

Victims of Development in the Struggle for Survival

A Case of Fisherpeoples' Movement in India

M. CHANNA BASAVIAIAH
Department of Political Science
Osmania University
Hyderabad

Fishermen like to talk about their esprit de corps, and it is true that there is a warm camaraderie, a sense of an elite brotherhood. Fishermen are like combat veterans who feel understood only by their comrades who have survived the same battles. But fishing is a constant struggle for economic survival. Each man works for shares of the catch. Anyone who can't keep up, whether because of injury or age is harassed out of the fishery. There are few fishermen over fifty. And because fishermen are technically self-employed and not salary earners, governments have been slow to recognise claims to social benefits for those who are out of work.

Cod: A Biography of Fish That Changed the World
by Mark Kurlansky

*'The notion of development as solution be turned on its head because it is development that has caused modern poverty.... To eradicate poverty we must seek not the promotion but the abolition of the development project as we know it today.'*¹ Through the export of prawns and other high quality marine products India earns quite a lot of foreign exchange. This is because these products realise high prizes in the international market and there are no restrictions for them to enter the markets of the industrialised countries. In many cases however the modernisation/westernisation of the fisheries that is often referred to as the 'Blue Revolution' damaged the ecology of the coastal areas and threatens the livelihood of the small-scale fishermen and their families. This paper tries to analyse the fisherpeoples' movement in India as a response to the various 'developmental' policies/programmes

undertaken by the Government since independence in the marine fishery sector.

THE SETTING

India has a coastline of about 6,000 km. The Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) spreads over 20,20,000 square km, equivalent to 66 per cent of land area. Traditional fishing communities, who not only live on the geographical fringes but they are economically marginalised and also occupy the lower strata in the hierarchical caste system, depend on fishing in the seawaters for their survival all along the coast. The population of marine fisher people numbered 21,15,612 according to the All India Census of Marine Fishermen, Craft and Gear, 1980, spread over 2,132 fishing villages in ten coastal states and union territories.² Kerala has the largest population of marine fishermen population accounting for the 30 per cent of the total marine fishermen population; Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh occupy second and third positions with 19 per cent and 15 per cent respectively. The other states in descending order are, Maharastra, Gujarat, Orissa, Karnataka, West Bengal, Goa, Diu and Daman and Pondicherry.³ These traditional fisherpeople depend basically on variety of traditional crafts such as Catamaran, Plank Built Boats, Dug-out Canoes, etc., and a wide range of traditional gears such as Drift/Gill Nets, Boat and Shore Seine, Fixed Bag Nets, Hook and Lines, Rampans, Traps, Scoop Nets etc.⁴ These wide varieties of craft and gear are evolved through generations of trial and error methods and indicate regional variations in coastal ecosystems and specific nature of the fish resources to be caught and their behavioural aspects like breeding habits, swimming habits, swimming speed and depth.⁵

Improving socio-economic conditions of the fisherpeople or welfare of the fisherpeople has been continued to be one of the stated objectives of the planned 'development' of marine fisheries development since independence period; the real objectives have been increased production, exports and foreign export generation, which resulted in the modernisation/westernisation of fishery technology, institutionalisation of fishery related knowledge and creation of large network of bureaucracy for the general administration of the sector.⁶ In practical terms stated objectives continued to be just elaborated in preambles of policy/programme documents and real objectives have been met with increased

production, exports and foreign exchange; for example, marine fish production increased from 7.52 lakh tonnes in 1950-51 to 52.90 lakh tonnes in 1998-99, and quantity exported increased from 0.22 lakh tonnes in 1950-51 to 3.12 lakh tonnes in 1998-99, and export value realised increased from Rupees 3.30 crores to Rupees 4330 crores in 1998-99.⁷ Thus real beneficiaries of the five decades of 'planned development' in the marine fisheries sector are not the traditional fisherpeople, but a class of new investors, mechanised boat owners, exporters within the country and already overfed consumers of the developed countries.⁸ The traditional fisherpeople continued to be one of the marginalised groups in the society. The developmental policies/programmes undertaken, one after the other—beginning with the early phases of modernisation/westernisation, which in actual terms manifested in trawling,⁹ purse-senisation¹⁰ to the present hightechisation¹¹ under the New Deep Sea Fishing Policy (NDFP), introduced as a part of New Economic Policies (NEP) in 1991—continue to uproot the fisherpeople from their occupation and from their places of living.

It is in this kind of scenario that the victims of development in the marine fisheries, the traditional fisherpeople, have been left with no option to organise themselves in the form of a peoples' movement for not only survival but also for the protection of fishery resources in the coastal waters. Beginning with the purely spontaneous expression of outrage, the fisherpeoples' struggles have come a long way to become a well-organised movement.

INITIAL PROTESTS

Most of the earliest protests, which began in early seventies, were spontaneous and sporadic in nature, in the sense that they were not planned or organised and there was no link in the protests from one area to another. These protests were first started in Tamil Nadu and Goa and later spread to Kerala and other parts of the coast. As early as 1971, conflicts arose between Catamaran fishermen (traditional) and the trawlers (mechanised) in Kanyakumari district of Tamil Nadu.¹² Though the state government issued orders declaring the three miles from the coastal waters as trawler free zone to protect artisanal fishermen, it was never enforced and the trawlers continued to operate very close to the shore. The fishermen expressed their anger through burning the houses of trawler owners. The district

administration reacted by placing buoys at sea to demarcate zones for catamarans and trawlers. Even a patrol boat was employed, but nothing worked. Then the fishermen started to seize the catches of trawlers on landing in the villages. Though the police arrested the people involved and kept them in jail, the protests continued. As there was no harbour near by to protect their catches, the trawlers stopped their operations and left the place.¹³

