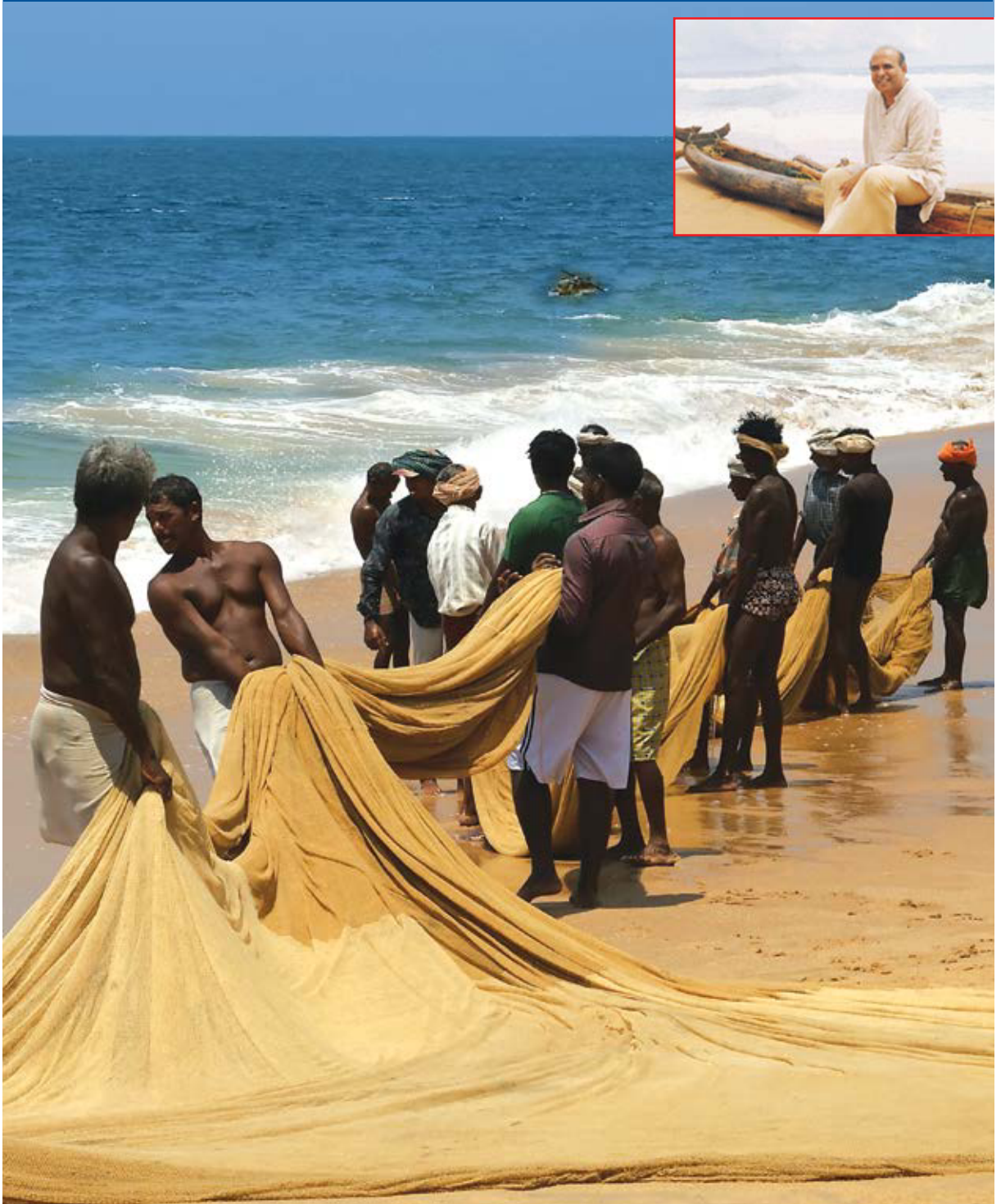
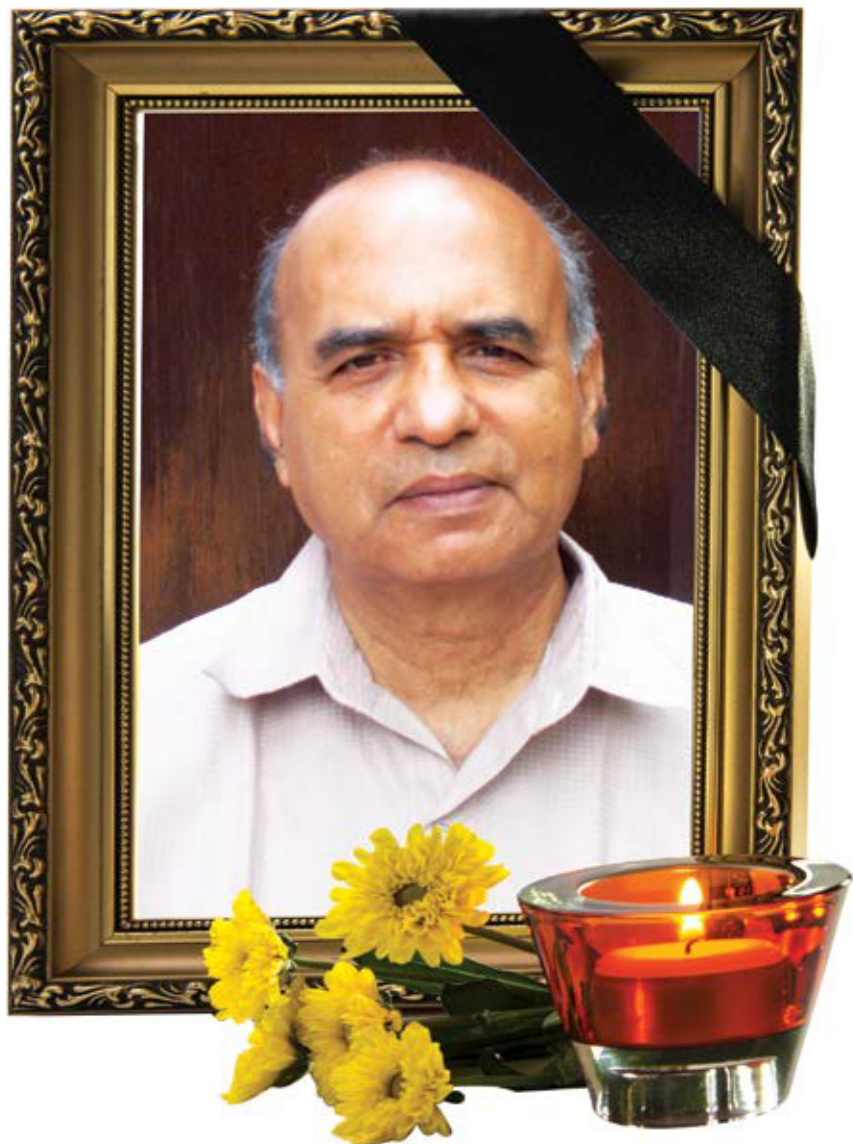


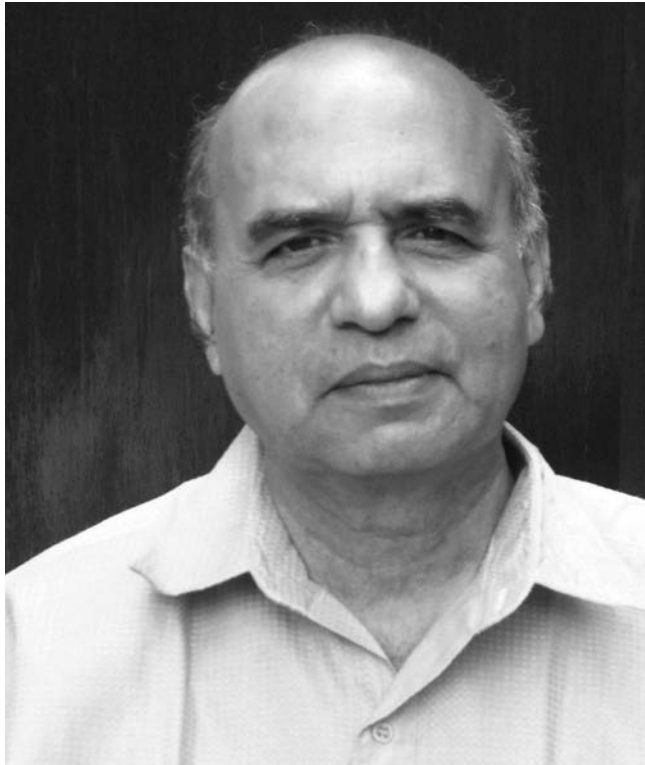
VOICE OF STORM

Fr. Thomas Kocherry





In Loving Memory of Fr. Thomas Kocherry



FR. THOMAS KOCHERRY C.Ss.R.

Date of Birth: 10.05.1940

Ordination: 20.04.1971

Death: 03.05.2014

Religious life and new challenges

"The story of my religious life is a
constant struggle for justice and the
values of the Kingdom of God"

Fr. Thomas Kocherry

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Appreciation and Acknowledgment:

Our Appreciation and sincere thanks to

Forum of Religious for Justice and Peace, Plough, Samudra, India Today, Economic & Political Weekly, Sanctuary, Agenda, Uca news.com and all our Contributors of this publication.

Consolidated by: Mr. Jerome Fernandez

Published on 2nd May 2015

In Loving Memory of
Joychan Antony
(15th May, 1990)

25th
Death Anniversary

*“The goodness in his life and
the dedicated mind towards his
services still stand as a legacy
which continue inspiring us”*



“...Another instance was when for the first time, Trivandrum District Union decided to go on an indefinite fast as part of the struggle for trawl ban in 1981. It was suggested that the President Mr. Joychan Antony go on fast. But he insisted that Tom too join him. Since it was Tom’s exam days for LLB, first he hesitated, but suddenly realizing the need for support for Joychan, he agreed...”

