties had control or influence”. The latter idea was applied as the major strategy to deal with the situation. Accordingly, the state unit of the Communist Party of
India, to which belonged the Chief Minister, held talks with the joint council of service organizations, over which it had a hold. The other ruling political parties like Congress (R), RSP and PSP pressurized their auxiliary unions to support the government. All these finally resulted in the disintegration of the Joint Action Council. “By the end of sixth day of the strike, the entire bargaining power matrix had changed. The JAC , which launched the strike with a formidable bargaining power , was reduced to a weak-ling. The government emerged with redoubtable bargaining strength” (Reddy,1992). There was a very steep fall from the original demand by the employees while the concessions given by the government were marginal. The conclusion of the strike virtually exposed the vulnerability of Kerala trade union movement in the context of political party-trade union nexus.

The experience in Mavoor Gwalior Rayons Factory was also more or less same. Gwalior Rayons Factory and construction workers union (affiliated to pro-CPI AITUC) was the first trade union in Mavoor. Later, workers loyal to Indian National Congress joined and formed the Gwalior Rayons Employees Union (affiliated to INTUC). The split in the Indian communist movement (1964), was also reflected in Mavoore trade union movement. The CPI (M) loyalist left the AITUC and formed the pro-CITU Gwalior Rayon pulp and Fibre workers union. During 1970's five new unions entered in to the scene. The national level split in the Indian National Congress (1969) induced a group of INTUC workers to organize the Gwalior Rayons Labour Union affiliated to pro-congress (0) INLC. Later influenced by the second national level split of the Congress party (1978), the Indira loyalists formed the Gwalior Rayons pulp and Fibre employees Congress
affiliated to INTUC (I). Similarly, the split in the Muslim League led to the formation of Gwalior Rayons Pulp and Fibre Factory Thozhilali Union (Pro-AIML). With the formation of Gwalior Rayons Organization of workers (GROW), the number of trade unions rose to 13.

Table 2.3.2.2: Proliferation of Trade Unions in Mavoor

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Source: Information collected from AITUC office, Mavoor.

2.3.3 Class Co-operation

It seems that the nature of the working class movement in Kerala, unlike the trade union movement of the past, is now increasingly leaving out its materialist class content. There lies a fundamental distinction between the traditional trade unions and the emerging workers movements. The former emerged from the class paradigms in the sense that they used to have class-consciousness. Their movements were class movements and struggles were class struggles.

According to Payyappilly Balan, a prominent trade union leader from Aluva, the industrial capital of Kerala, it was the introduction of contract system, which paved the way for class cooperation. Workers participation in factory management in turn resulted in an unholy alliance between the trade unions and the management (Balan Payyappilly, 1976). While analyzing the reasons for the unconditional surrender of working class in Mavoor (The workers at Grasim industries Mavoor went on a strike during 1985-89, which
continued for a period of 39 months), K.T Ram Mohan and K. Ravi Mohan described the trade unionism in Mavoor as “collaborationist kind of trade union leadership”. There was a wide spread realization among the workers that the trade union leadership in Mavoor and the factory management were in co-operation. (Mohan ,1988). This co-operation was also visible in Plachimada, where the trade unions provide all possible assistance for the smooth functioning of the soft drink factory.

The trade union movements were “oppositional and antagonistic to the capitalist employer and cherished a revolutionary zeal. An antagonistic class separation clearly divided the workers and the capitalist owners. In the contemporary setting, the material content and the class consciousness of the working class is lost: it is not struggling for class revolution, nor does it treat the employer as the class enemy”.( Rajendra Singh,2001) . French Scholar Andre Gorz’s has made a similar reference in this work “farewell to the working class”. He is of the opinion that the rationalization process in industry would result in a reduction in the socially organized work. The decline of industrial employment thus would minimize the role of working class in the social discourse (Andre Gorz, 1982). George Bernard Shaw’s prediction about working class behavior seems to be relevant here. In his “intelligent woman’s guide to socialism etc” Shaw said, “ trade unionist have no objection to continuance of capitalists methods in industry, provided that Labor gets the lion share”( op.cit., Subramanian 1967) . Lenin had foreseen the danger of class co-operation. He observed, “Trade union activity as an infantile disease of the working class and the faster they are cured of it the sooner they will reach adolescence and revolutionary maturity” (op.cit., Roy,
He was of the opinion that workers bargaining with capitalist through their trade unions would compel them to pay attention to improve their wages and benefits.

The document on trade union activity adopted by the central committee of CPIM has noticed a decline in the party membership among workers, which could be analyzed as an indirect reference to class co-operation. It reads, “despite the number of struggles conducted by the working class over the years, the progress in this respect is not satisfactory in the strong states (Kerala, West Bengal, Tripura, Tamilnad and Andhra Pradesh) and in most of the weaker states, there is no progress and in several places deterioration. One major reason for the lack of increase in party membership from the working class is the crisis in the industrial situation, with closures, retrenchment, VRS and ban on recruitment having their impact. But even where the work force exist and our trade unions work among them, the party membership is in no way commensurate to our work and influence” (op. cit., CPIM, 2002).