The first major clash between catamaran fishermen and trawlers occurred in Madras in May 1976, when the trawlers ignoring the five fathoms law, continued to encroach more and more into the shallow waters, destroying the nets of the fishermen and the spawning grounds. The state administration, then under the Presidential rule, did not take any proper action. Though the fishermen stopped the illegal operations trawlers, seized them and handed them over to the police, the police without any penalty let them off. As a result, clashes erupted at the sea between the two groups. Boats were burnt, nets were destroyed and people were killed. By the end of 1978, sixteen fishermen lost their lives and 110 boats were destroyed. In these agitations, women also took part.¹⁴ These agitations later spread to Quilon and Cochin areas of Kerala coast and also other parts of the Indian coast. The response of the Governments all the states was coercive, and situation was viewed as a law and order problem without any concern for the fisherpeoples' rights and the damages caused to the coastal ecosystems.

All these agitations were spontaneous and violent, reflecting their anguish over the injustice meted out to them. They were the logical outbursts of the evolving socio-economic and technological forces rooted in the very development mode of modernisation/westernisation adopted in the marine fishery sector. The protest agitations continued to take place despite the suppression by the state apparatus. These spontaneous actions gradually awakened the fisherpeople, coupled with action of the voluntary groups in different regions, there emerged fisherpeople associations across the coastal states of India, which ultimately resulted in the formation of regional unions at the state level as well as a federative forum combining all of them to coordinate the activities.

TOWARDS AN ORGANISED AGITATION

In June 1978, fisherpeoples' representatives of different states met

in Madras, with the initiation of Matanhy Saldanha and Xavier Pinto of the Goan fisherpeople organisation. The groups discussed in detail various issues at stake in the coastal areas of Goa, Tamil Nadu and Kerala. At the end, they arrived at the conclusion that the situation in the sea had reached the level of a national catastrophe. The traditional sector, which was contributing a major share of the marine fishery catches, was literally threatened with extinction, if proper measures were not initiated immediately.

There was threat not only to the fisherpeople but also to the resources itself. In the same month the National Forum for Catamaran and Country Boat Fishermen Rights and Marine Wealth (popularly known in the fisheries circles as the National Forum), a representative body of thirteen major regional fisherpeople unions/associations was formed under the chairmanship of Matanhy Saldanha. The National Forum launched a nation-wide campaign in July 1978 with the following demands.¹⁵

1. To reserve 20 km of coastal waters for the traditional sector (non-mechanised).
2. To put a coast guard on the seacoast.
3. To fix the minimum mesh size.
4. To restrict the trawlers and purse seines.
5. Not to issue licenses for mechanised net making industry.
6. Prevent water pollution by the factories.
7. Prevent pollution of the sea from tankers and ships.
8. Initiate fishermen development banks.
9. Enact a comprehensive National Marine Fishing Regulation.

The demands of the National Forum should be understood in the context of crisis in the marine fisheries sector that emerged with the advent of modernisation/westernisation process. The large-scale mechanisation process since the third five-year plan period¹⁶ (i.e. from 1961 onwards) in the marine fisheries created acute competition between the unequal partners—labour intensive non-mechanised sector and capital intensive mechanised sector—resulting in reduced oceanic space and reduced landings of fish on the part of traditional sector, thus causing several hardships to the traditional fisherpeople.

The demand for the reservation up to 20 km distance in the coast for the traditional sector was meant to avoid conflict between the two sectors—traditional and mechanised. The demand for installation of coast guard was to monitor the zonal violations by the mechanised sector, once they were demarcated. The third

and fourth envisaged regulation of the mechanised sector, as unregulated operations of the mechanised sector lead to causing damages to the coastal ecology and the fish resources. The fixation of minimum mesh size is essential to prevent unnecessary catch of juvenile fish. The mechanised net making, which made dent into the marine fisheries sector in the wake of modernisation process, displaced hundreds of fisherwomen all along the coast from their hand-woven cotton net making occupations. This was another blow to the traditional fisherpeople affecting their livelihood sources. With the onset of industrialisation and urbanisation process a large number of industries have come up in several coastal areas of the country. The untreated industrial sewage and municipal sewage entered coastal waters causing pollution and death to fish resources. What the National Forum demanded was preservation of the health of the seawaters and its resources, which determine the livelihood of the fisherpeople. There is no proper credit mechanism devised by the government for the fisherpeople, while for the mechanised sector there existed various financing agencies to cater to their credit needs. The National Forum's demand for the establishment of fishermen development banks to cater to specific credit needs of the traditional fisherpeople was to liberate fisherpeople from the clutches of private moneylenders. Lastly, these demands can only be possible through comprehensive legislative measures,¹⁷ as visualised by the National Forum.