‘Thomas Kocherry: A Prophet of our time’
Sr. Philomine Mary

In Loving Memory of **HARE KRISHNA DEBNATH**



*The Chairperson of The National Fishworkers Forum (NFF),
Mr. Harekrishna Debnath, passed away in Kolkota at 11 am
on 30th December 2009 at the age of 60.*

Harekrishna has been a great supporter of traditional fishing communities in India. He has worked dauntlessly over the past two decades in organising fishing communities in India under the banner of the NFF. He gave them a voice to project their aspirations and sufferings to the concerned governments. He led the Macchimar Adhikar Rashtriya Abhiyan in 2008, a two month yatra that traversed the entire coast of India from Kutch to Kolkota, mobilizing support for better implementation of the Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) Notification and for scrapping the controversial draft Coastal Management Zone (CMZ) Notification. These efforts led to the withdrawal of the CMZ Notification, a major victory for fishing communities. Harekrishna was a member of the National Fisheries Development Board (NFDB). He also contributed significantly to the struggles of fisherpeoples worldwide, as the General Secretary of the World Forum of Fisherpeoples (WFFP).

The NFF has lost a great leader of the fishworker movement. Harekrishna has been a great inspiration and he will always be remembered by the fishing community of India. Every minute of his life was dedicated to the fishing community. His fight has fostered greater resolve among Fishworkers to fulfill his dreams and to continue the struggle for social justice.

In Loving Memory of **MATANHY SALDANHA**



Matanhy Saldanha (1948-2012)

21st March 2012

*Founder Leader and First Chairman of National Fish Workers Forum,
Minister of Environment and Tourism, Goa*

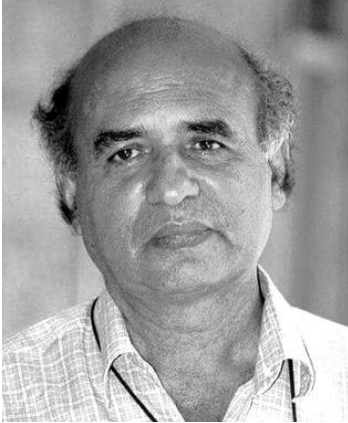
THE FIRST CHAIRMAN OF THE NATIONAL FORUM

“The Goan fishermen took the whole country by surprise. Matanhy, Christopher Fonseca, Desmond Da Souza CSsR, Xavier Pinto CSsR supported the All Goa Fishermen’s Union. The otherwise peaceful and well-ordered capital city of Panaji was suddenly disrupted. Not only the fishermen but also big groups of the population, nature lovers and conscious citizens, came out on the streets. A National Forum for Catamaran and Country Boat Fishermen’s Rights and Marine Wealth was created and decided a nationwide actions culminating in New Delhi on July 15th was organized. Matanhy Saldanha was elected Chairman of the National Forum. The Goa struggle had hit the national press so on July 26 NFF leaders met the members of Parliament to explain the situation”.

Eulogy

to Fr. Thomas Kocherry (3rd May, 2014)

Fr. Xavier Sanjivi, C.Ss.R.



He was a tall, stocky, bald and clean shaved priest. He was a bitter critic of globalization in India. He had a booming voice. Friends would often joke that a megaphone was placed in his throat. For his voice rose like a rolling thunder. He was a relentless fighter. It was said of him in an issue of India Today, "That he was often seen wearing a khadi dhoti and standing tall in front of politicians, police, unions, shipping companies or anyone who dared bother his beloved fisher folk or ruined the oceans". That was Fr. Tom Kocherry; and we his confrères who knew him well in the Redemptorist congregation would just affectionately call him as - Tom.

1. Fr. Tom Kocherry was born on 10th May 1940 at Changanassery in Kerala to Mr. Vavachan and Aleyamma. He is the fifth in a family of eleven children, seven boys and four girls. Tom completed his graduation studies in Science and then joined the congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer to become a priest in this congregation.

2. But why did he join this congregation in the first place? Tom himself explains this in his brief auto-biography. He says that while he was still a student at St. Berchmans College in Chenganasserry he met another Redemptorist the late Fr. John Anthony, who incidentally had come to Kerala to study Malayalam. Soon both Thomas and Fr. John Anthony became good friends. As days went by, Tom expressed to Fr. John that he would like to join the Redemptorist congregation. Next, Fr. John seems to have asked him "but why do you want to join the Redemptorist? And Tom's immediate answer was, "I want to work among the poor". Fr. John Antony then went on to explain to Tom about the Redemptorist congregation. He said that the Redemptorist congregation was actually started by a very famous lawyer named Alphonsus Liguori in the city of Naples in Italy. And it so happened that Alphonsus, who was considered a brilliant lawyer at that time, suddenly lost a very important case in court due to the corruption of the officials at the court. Alphonsus was both disheartened and ashamed at this defeat in court. He soon said good bye to the law courts, and gave himself to the search for true justice. This search led him to a small village in Naples called Scala, where he found group of shepherds who were totally abandoned by the official church of that time. This situation

of the plight of the poor affected him very much. So he decided to begin a congregation that would work for the most abandoned poor in society. After giving Tom this brief history of the congregation, Fr. John added, “Tom, I must tell you, the actual practice of working among the poor does not receive a high priority in the Congregation. And he seems to have turned towards Tom Kocherry and said, “But if you want to take it as a challenge to work for the poor, then you are welcome to our congregation”. And Fr. Tom used to always say to us that he accepted this challenge from Fr. John Antony, and did his work for the poor. And to prove his determination, the next step that Tom took was to join the Redemptorist congregation in Bangalore in the year 1962. He was professed as a Redemptorist on 2nd August 1963, and was ordained a priest of the Redemptorist congregation on 20th April 1971.

3. Keeping to this motto of working among the poor in his life, Tom was always a voice of dissent in our congregation. The dissent was not just to oppose something that was said or asked by our superiors, but it was primarily to draw the attention of the majority to the struggles of the poor. Let me give you just one example. In the year 1971, millions of refugees from Bangladesh crossed over to India in the wake of the Indo-Pakistan war. These refugees were located in different refugee camps. Tom was doing his final year of theological studies at the Redemptorist Seminary in Bangalore. And what did Tom do? He got the support of one more companion from among the students named James Chakkalakal and they both went to their superior and asked for permission that their final exams in theology be anticipated by one month, so that they would be free to go and serve at the refugee camps during the holidays. The due permission was granted. And only these two confreres were allowed to write their exams early and they then rushed to the refugee camps in West Bengal, to render their service to those refugees. It was an action that helped others to see what was demanded of us. In our book of constitutions and statutes it is written, “Redemptorists are never deaf to the cry of the poor”. And this action of working among refugees was Toms way of reminding many of us, that this constitution should not just remain in our books, but one that becomes real in our present day situation. However, it must also be said, that at times in his dissent Tom, also took a very rigid position, and would not tolerate any compromise on an issue he felt very strongly.

4. Tom was one person who by his life and work gave visibility to us Redemptorists as a congregation, both within the country and abroad. Tom in one of his many interviews with the media was once asked this question: “what led you towards fishing communities in particular? And Tom said, “My decision to spend my life defending the oppressed was further consolidated when I began to work in a small fishing village called Poothura near Thiruvananthapuram. Middle men led by one politically well –connected family were

using muscle- power to keep fisher folk permanently on the edge of starvation even though they worked harder than any community that I knew. I decided to arm them with knowledge by teaching them to read and write”. And thus began my work he said among the community of fisher folk. His work among the poor fisher folk led him to become the coordinator of the world Forum of Fish –harvester and fish workers (WFF) and India’s National Alliance of Peoples Movements (NAPM). He was one of the organizers of the famous Kanyakumari march of 1989 that struggled to protect India’s coastal ecology. He together with his companions mobilized the fishing community to fight the foreign industrial fishing fleets who were invited to India by our politicians. He was a crusader against coastal pollution and spearheaded protests against the Koodamkulam Nuclear Plant in Tamil Nadu. Once in the United States at Seattle, they addressed him as “Tom Kocherry, the Catholic priest, trade union leader, lawyer, environmentalist and battler against the World Trade Organization, and Toms simple reply was, “I might be all that and more. But my one concern is, ‘I want people who live close to the earth to be protected from those who have detached themselves from the earth’, and then he added, ‘I still do Gods work by defending his creation’ he would say.

5. Once the newly elected Superior General of our congregation visited Canada, and since he was newly elected as Superior General, the Media approached him and asked him a number of questions. They said to him, what is the work you do as a congregation in the world? And the Superior General explained to them what the mission of the congregation was and the many types of work we Redemptorists are engaged in. But those answers did not satisfy the people who questioned him. Then they asked the superior General once again, “tell us what you concretely do as a congregation for the growth and development of people in many parts of the world?” And in his answer the General casually mentioned that some of our men also work among the poor very much, and a person like Fr. Tom Kocherry is engaged with working for the traditional fish workers in India. The moment our Superior General mentioned the name of Tom Kocherry the media personnel immediately said, Oh!, If it is Tom Kocherry we know him very well, and we are happy to know that he is a member of your congregation, and that you as a congregation encourage him in his work.” Well, that is how Tom was. He was a person who by his life and action gave much visibility for the Redemptorists both in the country and outside the country as well.