2.3.4 Informalization

Informalization in Indian trade union movement appears as a response to the inability of traditional trade unions to accommodate the new generation workers in the unorganized sector. Hence, it is a response to the overall changes in the employment structure and management practices caused by the waves of globalization. Nearly 92% of the total workforce in India belongs to unorganized sector. Agriculture and allied occupations remain as the single largest employer of the Indian workforce, about 99% of which are
in the unorganized sector. Similarly, 98% of the workers in trade and commerce belong to unorganized sector. In the manufacturing sector, this is amounted to 75%. The main limitation of the Indian trade union movement was that 70% of its membership was confined to the organized sector, which constituted only less than 10% of the total workforce. (Mohanthy, 2009)

The ushering in of neo-liberal economic reforms in 1991 further deteriorated the conditions of Indian labor force. Indian government began to withdraw support for labor. It also opened up the economy according to the dictates of global capital. There were loud cries for labor flexibility, a euphemism for labor deregulation. The public sector began to shrink, employers could fire workers and closure more easily, and contract workers could replace permanent workers. Unions face tremendous pressure to increase productivity, which in turn reduced job growth. With the government’s gradual withdrawal from the interest of labor, traditional trade unions that have relied on political support began to face new crises. Privatization, contract labor, anti unionism, growth of multinationals, and overall changes in employment structure and management practices threw open a whole set of new problems for Indian workers and their unions. The unorganized sector grew as organized sector regular employment began to be replaced by contract labor. It seems that those employed in the unorganized sector are the most vulnerable sections in society—woman, Dalits, and migrants. They found traditional unions as male dominated and upper cast. It is in this context, the informalization has become a trend in Indian trade union movement, mainly manifested in the form of independent disaffiliated unions, Workers cooperative societies and trusts, community bases trade unions etc.
The emergence of independent unionism in Ernakulam area in 1940’s was the first step towards informalization in the history of trade union movement in Kerala. They stood for two principles; non-affiliation to political parties and the principle of one industry one union. However, this experiment did not survive. Another significant development in this direction was the formation of Gwalior Ryons Organization of Workers, popularly known as GROW, at Grasim industries, Mavoor. Though GROW was formed in 1983, its history could be traced back to 1978. The trade unions and the factory management had signed a long-term agreement in 1978 in which it was provided to absorb over 1400 contract laborers as reserve workers. Accordingly, they were provided 13 days work in a month. As in the case those statistics, 33% of the employed workforce who live below poverty line, the reserve workers in Mavoor found themselves as victims of under employment. Whereas the management, which had agreed to abolish contract system, resorted to award, fresh works to the contractors. Paradoxically some of the traditional trade unions supported the contract system and many of them used to take contract work. The management also played its role well and took care to award as many contracts to these leaders or their relatives. In short, the work, which could be given to the reserve workers, was allotted to the contractors. In addition to this, those permanent workers who were frustrated with the collaborationist style of trade union leadership also played a role in the formation of GROW. A Vasu, a former naxalite leader and a well-known social activist working for the benefit of workers in the informal sector was the founder leader of this new union. Moieen Bappu; a social activist with a Muslim identity and Islamic ethos found himself a part of this movement. It is a generally agreed fact that this informal union was able to
cut across the sectarian barriers put up by the traditional trade union organizations in Mavoor, particularly in the final stage of agitation to reopen the factory, which remained, closed for period of 39 months due to the so-called labor dispute (Vasu, 2011).

2.3.4.1 Kerala Swathandra Malsya Thozhilali Federation (KSMTF)

There are several community based informal trade unions in different parts of the state. Formation of Kerala Swathandra Malsya Thozhilali Federation (KSMTF- Kerala Independent Fish Workers Federation) is, perhaps the most significant development in this direction. They are set against a background where the traditional trade unions and political parties consistently failed to address the problems of fishermen community in Kerala. T Peter President of the KSMTF said, “Neither the democratic forces nor the communists did pay attention to the grievances of fishermen community in Kerala. These organizations failed to accommodate the distinct identity of our community” (Peter, 2012). Following are the extracts taken from the action taken report of KSMTF for the year 2004.

2.3.4.1.1 Agitation against foreign fishing Vessels: KSMTF was in the forefront of agitations against the central government’s decision to issue licence to foreign fishing factory vessels for fishing activities in Indian sea. In connection with this, a state level mass convention was organised in YMCA hall in Thiruvanthapuram on 13 January 2004. Similar conventions were held in all most all coastal districts on January 23-28,2004. A coastal Bandh was organised on 3 February 2004. Thousands of fish workers marched on
2.3.4.1.2 **Red-Tide Issue:** The sudden event of massive-fish-death were observed in Kollam and Trivandrum sea coast districts during the month of September 2004. The sea water had reddish color and toxic smell. The scientific community in Kerala did not have a single window opinion over the issue. Self-contradicting and fear-emanating ideas were communicated to the general public which in turn made the people panic. They scared to buy and eat fish. This raised a livelihood threat to the fishworkers. KSMTF intervened urgently and organised a series of action programmes to remove the fear of the people and to counter the arguments of the scientific community. The federation publicly cooked fish in front of the State Secretariat and ate them with cooked tapioca. Many people including policemen came forward and ate the food. No one was inflicted with any kind of disease. This was communicated to the general public with the active support of visual media.

2.3.4.1.3 Participation in World Social Forum: Ten representatives of KSMTF participated in the meeting of the World Social Forum held in Mumbai in January 2004.

2.3.4.1.4 Trawl agitation: when the government of Kerala announced ban on trawling for a period of 45 days instead of 90 days as demanded by the federation, KSMTF started agitation against the alleged conspiracy between the government and the association of mechanised boat owners.

It is significant to note that the KSMTF is instrumental in fighting the negative impact of Globalisation. Inspite of its image of an organisation of
tradtional fish workers it has proved its capacity to challenge neo-liberal policies with an unusual vigour. The prgramme of actions like agitations against sand mining from coastal areas makes it an environmentl movemnet bestowed with the responsibility to protect the coastal eco system.

The cross-pollination of two social movements could be attempted successfully only with the help of those fundamental information about the two movements. The coming chapter is an effort to discuss the evolution and the unique features of environmentalism in Kerala.

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