To impress upon these problems the National Forum convened a meeting of Members of Parliament at Delhi on 26 July 1978, to explain the grievances of the fisherpeople. Eighteen M.Ps attended the meeting, prominent among them were include Jyothirmai Basu, Ahalya Rangnekar and Mrinal Gore. All these members agreed to support the cause of the traditional fisherpeople. The next day, the representatives of the National Forum tried to represent the matter with the then Prime Minister Morarji Desai. On 28 July, the representative of the Forum demonstrated with a day long Dharna before the residence of the Minister of Agriculture, Surjit Singh Barnala and submitted a memorandum of demands.¹⁸ This action brought the plight of fisherpeople to the attention of the national media and the public. It also boosted the morale of the National Forum by strengthening it organisationally. Then onwards the National Forum came into operation in full swing. In November 1978, different state unions coordinated by the Forum initiated fasts and other forms of agitations to pressurise the government on their

demands. In Goa, fisherpeople went on relay hunger strike for 367 days. In Kerala, agitation was taken up as relay fast in Trivandrum, Quilon and Alleppey. Dhrama, picketing, rallies and other forms of peaceful agitations were organised in Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra and Karnataka.¹⁹

Meanwhile, the National Forum undertook the issues in concrete and worked out a draft bill on National Marine Fishing Regulation. The Forum also succeeded in presenting it in the Parliament, in the form of a private bill. However, the bill was withdrawn on the request and promise by the Prime Minister, Morarji Desai, to introduce an official bill along the same lines in the Parliament. The A.K. Majumdar (Secretary of Fisheries, Government of Maharashtra) Committee was appointed by the Central Government in the wake of 1976 clashes, discussed earlier, to examine the question of delimiting the areas of fishing for different types of boats, submitted its report in December 1978. It also worked out and enclosed a model marine fishing regulation bill on the lines of the National Forum's draft bill.²⁰ Though the Janata Party Government could take up the issue it could not enact the law. It fell into deep political crisis ultimately resulting in the collapse of the government. The Congress Party Government, which came to power in 1980, instead of making a common national legislation, had referred the bill to the respective maritime states for enactments. With this development, the focus of the National Forum had to shift from the Centre to the State level activities. As nine coastal states were involved in the question of legislation, the National Forum had to seek allies in all the states and strengthen the struggle. Efforts by the National Forum yielded good result, the regional unions, which were already under the National Forum, were strengthened and new unions were formed in the states where there were no union activities. After a prolonged struggles, Goa and Kerala passed bills in 1980. Since then, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Orissa and Tamil Nadu have also enacted marine fishing regulations. But many of these enactments, have been challenged in the courts of law.

Apart from demanding fishing regulation, the National Forum also put forward concrete ideas on different issues relating to marine fisheries and campaigned on them. They include, appropriate forms of fishing technology –labour intensive, eco-friendly and income distributive. Other activities include protests organised from time to time against the use of 'development aid' and commercial investments in large scale fisheries 'development'

by the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO, the World Bank and the Parries Group of Investors, which have been detrimental to the interests of artisanal fishermen. The National Forum launched an international campaign against the export of seafood from the country, which was one of the causes of reckless over fishing in shallow waters by trawlers and the consequent anarchic growth of the fishery industry.²¹ One successful intervention by the National Forum in this regard was a combined campaign with the India Committee of the Netherlands—a solidarity organisation supporting progressive movements and organisation in India—against the purchase of seventeen trawlers worth Rs. 120 million from the Netherlands in 1982.²² The National Forum voiced the protest to the Dutch Minister of Development Cooperation through a number of letters. In Netherlands, the India Committee, spoke against the trawler deliveries by the Dutch Government. Their move gained considerable public support and finally the Dutch Government had refused to finance trawlers for India without a preceding the 'experimental fishing programme' on the seafood resources in Indian deep-sea zone.²³

CONSOLIDATION MOVES

The early 1980s were the years of intensive organisational consolidation, both at the national and the regional levels. As stated earlier, the shift of focus in the activities of the National Forum from the national to the regional, to organise the fisherpeople for the enactment of marine fishing regulation in different states, resulted in the consolidation of regional allies. The number of general body meetings organised during the early eighties strengthened national regional tie-ups and provided systematic direction to the movement. The general body meeting of the National Forum held in September 1983 at Bangalore was considered unique in this respect. It was in this meeting that the National Forum decided to change its name to the National Fishermen's Forum (NFF). The general body also finalised a new constitution. Matanhy Saldanha who held the position of the national Chairman from the inception handed over charge to the newly elected Chairman, Thomas Kochery. The general body unanimously decided to call for an All-India Convention to finalise the national manifesto and to strengthen the organisation. Accordingly, the NFF organised a National Convention on 17 and

18 January 1984 at Calicut in Kerala. Over hundred delegates representing seven states participated in the Convention. The Convention discussed the manifesto and decided to register the body under the Trade Union Act, for this purpose once again name of the organisation was changed as the National Fishworkers Federation (NFF). The state reports presented by Goa, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and West Bengal were also discussed in the Convention.²⁴ In 1985, the NFF decided on new points of agitation. They include:

1. To take immediate measures for fisher management, as there is a further decrease of fish wealth in all states.
2. To save life and sea wealth by correctly imposing the marine law.
3. To stop trawler operations in 10 km area from the sea coast, to stop night trawling, to curtail the number of fishing boats and to forbid trawling in June, July and August months every year.
4. To curtail the star-hotels mushrooming on the beaches and to stop eviction of fisherpeople from the seacoast on account of tourism 'development'.
5. To prohibit factories from throwing out untreated materials which pollute the seawaters.
6. To stop perse seine operations in 22 km radius on the seacoast.