6. Tom was a highly committed person. What he did, he did it with passion. There was no half hearted measures with him. If he took up some task, he put his entire heart and soul into the work, and tried to complete that work as best as he could. Yet, he met with a lot of opposition, both from within, which is the congregation or the church, and also from

the powers in authority in the outside world. At times the opposition also came from his own companions or colleagues who turned hostile and went on a rampage to defame his name. But Tom weathered all these storms and came through, at times a little bit shaken, but often with renewed courage and energy. He used to say to his friends, “every fight, every movement, every reform is a moment of optimism”. Kocherry fought on. When he couldn’t argue in the courts, he used the old Indian weapon - the fast. In 1995, his fast led to the inclusion of fish workers in the Murari Committee which was formed to review the 1991 policy on joint venture fishing; in 1996, when the government again ignored a parliamentary committee’s recommendation on cancellation of all licenses to foreign trawlers, he fasted until the United Front rescinded it. Speaking of Tom, his friend the late Mr. Harekrishna Debnath once said, “Tom personified the struggle of Indian fish workers”.

7. Tom was a recipient of many international awards. He was awarded the Pew Research Centre foundation award for marine conservation. He declined the award because it was funded by a company that was in itself responsible for marine pollution. The international Socio-Economic Human Rights Protection, Germany, awarded Thomas Kocherry with a gold medal for his work on human rights issues. The earth day celebrations at the United Nations, the Earth Society Foundation, New York awarded Thomas Kocherry with the earth Trustee Award for his contribution in preserving and promoting marine ecology. He was also one of the winners for the Sophie Prize from Norway, which recognizes contributions in the field of alternative politics and development.

8. And finally Tom, we your brothers in the Redemptorist congregation look up to you, for all the greatness you have achieved. Your life of commitment and dedication to the Lord Jesus in the oppressed poor will always be powerful witness to all of us. Your life was symbolized by struggle and you struggled till the end. In the last few months your health condition deteriorated after a series of heart attacks. Yet, you kept working with your lap top and continued to send messages of hope and encouragement to many of us, and also to many other people. As we bid goodbye to you, we say that we are very proud of you Tom, and very proud of all your achievements. You have become a legend for many of us. We thank you for your goodness, your sincerity, your hard work and above all for your faithfulness to struggle till the end. Thank you Tom, although your booming voice may have been silenced, yet the memory for what you stood and what you worked for , will linger long in our minds . Good bye Tom, may the Lord protect you and take you into his kingdom of eternal peace and happiness. Goodbye Tom, till we meet again in Gods holy Kingdom.

Thomas Kocherry: A Powerful Voice for Fishworkers



Aparna Sundar

A priest whose commitment to justice was a way of living his faith and working hard for the betterment of Fishworkers, Thomas Kocherry was a firebrand among social workers on Kerala's coast for over three decades. His talent lay in translating ideas into a language that could inspire and mobilise and move people to action. Rightly known for his courage and compassion, Tom, as he was popularly known, left behind a void that is not easy to fill.

Thomas Kocherry, legendary leader of the fish workers, passed away on 3rd May 2014, a week before his 74th birthday. A Catholic priest, lawyer, trade unionist, and environmentalist, he was for more than three decades central to the political mobilization of India's eight million fisher people and their formation into a social movement which, along with other popular and environmental movements, fought for a "people centered" development against the dominant model of top-down development.

Tom was born in 1940 as the fifth of 11 children in a Syrian Christian Family in Changanassery in Kerala's Kottayam district. He attributed his social commitment to an early incident. One day, when giving him and his siblings spending money, his mother told them they could do whatever they wanted with it, even give it to a beggar, and that was precisely what his sister did. This simple act opened his eyes to a larger sense of family, and to the needs of those less fortunate than himself. His desire to serve and to work for justice that was not limited by the demands of family and career drew him to a religious life. After graduation, he joined the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer (The Redemptorists). During his seminary years, he read widely and was influenced by Marxist writings and liberation theology. He worked in city slums and in a refugee camp during the 1971 Bangladesh war.

On his ordination as a priest in 1971, Tom asked to be sent to a poor parish, and was sent to Poothura, a fishing village in Trivandrum district. From the start, he was clear that "a priest is not an institutional man. He is an ordinary lay person and Jesus was like that." He learned the hard work of fishing, pulling the shore seine along with other men. All through his seven years in Poothura, he would say mass in the morning and then go fishing. Used to parish

priests with relatively well-appointed households, villagers recounted their amazement with this priest who refused to wear a cassock and was to be seen in a simple dhoti, cooking and cleaning for himself and the other priests in the small Redemptorist community in the village. Those years in Poothura acquainted him intimately with the routines and rigors of a fishing life, and allowed him to speak of them with authority in later public campaigns.

The early 1970s were a time of growing ferment in the fishing villages of southern Kerala as elsewhere along India's coast. State-supported mechanization and the growing demand for shrimp in export markets had led to the entry of business interests; artisan fishers, facing competition from mechanized trawlers, and prevented by their indebtedness to merchants from benefiting from new markets, began to fear displacement. A small group of social workers and researchers, among them Nalini Nayak and John Kurien, later key figures in the fish-workers' movement, had been working in a village called Marianad since the late 1960s, helping establish marketing cooperatives as a way of breaking the hold of merchants. In Poothura and neighbouring villages, a group of Medical Mission sisters were also active, working among women and children to create greater social awareness. Tom became involved in organizing local fishermen in their fight against a flawed government refinance scheme. As protests against trawling grew, he worked with fisher youth such as Mercy Alexander and Joychen Antony to establish the Trivandrum District Fishermen's Union. Among its first successful battles was one led by fish-vending women for buses to take them to markets, since they were not allowed on public buses.

From Strength to Strength

By the mid-1970s, militant protests against trawling had grown in several states. In 1978, a National Forum for Kattamaram and Country Boat Fishermen's Rights and Marine Wealth was set up to campaign for the regulation of trawling. In response to pressure from the forum, including the presentation of a Draft Marine Fishing Regulation Bill, several coastal states passed marine fishing regulation Acts. The struggle now turned to ensuring enforcement of these Acts in the face of opposition by the trawler lobby. In one such struggle in 1984, Tom, along with sisters Alice and Philomine Mary, declared a fast unto death, gaining the movement national media attention. By then, Tom had also trained as a lawyer, and took up the movement's cases in the Kerala High Court. The national forum was registered as a trade union and later renamed the National Fish-workers' Forum (NFF); eventually it represented unions and other organizations in nine coastal states. Elected chairperson in 1983, Tom held the position for a decade, continuing to be a strong steering force even after.

In 1989, the NFF organised the historic Kanyakumari march with the slogan "Protect Waters, Protect Life", marking its awareness that struggles for livelihood and ecological protection were inseparable.

In 1994, the NFF launched a national campaign against the Indian government's plan to

license foreign fleets in joint ventures for deep sea fishing. Under Tom's leadership, which included two fasts unto death to press its demands, the campaign built support from political parties across ideological lines, central trade unions, and the media, and succeeded in getting the policy rescinded. In subsequent years, the NFF fought against intensive industrial aquaculture, and for implementation of the coastal zone regulation. In 1998, a World Forum of Fisher People was established, with Tom as its first coordinator. The NFF is a remarkable instance of a social movement, framing issues of livelihood and work in terms of social justice, a gendered approach to organising and leadership, the protection of the commons, food sovereignty, appropriate technology and energy efficiency, environmental sustainability, holistic and inclusive development. This perspective led it to join other "new social movements" in founding the National Alliance of People's Movements in 1989, and other organizations of informal sector workers to found the National Centre for Labour.

In the course of 30 years, the NFF has had some strong leaders, including two stalwarts it lost recently – Matanhy Saldanha and Harekrishna Debnath – but to the general public, Tom was its best known face. He won awards and recognition for his work, including the Pew Foundation Award for Marine Protection Activity, which he rejected on the grounds that the foundation was funded by Sun Oil, a major marine polluter; Norway's Sophie Prize for environment and development along with leading environmentalist Herman Daly; and the United Nations' Earth Trustee Award.

Man of the People

While not necessarily the primary ideologue of the movement, Tom's talent lay in translating ideas into a language that could inspire and mobilise, and move people to action. He could address school children and university intellectuals, village women, business people and professionals, and draw them to the cause. His booming voice and towering physique lent power at a rally, but it was his political acumen, willingness to take risks and responsibility, and complete identification with the movement that established him as a leader. He was also an organisation builder who paid attention to every detail. If at one moment he was strategising a campaign, at another he would be sitting drawing lines in an account book or membership register. Women activists recall how he encouraged them to speak at public meetings and taught them much about the minutiae of local organising, from recruiting new members to writing slogans and obtaining police permission.

Tom was not always an easy person to work with; his increasing inability to tolerate criticism or dissent, and impatience with quieter modes of organizing led to the alienation of many who were initially close to him and to divisions within the movement, although many of these also stemmed from the shift in the Kerala movement from class politics to the assertion of caste and community. Some of this alienation took the ugly form of allegations of financial impropriety, against which he defended himself successfully in court. His personal austerity

was transparent, and there was little separation between his public and private life. Philomine Mary, the accountant for the NFF and World Forum of Fish Harvesters and Fish Workers (WFF), noted that he did not even have a bank account in his name. In the Valiathura house that served as the office of the Trivandrum and Kerala Fish-workers' Unions, the NFF and the WFF people, the chairperson of the latter two, Tom, was also the chief cook and bathroom cleaner.

At the heart of Tom's politics was his spirituality. His commitment to justice was a way of living his faith. In his recent book *Faith in Jesus: A Passionate Call for Liberation*, he read Jesus' life as a story of slavery and emancipation, institutionalisation and dissent, and drew on it to discuss globalisation and capitalism. In another context, he spoke of the Christians in the catacombs as the Maoists of their day. For him, a restructured UN Security Council was a step towards the kingdom of god. He wrote, I still long the day will come soon, heaven and earth meet, god and humans meet, politics, economics, religions all meet, a new restructured UN and Security Council, for the security of the planet and the entire humanity.

A fierce critic of many aspects of the institutional church and hierarchy, such as its resistance to the ordination of women, he was often irreverent, as in the jokes he told, and entirely ecumenical in his practice.

In 2009, Tom suffered a massive heart attack in Australia where he had gone at the invitation of Indian students organizing themselves against racist attacks. Advised against travel and exertion, he retired to the Redemptorist community he had helped establish in Manavalakurichy village in Kanyakumari. This enforced rest gave him time to pray with local villagers, enjoy the company of neighbouring children, and chat with his 'that has' (grandfathers) group. He cooked and gardened, and welcomed guests with great hospitality. But he remained greatly involved with the movement against the Koodamkulam nuclear plant in the neighbouring district, speaking and writing incessantly against nuclear energy and moved by the self-mobilisation of the villagers to reflect on the role of leadership in movements. He continued to guide the NFF and WFF. And he remained passionately engaged with politics, reading several newspapers daily in English and Malayalam, writing and teaching. At 3.45 am on 3 May, only a few hours before he died in his sleep, his email list received the latest version of his article on Narendra Modi, his "development model", majority communalism.

At a time when people of compassion and courage are needed more than ever, Tom's loss will be greatly felt.

Aparna Sundar

E-mail: aparna.sundar@gmail.com

worked with Thomas Kocherry in the early 1990s.

She is currently with the Aziz Premji University, Bangalore, India

Thomas Kocherry: Fisher for Justice

The 71-year-old legend of social movement politics in India shows no signs of slowing down, as **Richard Swift** discovers.

Redemptorist priest, union leader, anti-nuclear activist and people's movement educator – Tom Kocherry (pictured below) is a senior sage of India's environmental and social justice movements. Despite scars from many battles, he remains an inveterate optimist – 'Every fight, every movement, every reform is an optimism,' he says.

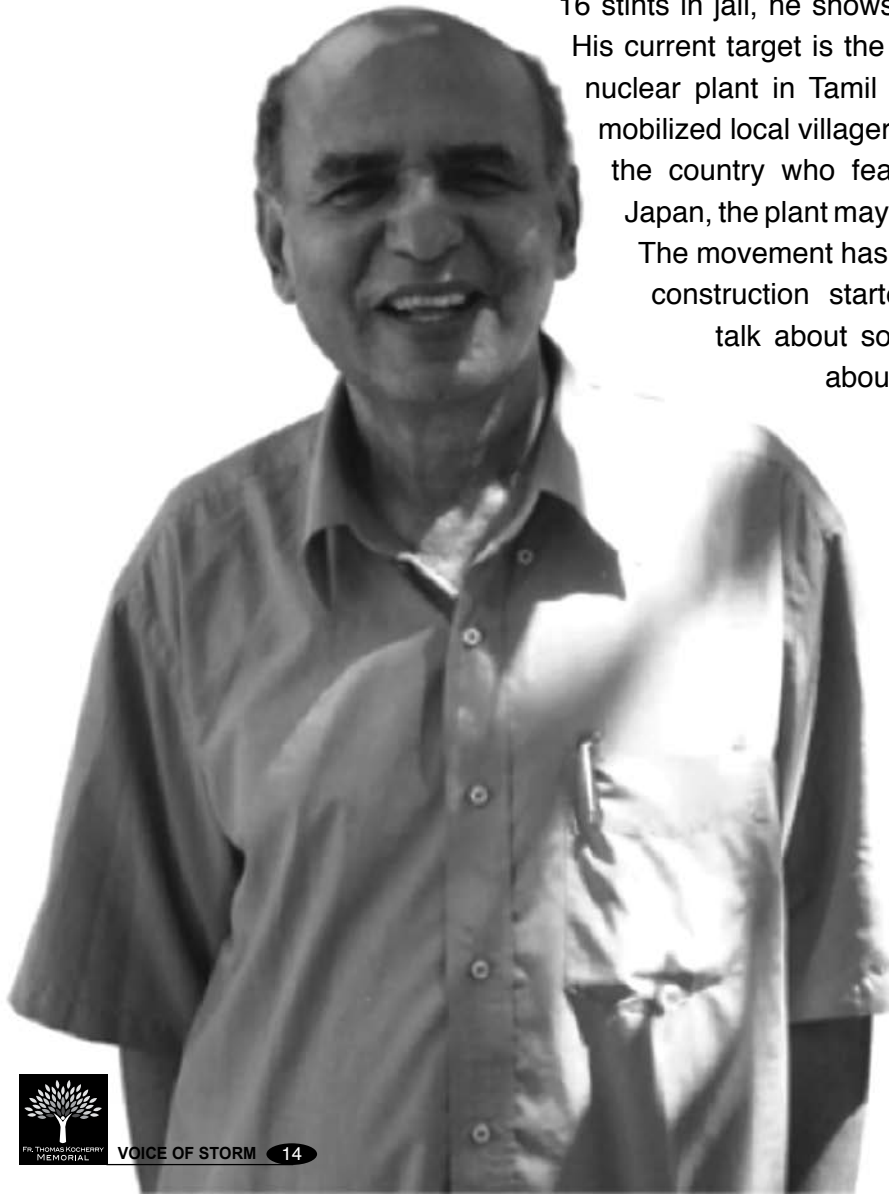
You just can't stop Thomas Kocherry. After four heart attacks, innumerable fasts and 16 stints in jail, he shows no sign of slowing down.

His current target is the controversial Kudankulam nuclear plant in Tamil Nadu. The campaign has mobilized local villagers and activists from across the country who fear that, like Fukushima in Japan, the plant may be vulnerable to a tsunami.

The movement has fought tooth and nail since construction started in 1989. 'You cannot talk about social justice without talking about the environment,' says

Kocherry. 'There can be no shortcuts, no depleting of natural capital.' This in part explains his anti-nuclear stance. When not campaigning, he travels South India putting on seminars for young activists.

Tom Kocherry, the fifth of eleven children, Kocherry grew up in the Backwaters region of Kerala, where poor fisher folk used small



boats to earn a living from the fresh waters that parallel the Indian Ocean. The two influences on his early adult life were the church (particularly the social gospel of the Redemptorist Fathers) and the radical Left movement that contested Kerala politics (led by the Communist Party of India) from the first days of independence. It was natural enough for Kocherry to make common cause with the poor inshore fisher folk and their struggles. He and three other Redemptorists made their living as part of the Shore Seine fishery, and helped organize health clinics and nurseries amongst the hard-working but desperately poor fishers systematically exploited by a series of wholesalers and merchants.

In the late 1970s, Kerala fishers started to organize and assert their rights on a whole range of issues. They set up an organization called the Kerala Independent Fishworkers Federation. In 1981 Kocherry and fellow leader Joyachan Antony went on an 11-day fast in favour of a Monsoon Trawl Ban (the breeding season for many varieties of fish) in Kerala. Kocherry was arrested on trumped-up charges; in the course of defending himself he managed to fit in a law degree at Kerala University.

By 1982 the fish-workers' struggle had gone national, with Kocherry elected president of the National Fishworkers Forum. In the mid-1990s he led a nationwide campaign to stop the Indian government from opening up the country's fishing industry to a growing fleet of 2,600 large foreign trawlers. With 10 million Indians dependent on a sustainable fishery for their survival, the stakes were high. A militant campaign included marches, fasts and blocking of major fish ports around the country. The Indian government was forced to withdraw the legislation – one of the first and most significant victories against corporate globalization. Kocherry, who went on to help form the World Forum of Fisher People, understands the tensions of fighting for the rights of the fishing community in an era of declining global fish stocks. 'You simply cut from the top. The biggest, most destructive, trawlers go first and you work your way down until you reach a sustainable fishery.'

Kocherry has thought a lot about people's movements – how they succeed and fail. These days, he is highly critical both of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) and the established Christian church. 'They become institutionalized, create dogmas and rituals and statues of their gods, they become power-mongering or give in to the power of money.' For Kocherry, the strength of a people's movement lies elsewhere. 'It must be from the bottom up. The challenge is to create an evolving revolutionary structure that never becomes institutionalized or ratified by power.' It is a vision that would strike a chord with today's Occupy Movements and their search for new organizational forms.

Richard Swift is a former New Internationalist co-editor. See more at: <http://newint.org/columns/makingwaves/2012/05/01/tom-kocherry-interview/#sthash.1zxBCIFw.dpuf>

KOODANKULAM NUCLEAR PLANT & PEOPLE'S PROTEST

Thomas Kocherry

“We have been opposing the Koodankulam Nuclear Power Project (KKNPP) ever since it was conceived in the mid-1980s. The people of Koodankulam village themselves were misled by false promises such as 10,000 jobs, water from Pechiparai dam in Kanyakumari district, and fantastic development of the region. We tried in vain to tell them that they were being deceived. Without any local support, we could not sustain the Anti-Koodankulam movement for too long,” says Dr. Udayakumar, Convener of Anti-Koodankulam Nuclear Movement.

The people of Koodankulam know and understand that this is not just a fisherfolk's problem, they may be displaced, and they have to deal with radioactive poison. Their joining the movement in 2007 has invigorated the campaign now. And (almost) all of us here in the southernmost tip of India oppose the Koodankulam NPP for a few specific reasons:

[1] The KKNPP reactors are being set up without sharing the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), Site Evaluation Study and Safety Analysis Report with the people, or the people's representatives or the press. No public hearing has been conducted for the first two reactors either. There is absolutely no democratic decision-making in or public approval for this project.

[2] The Tamil Nadu Government G.O. 828 (29.4.1991 – Public Works Department) establishes clearly that “area between 2 to 5 km radius around the plant site, [would be] called the sterilization zone.” This means that people in this area could be displaced. But the KKNPP authorities promise orally and on a purely ad-hoc basis that nobody from the neighboring villages would be displaced. This kind of ad hocism and doublespeak causes suspicion and fears of displacement.