To press these demands, all the states organised a demands day on 15 June 1985. The states of Kerala, Goa, Tamil Nadu, Orissa, West Bengal and Karnataka responded positively to the NFF's call and organised demonstrations.²⁵

Two more nationwide agitations of the NFF can be considered as important moves in the 1980s. They were March 1987 agitation and the Kanyakumari March of 1989. The March 1987 agitation was well planned, almost eight months in advance in July 1986. The NFF chalked out fifteen demands for the agitation. Increase in the number of demands signifies the increased crisis in the marine fishery sector and the concomitant victimisation process of the fisherpeople in the country. The new demands added include stopping joint ventures in deep sea and promoting deep sea fishing in public and cooperative sector with the active participation of the fisherpeople; legislation and implementation of labour laws in the processing plants and mechanised boats; exemption of excise duties on imported Out Board Engines (OBE) and supply of quality kerosene at reasonable prices; reorientation of fisheries research in cognisance with traditional skills; controlling the export of marine products; introduction of old age pension

schemes; and providing title deeds to fisherpeople of their house sites where they reside.²⁶

One important aspect of the March 1987 agitation was gaining support from other trade unions. It was with this aid that the NFF participated in the National Convention of Militant Trade Unions, organised by Datta Samant and George Fernandez in early 1987. The Convention unanimously passed NFF sponsored resolution on the demands of the fisherpeople. Thus, the NFF succeeded in its attempts to gain support from other trade unions. Several trade unions—Kamgar Aghadi, Hind Mazdoor Kisan Panchayat, All India Centre of Indian Trade Unions, Bharatiya Shramik Sabha, Indian Federation of Trade Unions, Indian Confederation of Labour, Artisans and Craftsmen Association supported and participated in nationwide agitation on 16 and 17 March 1987. On these days, fasts, rallies and public meetings were organised in Delhi, Raipur, Calcutta, Patna, Berhampur, Puri, Madras, Trivandrum, Panjim, Bangalore, Pune and Bombay. Simultaneously, the fisherpeople staged mass fasts, picketing, dharnas, rallies and public meeting in coastal villages and towns all over India, in which inland-fisherpeople also joined the agitation all over the country.²⁷

The Kanyakumari March, a month long campaign and agitation held from 2 April to 1 May 1989 with the slogan of, 'protect waters, protect life', was a unique and historic event in the fisherpeoples' movement in India. Like earlier nation wide agitation, the Kanyakumari March was also pre-planned and well organised. Planned in the general body meeting held in December 1987, the historic March secured an extensive support from not only different non-party trade unions of the country but also environmental groups, non-governmental organisation, women's groups, teachers, students etc. Basic aims of the Kanyakumari March were:

1. Widening peoples' awareness of the vital link between water and life and providing encouragement to the peoples' initiatives and struggles to protect waters.
2. Forming a network of all those who were concerned about the issues.
3. Pressurising the government to evolve a sustainable water utilisation policy, democratising and strengthening the water management agencies.
4. Assessing the damage already done and identifying problem areas, which need to be studied in detail and evolve practices

for rejuvenating, water resources.

5. Revival and propagation of traditional water conservation practices and regeneration of fishing technologies.²⁸

A close look at these issues reveal that each issue has got multiple aspects within it and each issue is interlinked with the other. The formulation of a campaign and agitational programme based on these multi-dimensional aspects shows the deep and comprehensive understanding of the NFF in its sphere of activities.

The east-coast march began on 2 April 1989 from a small fishing village called Purandar Basudebpur on the bank of Hagol Creek in Sunderbans area of 24 Paraganas district of West Bengal and was led by Thomas Kochery. In the west coast it began on 3 April from a place called Utan in Bombay and was led by Matanha Saldanha. Both the teams covered important towns and villages of the coast on their way to Kanyakumari. In each spot the teams campaigned the basic aims of the March through addressing public meetings, rallies, dharnas and cultural programmes. Besides campaigning on the issues mentioned earlier, each team attempted to find out and comprehend specific problems of the areas through the people wherever the teams visited. These attempts resulted in formulating a single comprehensive statement covering seven common issues at the end of the Kanyakumari March. Both teams reached Kanyakumari on 1 May 1989 and culminated in a huge rally of more than 15,000 people, of which nearly three quarters were women. Despite the attempts of State machinery to disrupt the rally, including an incident of firing by the police, the rally was successfully concluded with a public meeting addressed by the Chief Speaker Justice Krishna Ayyar and the leaders of the NFF and its allies. In order to further strengthen the movement, the NFF reviewed its activities and several decisions were taken at the end of the March. The important decisions taken by the NFF were:²⁹

1. To continue to strengthen the unionisation process, mainly in Tamil Nadu, Orissa and Andhra Pradesh.
2. To further support the artisanal sector in the struggle against the trawlers and other over-efficient technologies.
3. To deepen the consciousness of the artisanal fishworkers on the ecological aspects of the sector.
4. To support local struggles against pollution of the waters where this has become a major threat to fish life.
5. To further study the intensive aquaculture programme sponsored by the government leading to the privatisation of

- the common property lands and make alternative proposals.
6. To extend campaign for the protection and regeneration of the mangroves wherever possible.
 7. To support the women fishworkers in their right to work and access to fish primarily in Andhra Pradesh where they are not organised.
 8. To support the people of Koodankulam and Kaiga in their struggle against forthcoming nuclear plants.
 9. To further the debate at state level regarding new plans and ventures in industrial fisheries.

JOINT STRUGGLE AGAINST THE JOINT VENTURES

The opening of the Indian EEZ to the foreign joint venture operations under the New Deep Sea Fishing Policy (NDFP) of 1991—part and parcel of the Government's New Economic Policies (NEP), triggered the beginning of a new phase in the fisher peoples' movement in the country. It united hitherto antagonistic sections of traditional fisher folk and the mechanised boat owners. The entry of foreign joint ventures with high-tech deep sea vessels and 100 per cent export orientation sent shock waves to the different sectors of marine fisheries in the country.