[3] More than 1 million people live within the 30 km radius of the KKNPP which far exceeds the AERB (Atomic Energy Regulatory Board) stipulations. It is quite impossible to evacuate this many people quickly and efficiently in case of a nuclear disaster at Koodankulam.

[4] The coolant water and low-grade waste from the KKNPP are going to be dumped into the sea which will have a severe impact on fish production and catch. This will undermine the fishing industry, push the fisherfolks into deeper poverty and misery and affect the food security of the entire southern Tamil Nadu and southern Kerala.





[5] Even when the KKNPP projects function normally without any incidents and accidents, they would be emitting Iodine 131, 132, 133, Cesium 134, 136, 137 isotopes, strontium, tritium, tellurium and other such radioactive particles into our air, land, crops, cattle, sea, seafood and ground water. Already the southern coastal belt is sinking with very high incidence of cancer, mental retardation,

down syndrome, defective births due to private and government sea-sand mining for rare minerals including thorium. The KKNPP will add many more woes to our already suffering people.

[6] The quality of construction and the pipe work and the overall integrity of the KKNPP structures have been called into question by the very workers and contractors who work there in Koodankulam. There have been international concerns about the design, structure and workings of the untested Russian-made VVER-1000 reactors.

[7] The then Minister of State for Environment and Forest Mr. Jairam Ramesh announced a few months ago that the central government had decided not to give permission to KKNPP 3-6 as they were violating the Coastal Regulation Zone stipulations. It is pertinent to ask if KKNPP 1 and 2 are not violating the CRZ terms.

[8] Many political leaders and bureaucrats try to reassure us that there would be no natural disasters in the Koodankulam area. How can they know? How can anyone ever know? The 2004 December tsunami did flood the KKNPP installations. There was a mild tremor in the surrounding villages of Koodankulam on March 19, 2006. On August 12, 2011, there were tremors in 7 districts of Tamil Nadu.

[9] The Prime Minister himself has spoken about terrorist threats to India's nuclear power plants. Most recently, on August 17, 2001, Minister of State for Home, Mr. Mullappally Ramachandran said: "the atomic establishments continue to remain prime targets of the terrorist groups and outfits."

[10] The important issue of liability for the Russian plants has not been settled yet. Defying the Indian nuclear liability law, Russia insists that the Inter-Governmental Agreement

(IGA), secretly signed in 2008 by the Indian and Russian governments, precedes the liability law and that Article 13 of the IGA clearly establishes that NPCIL is solely responsible for all claims of damages.

[11] In 1988 the authorities said that the cost estimate of the Koodakulam 1 and 2 projects was Rs. 6,000 crores. In November 1998, they said the project cost would be Rs. 15,500. In 2001, the ministerial group for economic affairs announced that the project cost would be Rs. 13,171 crores and the Indian government would invest Rs. 6,775 crores with the remainder amount coming in as Russian loan with 4 percent interest. The fuel cost was estimated to be Rs. 2,129 crores which would be entirely Russian loan. No one knows the 2011 figures of any of these expenses. No one cares to tell the Indian public either.

[12] The March 11, 2011 disaster in Fukushima has made it all too clear to the whole world that nuclear power plants are prone to natural disasters and no one can really predict their occurrence. When we cannot effectively deal with a nuclear disaster, it is only prudent to prevent it from occurring. Even the most industrialized and highly advanced country such as Germany has decided to phase out their nuclear power plants by the year 2022. Switzerland has decided to shun nuclear power technology. In a recent referendum, some 90 percent of Italians have voted against nuclear power in their country. Many Japanese prefectures and their governors are closing nuclear power plants in their regions. Both the United States and Russia have not built a new reactor in their countries for 2-3 decades ever since major accidents occurred at Three Mile Island and Chernobyl.

In our own country, Mamata Banerjee government in West Bengal has stopped the Russian nuclear power park project at Haripur in Purba Medhinipur district and taken a position that they do not want any nuclear power project in their state. Similarly, the people of Kerala have decided not to host any nuclear power project in their state.

[13] And finally, the Indian government's mindless insistence on nuclear power, utmost secrecy in all of its nuclear agreements and activities, and its sheer unwillingness to listen to the people's concerns and fears make us very doubtful about the real benefactors of all this nuclear hoopla. Is it all for us, the people of India? Or for the corporate profits of the Russian, American and French companies? Or for the Indian





military? Are the lives and futures of the Indian citizens inferior to all these?”

We should keep in mind the following points if anybody would like to intervene in this issue:

1. The fisher people protested against the Koodamkulam Nuclear Plant in 1989 under the aegis of Kanniyakumari March.

The police opened fire upon the fisher people and many got wounded and Mr. Jesuretinam lost his leg and he is permanently disabled. The police filed against the fisher people and the case went on for 6 years and finally the case was dismissed.

2. The protest continued under the leadership of Y. David but the GOI went ahead with the construction of Koodamkulam Nuclear Plant (KNP)

3. The National Alliance of Peoples Movements (NAPM) also protested against KNP many times but the GOI went ahead with the construction of KNP.

4. It was in this context Fukushima Incident took place in Japan. This has created protest all over the World against Nuclear Plants.

5. Germany decided to close down all the Nuclear Plants in Germany by 2025. People are moving out from the areas of Nuclear Plants in Germany.

6. Vatican has constructed Solar Energy Plants in Vatican with the help of Germany instead of Nuclear Plants.

7. GOI cannot give any safety when they totally failed in BHOPAL GAS TRAGEDY. Nobody in India is going to believe the promises of Safety by the GOI.

8. What safety GOI can give when KNP is dumping hot water with radiation content to the Sea? Who will compensate the fisher people in Tuticorin, Kanniyakumari and Trivandrum?

9. Where will KNP dump the waste with Radiation Content?

10. Russia is not taking any liability if any disaster happens with KNP.

11. This is a new technology by the Russians. They are experimenting with it. Nobody is sure about the safety.

12. If any disaster happens, who is liable? Prime Minister Manmohan Singh?

13. Mamata Banerjee, Chief Minister of West Bengal Canceled Haripur Nuclear Plant all by herself? Why can't Tamil Nadu Assembly and the CM and People reject KNP? Why Prime Minister is pushing KNP upon Tamil Nadu? This is a violation the federal system of India. It is an open violation of Indian Constitution.

14. In Jaithapur fisher people are protesting against the Nuclear Plant.

15. Why Can't GOI make Solar Energy and Wind energy? . If the same amount they are investing on Nuclear Plants, be made on Solar and Wind energy creation, we can have Wind and Solar Energy in India.

16. If the present transmission of electricity is converted scientifically we can save 20-30% electricity of present production. The maximum nuclear energy GOI is envisaging is only 20%.

17. In the light of these the People of Tamil Nadu do not want KNP. Please stop talking about safety.

The dioceses of Tuticorin and Kottar are fully involved in the struggle. The first struggle went on for 11 days with 125 persons on indefinite hunger strike and thousands sit-in-dharna supporting the fast. This led to the resolution that Tamil Nadu Assembly saying 'no' to the KNP. The Tamil Nadu Chief Minister has taken a strong stand against the KNP. The agitation is on and the people expect the church to render support to their cause.



Koodankulam and Mullaperiyar: Do not divide the people!

Dear Friends,

1. Let us look at the Nuclear Power and Mullaperiyar issues separately. It is very dangerous to compare these. These will complicate further. Let us take the issues one by one on its own merit. There are many problems interconnected. Each issue is different and let us not complicate that further.

2. Let us take Nuclear issue. Kerala as a state says no Nuclear Power in Kerala. All the political parties are unanimous on this. However Kerala as a whole is not supporting the struggle against Koodankulam Nuclear Plant(KNP). No political party came in support of the struggle against KNP. Though Kerala Chief Minister compared these two in the context safety, he did not support the agitation against KNP. He will not dare to do that, because he knows that Prime Minister will not entertain that.

3. On the other hand Tamil Nadu is unanimous with regard to Mullaperiyar and its safety. Whether this is correct or not, history will have to prove. Scientists and Engineers have to play an important role. However Kerala has a different stand concerning Mullaperiyar and safety of the Dam. It is very interesting to know that there is no difference on the sharing of water among Kerala and Tamil Nadu.. It is here that the PM, the Supreme Court, and the Central Empower Team have to play an important role to settle the issue. It is heartening to know that such positive steps are taking place.

4. Mullaperiyar issue is a highly an emotional issue both in Kerala and Tamil Nadu. If we do not use our mind this can flare up to other issues, like language issues, Tamils and Malayalees issues. Blocking Vehicles and attacking people are dangerous. All have to take self control in this. All the political parties, religious groups and other groups have to play an important role not to flare up to such issues. We cannot afford to do that now in the present juncture.

5. In the same way let us use our mind concerning KNP. Kerala can play an important role to show the reason why they do not want Nuclear Plant? We have to go beyond political parties and reason out why we do not want Nuclear Plants. Kerala can help the Prime Minister to understand the Nuclear Issue in a different manner. We have to think in an all inclusive manner going beyond any kind of exclusiveness like my state. We have to think like Indians together. Then we can solve the problems fast.

All the best. My prayers are with you all.

Thomas Kocherry

Lives:

Fr. Thomas Kocherry,

The People's Priest

Gary Frase, Posted June 26, 2014



When Thomas Kocherry, a Redemptorist priest in Kerala, India, died May 3 this year at age seventy-three, he was remembered as a champion for social and environmental justice. His personal writings show a man whose love for the poor and tireless advocacy stemmed from a radical understanding of the gospel.

In 1971 Kocherry began serving as a priest in Poothura, a poor fishing village in Kerala.

Soon he was accompanying local fishermen out to sea, running traditional nets from small catamarans made of wood tied with rope. He witnessed firsthand the suffering of the villagers as their livelihood was threatened by large trawlers operated by multinational fishing corporations.