These groups on several grounds are opposed to the NDFP. From the point of view of resources, the density of fish resources in the deep sea is low. There is an absence of precise biological knowledge about some of the species and there is also inadequate information about the location and seasonal behaviour of the fish resources. It is also observed that these constraints could impinge on the commercial viability of an expanded deep-sea fleet. These aspects were dealt with clearly in the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) study,³⁰ which suggests that improving the efficiency of the existing deep-sea fleet of 180 boats based in Viskhapatnam rather than recommending the expansion of the vessel numbers.³¹ On this basis the NFF questioned the very rationale of the NDFP. The chairman of the NFF said: 'It is assumed that there is a lot of exploitable fish in the deep-sea, in view of the 200 mile extended EEZ. This is a fallacy. The FAO fishery survey clearly indicated that 75 per cent of the total exploitable marine fish resources are within the 50 metre depths from the shore. If that be so, why should the bureaucrats and the scientists insist that we exploit the deep-sea?'³² Commenting on the zonal restrictions for the

operation of joint venture Deep Sea Vessels (DSV), he said: 'This is another fraud on the Nation. Most of the DSVs are carrying on their fishing activity in India, hardly 15-20 km away from the shore. Even the foreign fishing vessels, which were recently nabbed poaching in the Indian territorial waters, were found fishing hardly 20 km off our coastline.'³³

From the point of view of employment, the very nature of technology employed in these vessels rules out employment opportunities. Trained workmen from abroad fill the few jobs required. Further, the processing, grading and packing of catches that are carried out on board the vessels, rules out the employment of shore based labour. Neither will there be any marketing jobs as the markets are abroad. From the point of view of consumers, since the deep-sea fishing units are 100 per cent oriented, fish supply will be channeld away from Indian people to foreign consumers. The NFF is critical about excess export orientation of marine fisheries. It is of the view that, 'export of fish in any form, should be banned, as it is criminal to export food, at the expense of millions in the country who are malnourished and deprived. Even fishmeal should be stopped from being exported as the same could be utilised as baby food for the malnourished children of our country, as well for the ever increasing food needs of our poultry and live stock farms'.³⁴ The NFF feels that in order to benefit the protein deficient and malnourished masses of this country, 'the government should develop a better distribution and marketing system by setting up a chain of cold storage plants in the rural areas, so that masses of this country could be provided with low cost fish in all seasons.'³⁵

From the point of view of ecology, the argument against the policy is that it will lead to fishing at an unsustainable level that severely deplete the fishery resources. The experience world over serves a warning in this regard. There are as many as 25,000 vessels around the globe that are partially or totally idle. Some of these are forced to idle because of over fishing in certain areas. This has left with little or no resources to tap on. Others have to suffer the same fate because Western Governments have woken up to the threat they pose to natural resources and ecology and have imposed ban/restrictions on them.³⁶

Lastly, the Government has given a number of incentives to these joint ventures -waiver of customs duty on imported fishing vessels, 100 per cent exemption form customs and excise duty on capital

goods, spares and raw materials imported and purchased in the domestic market—including providing diesel at the highly subsidised rate of Rs 2/- per litre against then prevailing domestic price about Rs 8/- per litre. The only condition imposed on them is that 12 per cent of their earnings have to be remitted to the government.³⁷ Even this cannot be implemented in actual terms as the trade of fish resources at the high seas is bereft of accurate information to the government, i.e. the size and nature of the catch and the value. Thus from the point of view of economy, it is clear that there would not be any economic gains, but resource plundering would take place.

On the whole, the NFF considered that the NDFP was the result of a collaborative effort of bureaucrats, scientists, private big business and multinational corporations (MNCs). The NFF chairman pointed out: 'The lure for sophisticated machines at the cost of the traditional fishing technologies and poor masses has been the prime motive for our bureaucrats and scientists to advocate deep-sea fishing. It is our conviction that our policy makers are under the heavy influence of private Indian companies involved in joint ventures in fishing industry collaborating with MNCs.'³⁸

It is in the light of these arguments that the NFF is opposed to the NDFP and demanded a total recasting of the policy. According to the NFF, deep-sea fishing policy should ensure the expansion of the ambit of operations of the small fishermen to deeper waters. Enterprising fishermen should be encouraged and supported to move into offshore waters. The policy should ensure liberalised central subsidies and credit for small fishermen who venture into the seas. It should also lead to increased supply of fish for domestic consumption. The government should confer legal rights and reserve exclusive fishing zones for small-scale artisan fishermen at least up to the contiguous zone, i.e. up to 24 nautical miles. Annual fishery management plans with estimated of Total Allowable Catch (TAC), introduction of quota system, fishing holidays and surveillance should form part of resource management.³⁹

Articulating the demands on these lines, after the declaration of the NDFP, the NFF initiated an extensive campaign, to seek support from not only the traditional fisher folk but also the other affected sectors of the marine fisheries, mechanised sector, processing industry marketers, etc. to build a massive joint struggle against the NDFP. The NFF has succeeded in its attempts to mobilise

support from the above-mentioned sections as well as other organisations and groups. The practical agitation against the joint ventures began in early 1994. The NFF in collaboration with the Small Mechanised Boat Owners Association (SMBOA), the Association of Wholesale Fish Merchants (AWFM) and thirty-one other organisations and groups, such as trade unions, non-governmental organisations, environmental groups, women's groups, and student groups organised an All India Bandh on 4 February 1994. Not a single boat, non-mechanised or mechanised went to sea in any of the coastal areas on the bandh day. The major wholesale and retail fish markets also remained closed in all the coastal areas of the country. On 3 March 1994, a demonstration was staged before the Parliament in New Delhi and representatives of the NFF and other Associations met the Minister for Food Processing to press their demands and later they submitted a memorandum to the Prime Minister. As there was no response from the government, the NFF decided to intensify the struggle.