Kocherry had been introduced to liberation theology in seminary, and the villagers' suffering opened his eyes to the realities of globalized capitalism. He had earned a law degree before seminary, and now used his legal expertise to organize the fishing people of the coastal villages into trade unions and cooperatives. Many of them had been taken advantage of because of their lack of education, so he set up schools and adult literacy programs.

Soon Kocherry became a national figure as head of the National Fishworkers Forum. In 1983 he fasted for twenty-one days, achieving a ban on international trawlers during the monsoon spawning season that remains in effect to this day, protecting the livelihoods of traditional fishing peoples. In 1997 he was elected coordinator of the World Forum of Fish Harvesters and Fish Workers, becoming a spokesperson for over a hundred million poor fisherfolk worldwide.

His public activism made him a hero of the people, but a thorn in the flesh to corporations and political leaders. He was jailed no less than thirteen times. A man of conviction, he once turned down a \$150,000 Pew Foundation award for marine conservation because it was funded by an international oil company.

For Kocherry, human rights and environmental concerns were inseparable: "I want people who live close to the earth to be protected from those who have detached themselves

from the earth.” He protested the pollution of the ocean and campaigned against nuclear power stations. Months before his death, he was still protesting the construction of a Russian nuclear power plant in a small Indian fishing village.

Critics said Kocherry’s activism was inappropriate for a priest. His social conscience, however, stemmed from a vision of God’s kingdom here on earth. During his last year he drafted a personal statement of faith, titled Faith in Jesus: A Passionate Call for Liberation. In it he writes:

There are many movements in India working toward a better and classless society. Many of these struggles are secular in nature, but we experience the reign of God in each of them, working towards the realization of the kingdom of God and its justice. It is here that our faith becomes real and tangible.

Kocherry’s priestly and activist roles were deeply linked and ultimately indistinguishable. To him, corporate exploitation of the environment and the poor were evils, and “the church of today is not the church of Christ if it does not demonstrate the courage to protest against the evils that are going on today.”

The “fall” in the Garden of Eden at the beginning of time was a radical shift from our original trust in God, of living and working with God, to our taking control of our lives and managing the world our way. In modern times, we describe this as “civilization,” where sinister powers rule the world....The forces of globalization, neoliberalism and militarism are manifestations of these powers that have transformed us into such selfish consumers, destroyers of nature and life....Jesus came to free us from these powers and principalities and reestablish our trust in God.

In his war against systemic economic and environmental evils, Kocherry did not turn a blind eye to personal sin and guilt. He quotes Archbishop Oscar Romero:

There can be no true liberation until people are freed from sin....The first liberation to be proposed by any political group that truly wants the people’s liberation must be to freedom from sin. While one is a slave of sin – of selfishness, violence, cruelty, and hatred – one is not fitted for the people’s liberation.

Kocherry made many Christians uncomfortable: “If we are true followers of Jesus we will be like Jesus. We should be poor like Jesus.” He imagined popular social movements joining together to call for a biblical jubilee.

Sabbath was created for the freedom of slaves, who had no rest but were forced to work all seven days of the week.... Every fiftieth year was to be a jubilee year, “the acceptable

year of the Lord,” when all the slaves were freed, their debts written off, and each of them got her or his land back (Lev. 25). Jesus saw his mission as proclaiming this acceptable year of the Lord (Luke 4:18). In fact, he came to fulfil the law and to recapture the original, radical dimension of the Sabbath law....

...It is a denial of God the Creator if we amass land that actually belongs to all who have no land. It is time that through people’s movements we proclaim the “acceptable year of the Lord,” the jubilee year.

Jesus opened up the struggle against private property. He himself had left all that was his own; he had abandoned all privileges and given up all he possessed in order to go the way of love and sacrifice (Matt. 8:20). He is our example because he wanted no property. From the manger to the cross, he was the poorest.

Thomas Kocherry’s part in the struggle to defend the downtrodden and creation is over, but the struggle itself goes on. He concludes his statement with this prayer:

We are at the end of the final battle, caught in the tussle between life and death. Remain, then, under God’s command. The old world is overthrown and Jesus’ kingdom, it alone, arises from the ruins. May his kingdom come on earth for all people and for the planet. Amen.



Fr. Thomas Kocherry is doing a lot of **thinking** lately.

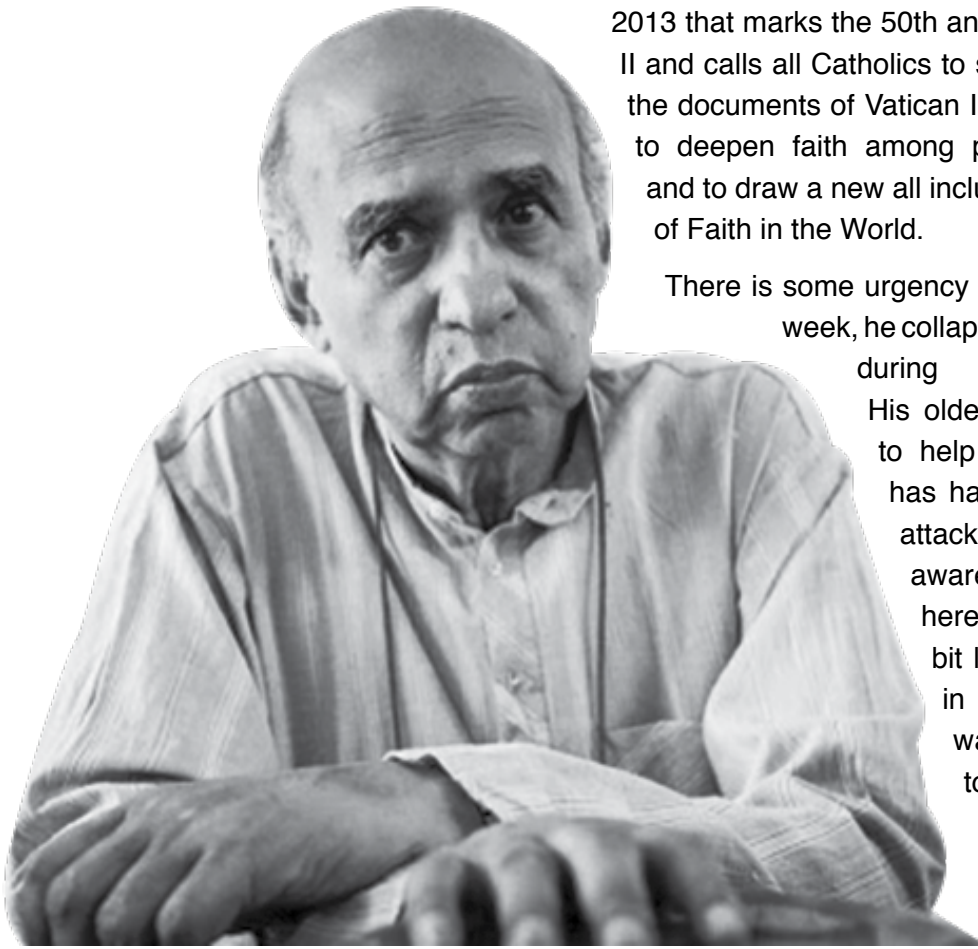
He is a Roman Catholic priest, a lawyer, a labor leader - who helped find the World Forum of Fish-harvesters and Fishworkers (WFF) and later the creation of World Forum of Fisher Peoples (WFFP). And, he is a pastor within a church community in southern India, as well as an ecologist of sorts, who has galvanized workers to protect India's coast-land from aggressive forms of development that threaten the livelihoods of vulnerable fisher communities and the pollutants and industrial-style fishing that put the ocean and its fish population at risk. He was able to do this through a national organization called National Fishworkers Forum (NFF).

He may have multiple titles, but the work is all one to Kocherry.

At 73, with a weak heart, he's now put down on paper his theological reflections about why this life? This faith? This call? This work?

He calls it **Faith in Jesus: A Passionate Call for Liberation**. It is his contribution to what the Roman Catholic Church is calling the "Year of Faith," a season ending Nov. 24, 2013 that marks the 50th anniversary of Vatican II and calls all Catholics to study and reflect on the documents of Vatican II and the catechism to deepen faith among practicing Catholics and to draw a new all inclusive understanding of Faith in the World.

There is some urgency for clarity now. Last week, he collapsed during a sermon during Sunday worship. His older sister is on hand to help with his care. He has had a series of heart attacks and is acutely aware that he will not be here for forever. It is a bit like hearing thunder in the distance, while waiting on raindrops to fall.



“In my life, this is what I’ve been trying to say,” Kocherry says, referring to his booklet, which contents that the liberating force of Jesus’ life and ministry can only be understood through the experience of enslavement, oppression and prophetic opposition to power-brokering within institutionalized religion that are recurrent themes in Jewish history and religious thought.

Redress sought in the calls of Abraham, Moses and the classical prophets, as well as Jesus, are a lens to view discipleship now and to formulate a faith-based response to a globalizing world. If you ask, he’ll talk about wealth that is amassed by a few at the expense of the many, about the few limits placed on tapping environmental resources, about people who are seen as consumers rather than creations of God. He also speaks of those who are deprived of education because of color, gender or caste – seen most vividly in the lives of fisherfolk in India and Sri Lanka who’ve been caught in the globalization struggle for decades now, whether it is fighting industrial over-fishing, an end to industrial pollution, and, now, protections for beach front villages that corporations are grabbing up for tourist development.

“In that (prophetic) tradition, everyone is called to the mission of Christ. And, you have to pay the price for it to respond to the call,” he says, adding that his own trajectory was set as a 22-year-old seminarian challenged by a working priest to recapture the “charism” of the tradition by working for the poor.

“It is not very easy,” he says.

The data proves that.

Kocherry has gone to jail nearly 20 times and fasted as a non-violent witness to promote governmental change tied to the environment, nuclear plant construction and, first, the poverty among India’s fisher-people. In 1981, Kocherry fasted to support a trawl ban. By 1982, he was president of the National Fishworkers Forum and by the mid-1990’s, was at the forefront of a national campaign that includes marches, fasts and blockades on ports to stop the government from opening its waters to foreign trawlers. Ultimately, the Indian government conceded.

But the quarrel still rages.

Kocherry believes that followers of Jesus are innately Suffering Servants and the witness is “a passionate call for liberation through non-violent means,” catching its proponents in the eternal conflict between life and death. The hope, he says, is that the “old world” will be overthrown one day and Jesus’ kingdom alone “will arise from the ruins.”



This work puts followers at odds with corporate, government, social and, often, religious power because institutions protect the systems that protect them. The church is no different, he says. Usually it is single individuals, not churches, who step forward in fights like these. What is necessary is to “realize your call within your institution,” Kocherry proposes, knowing that struggle is simply a part of the work of justice and that we are inescapably part of institutions.

That is a mantra that he says out loud.

In 1997, Kocherry was awarded the PEW Foundation Award of \$150,000 (U.S. dollars) for marine conservation and he turned it down. The award itself is funded by the Sun Oil Company, which, he says, is a polluter. He has been recognized for human rights work – without incident – by the FIAN International for Socio-economic Human Rights Protection. The Earth Society Foundation in New York recognized his work for marine ecology in 1998 at the Earth Day celebrations at the United Nations. In 1999, he was one of the winners of the \$100,000 Sophie Prize from Norway to honor contributions in the field of alternative politics and development.

But this is not work for sissies or for the spiritually lazy.

“What is your inner strength to face such a struggle? ... How can you face opposition left and right?” Kocherry challenges, adding that contemplative practice is the only answer to distinguish the deception within financial systems, advertising and other pressures that conform people unwittingly to culture.

It is the struggle Jesus faced in Jerusalem, he says, when he pledge with God to take his away, and then, finally, sacrifices his life. Without such struggle, he says, our search for justice is another exercise in human will and self-deception, rather than the deep internal transformation that is spiritually revolutionary and helps people live “truthfully, honestly and lovingly.”

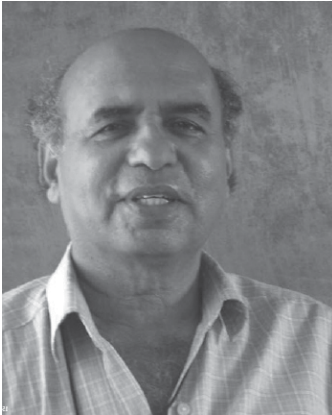
Whatever the practice, Kocherry says, it must be liberating and life-giving, not mere ritual or dogmatic. Each follower must find his/her practice.

“This is the crux of the problem of spirituality: If we are called by God or by Jesus... we are seeking the kingdom and justice. That is all-inclusive, not exclusive, the spirituality of any church. And naturally, you’re going to be opposed by the institutions of the world (who do not) stand for justice, (who do not) stand for truth,” he says.

Meet

Fr. Thomas Kocherry

Call of the wild
Sanctuary
A S I A



February 2000: A labour leader, Tom Kocherry is the Coordinator of the World Forum of Fish-harvester and Fishworkers (WFF) and India's National Alliance of Peoples' Movements (NAPM). He is also the Rector of the Periyavillai Redemptorist Community in Tamil Nadu. One of the organisers of the famous Kanyakumari march of 1989 that sought to protect India's coastal ecology, he and his colleagues have mobilised the fishing community to fight the foreign industrial fishing fleets that had been invited to India by shortsighted politicians. A crusader against coastal pollution, he

*spearheaded protests against the Koodankulam Nuclear Plant in Tamil Nadu and is currently a member of the Coastal Zone Management Authority of India. He spoke to **Bittu Sahgal** about his quest for a more secure future for India's fishing communities.*

Catholic priest, trade union leader, lawyer, environmentalist and battler against the WTO at Seattle... will the real Tom Kocherry please stand up?

He is sitting before you! I might be all these and more, but my concern is one... I want people who live close to the earth to be protected from those who have detached themselves from the earth.

Is this a new involvement? How come your life took so many twists and turns?

My life has actually taken me along the straight and narrow, towards the involvements that govern my existence today. It seems like yesterday, but I was ordained as a priest nearly 30 years ago and I still do God's work by defending his creations.

But what led you towards fishing communities in particular?

In 1971, soon after I became a priest, I worked with the refugees from Bangladesh in Raigunj. The stories of despair and destitution that I heard changed me forever. My

decision to spend my life defending the oppressed was further consolidated when I began to work in a small fishing village called Poothura near Thiruvananthapuram. Middlemen led by one politically well-connected family were using muscle-power to keep fisherfolk permanently on the edge of starvation even though they worked harder than any community I knew. I decided to arm them with knowledge by teaching them to read and write.

That sounds like very positive work. Why then are you regarded as anti-development by 'the system'?

Which system? The one that exploits and privatises the natural capital that belongs to the public? I might ask those in charge of the 'system' what exactly they mean by development in the first place. Does it mean destroying nature's priceless assets to build temporary commercial ones? Fisherfolk may not be professional communicators, but those who destroy human hope cannot be allowed to paint people like us as anti-development any longer.

Such charges, of course, come from people in high places.

Yes, they are precisely the ones I refer to. The corruption and autocracy in high places, which appears to go hand in hand with 'development', has become all too obvious. Millions of fisherfolk who live peacefully along the coast also want economic development. We also want security and health and nutrition. But these must come with peace, harmony and social justice. After divorcing themselves from nature, so-called developers are now looking to steal even this basic human right from fisherfolk and forest dwellers.

That could be Medha Patkar talking!

That's because the people of the Narmada Valley face aggression from the same forces that seek to profit from the degradation of the seas. Colossal mismanagement and injustice is being perpetrated in the name of development in the Narmada Valley, and along the entire coast of India. This is the very rationale for the launching of the National Alliance of Peoples' Movements (NAPM), which seeks to protect India's natural resources - water, land and forest - against global or national exploiters.





Is your battle a human rights or an environmental one?

What's the difference? Local fishing communities that depend on their daily catch from the oceans are not consulted when the fate of coastal areas is decided. The end result is starvation and social stress, caused by businessmen living far from the arena of distress. Should fisherfolk not own and manage the water bodies, fishing infrastructure and

the sale and distribution of their catch? Should they not have the right to prevent the pollution of their waters by industry or the usurpation of their habitats by industrial-scale aquaculture? We want control of these factors. If you take away my ability to provide for my family - by destroying my environment - you abuse my human right to livelihood.

Give me an example of what you mean.

In 1991, in pursuit of globalisation the government introduced what they called the Joint Venture Policy. Foreign fishing fleets were being foolishly invited in to Indian waters to exhaust our dwindling fish stocks. As many as 25,000 vessels of the type that have already destroyed 75 per cent of the world's fishing grounds, with the exception of the Indian Ocean, would have entered India. We prevented this through united actions involving the entire fishing industry, which went on four nation-wide fisheries' strikes that also involved the blockade of harbours in the past few years. I was personally constrained to go on a hunger strike twice. As a result of such actions fisherfolk found representation in the Murari High Powered Committee that was instructed to look into and redraft the deep sea fishing policy. This led to a ban on new licenses and the cancellation of all foreign fishing. Though the 21 recommendations made by the Murari Committee were accepted in toto, we await their implementation by the government. The Joint Venture policy of 1991 was rescinded in 1998.

How successful are your other battles?

I don't know if you can call them successful because we are condemned to permanent vigilance against the destroyers. But we have managed to make our point against industrial prawn farms that destroy paddy fields supporting thousands of hardworking communities. The irony is that aquaculture has in-built self-destructive elements. When

disease and pollution combine that will be the end of aquaculture, marine fishing and even the centuries old coastal agriculture. The NFF has no option but to work for a national and global ban on industrial aquaculture, which also depletes and pollutes coastal aquifers.

Take another case, that of Enron in Maharashtra. More than 30,000 fisherfolk and marginal farmers here now find themselves unable to provide for their families because this project usurped their habitat and eroded their ecological security. We fought against those who promoted Enron and won. But we were then let down by the very politicians who were elected on their promise of support to us. History will not remember such people well. They talk of 'benefits' but the benefits, if any, of such projects will flow directly to distant cities. Multiply the impact of Enron 200 times, which is an understatement of the potential impact of new and on-going destructive projects on the self-sufficiency of coastal communities, and India has a holocaust on its hands.

The World Bank would surely disagree with you. They suggest that larger trawlers, deep-water jetties, prawn farms, coastal highways and cold storages will help increase fish production.

They are a bank. They can suggest what they like. They do not want to increase fish production, but rather to mine the seas of fish instantly. But they cannot produce more fish than the seas wish to yield. Such policies have begun to impact even the big corporations that support them. Industrial prawn farms are being financially destroyed by disease and the catch from the oceans is falling. On one hand they talk about sustainable fishing and on the other they finance mega-trawlers that use wall-of-death methods to strip-mine the oceans. Such rape and run practices depleted the North Sea. We will not allow them to plunder our seas. This would endanger the food security of millions.

Are you in touch with the World Bank? How can you fight such policies?

We do not need to make contact directly. We are fighting their impact on policy makers around the world. In 1995, fisheries' representatives from four continents met in Quebec City, Canada and this resulted in the birth of the World Forum of Fish-harvesters and Fishworkers in 1997 with participation from 32 fishing nations. We seek a





world-wide ban on destructive fishing gears, a ban on coastal industrial aquaculture and the end of coastal industrial pollution. We observe November 21 each year as World Fisheries Day. We are committed to fight World Bank-financed projects such as chemical complexes, thermal plants and coastal reclamations that destroy marine breeding

grounds. In Seattle we recently won a signal battle when the combined might of the WTO, IMF and multinational corporations had to bow before the press of public opinion.