The representatives of the NFF, mechanised owners and operators, fish traders—domestic and exporters, and processing industry met twice in May-June 1994, at Earnakulam and Kochi in Kerala, discussed the future course of action against the joint ventures and formed a joint action committee called the National Fisheries Action Committee Against Joint Ventures (NFACAJV) (hereafter referred as to NFAC—National Fisheries Action Committee), and called for the cancellation of all licenses issued to the joint ventures in deep-sea fishing and stoppage of the issue of further license.

The NFAC observed 'Black Day' on 20 July 1994. On 23 November 1994, the entire marine fishery sector except joint venture companies went on a two-day strike on the call of the NFAC. Nineteen leading central trade unions, environmental groups, women's organisation, non-governmental organisation and other concerned groups all over the country actively supported the strike. The NFAC unit of Bombay organised a boat rally involving 1,000 vessels, which sailed from Bombay's Sassoon Dock and Ferry Wharf to the Governors residence in 'Headland' and submitted a memorandum explaining their demands. The Goan branch of NFAC organised a trawler rally in which 200 trawlers participated and gheraoed (blocked) foreign fishing vessels. In Orissa, 10,000 fisher people staged demonstrations in Paradeep. Similar kinds of actions were undertaken in other important coastal cities of India.⁴⁰

This two-day strike made an impact on the national media,

general public and the government. The newspapers and magazines covered the two-day strike writing supportive news items, editorials and special write-ups. About 300 Members of Parliament wrote to the Prime Minister asking him to withdraw all the licences issued for joint ventures and chartered vessels. The State Governments of Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and West Bengal wrote to the Minister for Food Processing Industries asking him to withdraw licenses. The Parliament Members belonging to all political parties raised the issue in Parliament on 12 December 1994. The Government initially responded negatively describing the strike as 'uncalled for' and rejecting the demands. Later on 15 December the Government took a decision to freeze its policy on deep-sea fishing for the time being, not to issue fresh licences and appoint a committee to review the NDFP.⁴¹ Accordingly, the Central Government appointed a review committee on 7 February 1995 under the Chairmanship of P. Murari, the retired secretary of Ministry of Food Processing Industries.

The NFAC opposed the one-sided constitution of the Review Committee by the Government. The Minister of Food Processing Industries had acknowledged in Parliament that the Committee was appointed in response to the All-India Fisheries Strike by the NFAC but no member of the NFAC was taken in the Review Committee. The Chairmanship given to P. Murari was also disputed by the NFAC on the grounds that he was mainly responsible for introducing the NDFP. Thus, once again the NFAC started the agitation on 2 May 1995 onwards, beginning with indefinite hunger strike by the National Convener of NFAC, Thomas Kochery, at Porbunder, Gujarat, mass Satyagraha in Delhi and other agitations in different coastal states. The question was raised in the Parliament and the Members of the Parliament also staged a walkout on 4 May 1995.⁴² On 8 May the Members of the Parliament insisted the Minister for Food Processing Industries to have a dialogue with the NFAC to settle the matter. The Lok Sabha Speaker also urged the Minister to do so. On the same day, when the indefinite fast of the NFAC National Convener had entered the seventh day, the Joint Secretary of the Ministry of Food Processing Industries called the representatives of the NFAC for a dialogue on the outstanding issues involved in the NDFP and requested them to withdraw the hunger strike/agitation. Accordingly, the NFAC suspended the agitation on 9 May 1995 and held discussion with the Minister in the presence of 13 Members of the Parliament on 19 May 1995.

There was a general agreement at the meeting on withdrawing licenses issued for Bull Trawling,⁴³ reconstitution of the review committee and changing the terms of reference.

Accordingly, the 16-member review committee on the NDFP was enlarged to a total of 41 members by admitting 12 Members of Parliament representing different political parties and representatives of the fisher people, including Thomas Kochery, Convener of the NFAC.⁴⁴ The NFAC also won the support inside the committee and all the five sub-committees after intense discussions, ultimately recommended cancellation of the joint ventures and reversal of the NDFP. Despite this, the final decision by the review committee had been postponed 16 times in 1995. As a result of these delaying tactics of the government, the NFAC once again initiated direct agitation. An all-India fisheries strike was held on 18 January 1996. Demonstrations in support of the NFAC's cause were held on the same day not only in coastal areas but also in cities like Delhi, Bangalore and Hyderabad.⁴⁵ Finally on 8 February 1996, the Review Committee (Murari Committee) submitted the report to the government unequivocally opposing the NDFP.⁴⁶

Of the total 21 recommendations suggested by the Murari Committee, the important ones are as follows:⁴⁷

- All licences issued to joint venture, test, and lease vessels should be cancelled immediately.
- No renewal or extension of such licenses.
- No deep-sea vessels (exceeding 20 metre in length) are allowed to fish in coastal waters.
- An exclusive zone be created for traditional fisher folk and mechanised boats below 20 metres in length—up to 50 nautical miles from the shore, or a depth zone of less than 150 meters.
- Financial help for technological upgradation of traditional and small-mechanised sectors.
- Reconstitution of marine fisheries under single ministry and creation of a Fishery Authority of India for better policy formulation and implementation.
- Creation of infrastructural facilities for preventing wastage of fishery resources.
- Effective steps to tackle the menace of pollutants/effluents/sewage let out by industries, which affects marine life adversely.
- Regulation of fleet size for different fishing grounds in accordance of the principle of Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY).

The review committee had given six months time to the Government for the implementation of all the recommendations. But the Government has not taken any decision on the recommendation even after the passing of the stipulated period of six months. The Government held the view that it cannot cancel the licenses already issued due to certain legal intricacies involved in them. However, as the stipulated five-year period has lapsed for majority of joint venture licenses in 1998, the NDFP has ceased to be effective, practically. The agitation of the fisher people is continuing in one or the other form for the total implementation of the review committee's recommendations, which would not only resolve the long drawn problems but also pave the ways for orderly administration and lessening of the conflicts in the marine fishery sector of India. Despite this, the present ruling party, which played a supportive role during fisher peoples' struggle against the NDFP, has not taken any action on the complete implementation of the Murari Committee Report.

CONCLUSION

It clearly emerges from the above discussion that the fisherpeoples' responses to the Government's policies in the marine fisheries are critical and constructive. Beginning with the sporadic outrages of violence against the mechanised sector in the coastal areas of Tamil Nadu, Goa and Kerala in the early seventies to the emergence of countrywide organised movement of fisherpeople by the late seventies, adverse impacts of the governmental policies/programmes in the marine fisheries sector have created a nationwide movement. In other words, the origin and growth of fisherpeoples' movement in the country is directly related to the dynamics of 'development' policymaking and policy implementation carried out since the third five-year plan. It is also evident that the demands of the fisherpeople are fair and democratic. What they have been demanding is protection of their sources of livelihood. The adverse impacts of state policies on coastal ecosystems and resources have only deprived the fisherpeople of their livelihood and have turned them into victims of development.

As observed in the paper, the fisherpeoples' movement, unlike the mechanised sector, is very much concerned with the health of the coastal waters. Their slogans like, 'protect waters and protect

lives', their demands on marine pollution problems and regulation of fishing effort by the mechanised sector, clearly reveal their environmental concerns for the long-term sustenance of the fish resources. All these emanate from the fisherpeoples' deep understanding of coastal ecosystems and resources. Thus, in the course of the movement, the NFF categorically made efforts to educate coastal communities on the crisis in marine fisheries and the need to overcome the crisis with community initiation.

It is also apparent that the NFF, which has been fighting against the mechanised sector, since its inception, took initiative to conclude a tactical alliance with the small scale mechanised sector, the wholesale marketers, exporters and processing industry in 1990s in the wake of the disastrous attempts of the NDFP to convert the EEZ waters and resources into a more 'open access regime', for the benefit of big business and the Multi National Corporations (MNC). The sustained struggle of the NFAC against the NDFP paralysed the whole marine fisheries sector of the country and compelled the Government to invite the NFAC for a dialogue and subsequently stop the issuing of new licences to joint ventures and appoint a review committee to look into the matters of deep sea fishing. The Murari Committee's suggestion to the Government to reconsider the NDFP can be regarded as a victory for the NFAC. The fisherpeoples' movement in the country is a remarkable movement as it could succeed in reverting the NDFP, the lone case of reversal since the inception of liberalisation process in India.

NOTES

1. Yapa Lakshman, Ben Wisner and Henry R. Luce, 'Building the Case Against Economic Development', *Geojournal*, vol. 35, no. 2, 1995, pp. 105-118.
2. These figures exclude Andaman and Nicobar and Lakshadweep islands where the survey was conducted. See *Marine Fisheries Information Service*, (CMFRI), No. 30, April 1981, p. 3
3. Ibid.
4. See for the detailed description of craft and gear, T.R. Menon, 'Traditional Craft and Gear' in G.R. Kulkarni and U.K. Srivastava, eds., *A Systems Framework of the Marine Food Industry in India*, Concept Publishing Company, New Delhi, 1985.
5. See, Vandana Shiva, *Ecology and Politics of Survival: Conflicts Over Natural Resources in India*, Sage Publications, New Delhi, 1991, pp. 31-33.
6. See various fishery sections of various plan documents, published by Publications Division, Government of India. For analysis of Marine Fisher

- Policy, see M. Channa Basavaiah, 'India's Marine Living Resources: Problems of Modernisation', in P.V. Rao, ed., *India and Indian Ocean: In the Twilight of the Millennium* (Essays in honour of Professor Satish Chandra), South Asian Publishers, New Delhi, 2002, pp. 100-121.
7. Sources of the data include Fisheries Survey of India Bulletins, Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute Information Service Bulletins, Marine Products Export Development Authority documents and see, <http://www.jaring.my/infofish/pdf.factsheet%2016-200.pdf>, <http://www.nic.in/dod.org>, <http://www.cmfri.org>, <http://www.indiaagrinet.com>, Also see *ibid.*, p. 109.
 8. While the nutritional value of fish for the people of the country was stated as one of the objectives of the fisheries policies, in practice, the results are quite the contrary as neither fish nor foreign exchange benefits reach the people. The domestic per capita consumption is static at 3.5 kg a year since several decades, as against a world average of 12 kg. See, *World Resources: A Guide to the Global Environment, 1996-97*, Oxford university Press, New York, 1996, pp. 310-311.
 9. Trawling is a predominant modern/western method of fishing is conducted by dragging heavy weights and beams on the seabed in order to squeeze the demersal (bottom dwelling) species such as prawns, out of the seabed. This process of dragging has a ploughing effect on the seabed and destroys the fish eggs and larvae that breed in its soft sediments. The constant repetition of dragging in the same area finally kills even the benthic life, seaweeds, and other sea vegetation. It also results in raising the sediments causing turbidity of water, which together with the noise, drives away and deflect the new fish from the deeper waters, which want to enter the coast for breeding and spawning, and thus prevents the replenishment of the fish population. See, "Traditional Fisherman and Appropriate Technology" (mimeo, anonymous), Fisheries Research Cell Documentation, Programme for Community Organisation (PCO), Thiruvananthapuram (Kerala), and John Kurian, 'Ruining the Commons and Responses of the Commoners: Coastal Overfishing and Fishermen's Action in Kerala State, India', *Discussion Paper No. 23, UNRISED*, Geneva, May 1991.
 10. Contra-distinctly to trawling, perse seining is a technique used for pelagic or shoaling type (upper dwelling) species. The technique of perse seining is derived from string purse/bag, when the strings are pulled the bag is closed. Unlike traditional shore seine or beach seines operation which wait for the fish following their natural and biological circle to come to the shore where it is encircled and caught, the perse-seine go after the shoals, out to the sea, hunting them out and capturing them thus stopping their movement towards the shore. See *ibid.*
 11. Under the NDFP huge vessels known as Factory Vessels or Deep Sea Vessels capable of fishing continuously for 3 months or more and undertake all kinds of works such as processing and packing on board automatically. For the detailed analysis on the NDFP see, M. Channa Basavaiah, 'Conflicts in India's Exclusive Economic Zone: A Case of New Deep Sea Fishing Policy' in Sudheer Jacob George, *Inter-Intra State Conflicts in South Asia*, South Asian Publishers, New Delhi, 2001, pp. 190-202.

12. The world 'catamaran' originated from Tamil world 'Kattu Maran' which implies 'logs tiled together'. Generally, all varieties of beach landing crafts are referred as catamarans. In India it is specifically referred to a craft made of logs lashed together either in a boat or raft form.
13. Jose Kaleelkal, (compiled, mimeo), *The National Forum: In Struggle of Fishermen and Fish-workers in India*, Indian Social Institute and Delhi Forum, New Delhi, 1987, p.146.
14. Ibid., p. 149.
15. Ibid., pp. 150-51.
16. During the first and second five year plan periods from 1951 to 1961 the state's marine fishery policies were positive in nature, in the sense that they aimed at slow modernisation. They attempted at developing intermediate range of technology to mechanise traditional boats thus raise the productive capabilities of the existing methods in a gradual manner, taking into confidence the accumulated skills of traditional fisherpeople. The 'success' of Indo-Norwegian Project (INP) in the introductions of trawlers in two villages of Kerala and subsequent high catches by these trawlers resulted in the imposition alien model all along the coast from the third five-year plan period. See, M. Channa Basavaiah, 'India's Marine Living Resources ...' op. cit. pp. 101-102.
17. There are problems of jurisdiction over marine fisheries between and the centre and the state and there are also problems of jurisdiction between various ministries such as Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Commerce, Ministry of Surface Transport, Department of Ocean Development, Ministry of Environment etc. As a result there are problems of administration and accountability with respect to marine fishery sector, unless a comprehensive legislation is made covering all aspects of the marine fishery sector the problems cannot be solved.
18. Jose Kaleelkal, op. cit., pp. 150-151.
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid.
21. Ibid.
22. *The Economic Times*, 22 January 1982.
23. For more details see correspondence between the National Forum and the India Committee of the Netherlands between 1981 to 1984, (mimeo), Fisheries Research Cell Documentation, PCO, Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala.
24. Jose Kaleelkal, op. cit., p. 153.
25. Ibid., p. 154.
26. *Fish Workers Struggle for Survival: A Compilation on March 1987 Agitation*, (mimeo), Fisheries Research Cell, PCO, Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala, p. 2.
27. Ibid.
28. Aparna Sunder (Compiled), *Break-through Despite Break-up: A Compilation on Kanyakumari March*, National Fishermen Forum, Cochin, 1989.
29. Ibid.
29. M. Gudicelli, *Study on Deep Sea Fisheries Development in India*, Food and Agricultural Organisation, Rome, 1992. For the analysis of this study, see M. Channa Basavaiah, 'Conflicts in India's Exclusive Economic Zone: A Case of New Deep Sea Fishing Policy'.

30. M. Gudicelli, op. cit., pp. 26-27.
31. Interview with NFF Chairman Thomas Kochery, 6 February 1993, Thiruvananthapuram.
32. Ibid.
33. Interview with Nalini Nayak, NFF's women activist and incharge of Fisheries Research Cell, Programme for Community Organisation (PCO), Thiruvananthapuram, 8 February 1993.
34. Ibid.
35. John Kurian, 'Impact of Joint Ventures on Fish Economy', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 11 February 1995, pp. 300-02.
36. *The Pioneer*, 29 November 1994.
37. Interview with the NFF Chairman.
38. The NFF's memorandum submitted to the Ministry of Food Processing, Government of India, January 1993.
39. *The Pioneer*, 24 November 1994, *The Hindu*, 5 December 1994.
40. NFAC Pamphlet Dated 15 July 1995 and also see, *The Pioneer*, 4 January 1995.
41. Ibid.
42. Members of the Parliament belonged to the BJP and AIDMK walked out.
43. The technique of bull trawling is similar to that of trawling, but carried out simultaneously involving two vessels in more intensive manner causing more damage to the seabed.
44. *The Telegraph*, 21 January 1996.
45. *The Hindu*, 20 January 1996.
46. *The Economic Times*, 10 and 24 February 1996.
47. For full text, see, *Report of the Committee to Review Deep-Sea Fishing Policy*, submitted to Ministry of Food Processing, Government of India, New Delhi, February 1996.