Is the law on your side, or do you intend to use sheer numbers in a show of strength as you did when our government was about to allow foreign trawlers to fish in our waters?

The law is on our side, and also the traditional wisdom of millions who have harvested the sea sustain-ably for centuries. Take the case of the Coastal Regulation Zone Rules, which prohibit the destruction of ecologically-fragile coastal habitats, mangroves, corals, estuaries and mudflats where marine creatures breed. We will also use our numbers to prevent business interests from building prawn farms, hotels, roads and industrial projects or influencing governments to dilute protective laws. Our rationale is simple: protect the coast and it will protect us.

Some suggest that the coast belongs to everyone, not only fisherfolk.

Everything belongs to everyone! But the coast is our space. We live and die here. We know that we must defend this space to protect our lives. Corals, mangroves and coastal vegetation reduce the impact of cyclones and tidal waves such as the ones that have struck Andhra Pradesh, Kutchh and Orissa recently. Developers believe they can destroy these natural defences and replace them with expensive sea walls. These are ineffective and a criminal waste of resources. Mangroves, corals, sandbars and dunes are the best sea walls and like other good things from nature... they cost nothing!

Which brings us to another issue, that of wildlife protection. Do you support this movement in India?

Naturally I do. But I am upset with those environmentalists who seek to protect turtles and dolphins, but collaborate with the very forces that think nothing of polluting our marine

environment and destroy our seas by financing large factory ships and trawlers. I also differ slightly from those who propose wildlife protection strategies that involve total bans on harvesting marine catch. Take the case of the Sundarbans Tiger Reserve. We support the protection of the tiger and the entire ecosystem, but defend the right of traditional communities to fish in the surrounding swamps, like they have for centuries. The people of the Sundarbans see the tiger as a protective and supportive God. Those fighting for wildlife and those who depend on the health of the Sundarbans should work together to protect this Eden. Similarly, we support the protection of turtle breeding grounds on Orissa's Gahirmata coast and are opposed to World Bank proposals to build deep sea jetties there. We are also upset at the proliferation of oil facilities near the fish breeding grounds in and around the Marine National Park in the Gulf of Kutchh. Wildlife groups and earth-dependent communities have a common destiny to fulfill.

What is the bottom line? What is it that the fisherfolk of India want from their government?

The bottom line is that fishing grounds and coastal zones around the world are in crisis and fishing communities must unite to protect their natural capital and human rights. We want a government acknowledgment that the sea is the source of all life and a promise to protect coastal waters and coastal communities. We seek a ban on destructive fishing gears, particularly factory trawlers. And, of course, we want an end to industrial pollution. This should be a key element of India's national purpose. Like our forests, the seas too can repair themselves, provided we are keep profiteers and destroyers from violating them.

International Awards

In 1997 Thomas Kocherry was awarded the PEW Foundation Award of US \$150,000 for marine conservation. He declined the Award because it is funded by the Sun Oil Company, itself responsible for marine pollution. In 1997, the FIAN International for Socio-economic Human Rights Protection, Germany, awarded Thomas Kocherry with a gold medal for his work on human rights issues. In March 1998, during the Earth Day celebrations at the United Nations, the Earth Society Foundation, New York awarded Thomas Kocherry with the Earth Trustee Award for his contribution in preserving and promoting marine ecology. In 1999 he was one of the winners of the US \$100,000 Sophie Prize from Norway. The Sophie Prize recognises contributions in the field of alternative politics and development.

See more at: <http://www.sanctuaryasia.com/component/content/article/137-interviews-archive/609-fr-tom-kocherry.html#sthash.LkSEidRc.dpuf>

Message from National Fisheries Solidarity Movement (NAFSO) Sri Lanka.



People come and Go. This is the natural phenomena. However, depart of the people who inspired thousands of people in the own community, within the nation and also internationally are not so easy to bear. Fr. Thomas Kocherry is such a person who inspired millions of fisher people all over the world through his commitments, sacrifices, intellectual capacities and political activism.

Thomas Kocherry, well known as beloved “Tom” among colleagues was instrumental to the formation of many social movements in the world. He was the backbone and brain to bring both World Forum of Fish Workers and Fish Harvesters [WFF] and World Forum of Fisher Peoples [WFFP] in to the main stream political arena of development. Tom did not compromise his principles and always took strong stand in favor of the marginalized, oppressed and poor in the world.

He had critics at any time once WFFP attempted to please the authorities while compromising the fisher people’s rights. Tom was not afraid and never hesitated to surface his ideologies, difference of opinions based on his principles while he understands he will be the minority among all others.

Even Tom’s opponents understood and respected when he took firm stand and rigid actions even though they are not accepted by the majority. So, he was not popular



among many circles and attempted to label him as extremist. But, eventually it proved Tom's thinking was correct and appropriate in many occasions.

As NAFSO, in Sri Lanka we benefitted from Tom's strong mediations to get release Sri Lankan fishermen when they were arrested and kept in India in many places. Tom's strong mobilization skills helped us to bring Sri Lankan

fishermen back home and make the families released from the tensions. Thank you Tom for your mediation, we were able to form strong women wing of NAFSO with your interventions.

Tom was with us as a commissioner during the People's Planning Commission, organized by Sri Lankan civil society organizations to find alternative approach for the post tsunami development process. Also, at the 4th General Assembly of the World Forum of Fisher Peoples' [WFFP] when we held it in Sri Lanka, in 2008. He was the major force behind the Coordination Committee of the WFFP. We won't get Tom's sharp political analysis and effective actions based on his commitment here after.

Tom is no more with us. He departed leaving us behind. We lost real father in the WFFP family, mentor, visionary and strategist in our social movement. This is a great loss for us and WFFP. And, also his depart had created a big vacuum for NAFSO, our own organization. Many fisher leaders from all over the world share the similar concerns as we saw number of letters exchanged. I never think, there is any other leader who was respected and loved like Tom.

Tom, it is hard to say Good Bye to you.

But, the time has come to Say Good Bye. But, the memories of your strong personality will remain in our memories for ever. At the same time, we assure we will carry your flag on your hand and the cross on your shoulder will carry up to the Goal where, poor and marginalized will live in peace, harmony and as prosperous community.

Laal Salaam Tom! We all in the fishing communities Love you!

Herman Kumara

Convener- National Fisheries Solidarity Movement, (NAFSO)

Victory Fishworkers



Indian fisher people have rallied round to reverse the government's policy on deep-sea joint ventures

This appeal has been issued by Thomas Kocherry, R. K. Patil and Harekrishna Debnath of the National Fishworkers' Forum

India has a sea coast of 7,000 km. Indian waters are tropical and therefore contain multiple species of fish, but each species occurs only in small quantities. According to one assessment, 3.7 million tonnes of fish are available annually. Of this, 2.7 million tonnes are caught by traditional crafts.

There are about two million full-time active fishermen, while the number of fisher people totals almost eight million. There are about three million part-time fishermen, whose total population is close to 12 million.

Most of them live below the poverty line in a subsistence economy. They live on the sea coast, with poor housing conditions. Illiteracy among them is about 70 per cent.

The first attempts to develop India's fisheries introduced bottom trawling in the 1960s which resulted in greater pauperization of the traditional sector. This created tensions between the small mechanized and traditional sectors.

The second stage of fisheries development introduced chartering of foreign vessels in order to exploit the deep seas. This too created havoc.

Bull trawling, which was part of the charter operations, depleted resources heavily. All these vessels were fishing in the territorial waters.

This led to open clashes between the traditional and the small, mechanized sector. Not even a single Indian entrepreneur was able to own a vessel in five years, the period stipulated by the charter policy. Thus the Government of India scrapped the policy. However, some of these vessels are still in operation.

The third stage of development was the introduction of 180 foreign trawlers owned by Indian entrepreneurs. This project was a total failure and only 20 remain in operation. Several of the companies ran up huge debts to the Shipping Credit and Investment Corporation of India.



: Lax rules and poor enforcement are allowing fleets to overfish at deeper levels. Photograph: Pierre Gleizes/Greenpeace

This led to the appointment of an FAO committee to study Indian deep-sea fishing. M. Gudicelli, who conducted the study, said that only 164,000 tonnes of fish are commercially viable in the deep seas. The other varieties are of low value, and catching them would not be profitable. In 1991, the Government of India introduced the joint venture scheme. This led to more open clashes between the traditional and mechanized sectors.

Since 1976, the fisher people of India have been agitating against these destructive policies. However, their campaign took a new turn when they went on a fisheries 'bundh' (work stoppage) on 4 February 1994. Then they organized an all-India strike on 23 and 24 November 1994.

As a result, the Government of India froze the issue of licences to foreign fishing vessels and appointed a committee to review the joint venture scheme. Since there was no representation for fisher people in the committee, they went on a nationwide agitation, which included an indefinite hunger strike in Porbunder, Gujarat, the birth place of Gandhi.

Subsequently, representatives of the fisher people and Members of Parliament representing coastal areas were included in the review committee. On 8 February 1996, this 41-member High Power Committee submitted its report to the Food Processing and Industries Minister.

It contained 21 recommendations, which included a call for the total cancellation of licences. Six months have been given to the Government of India to implement all the recommendations.

If the government fails to do so, it was decided that Thomas Kocherry, co-chairperson of the National Fishworkers' Forum (NFF), would go on an indefinite hunger strike at Sassoon Dock, Mumbai (Bombay) from 7 August 1996 onwards.

The NFF requests everyone to support and collaborate with India's fisher people to keep all foreign vessels and industrial fleets out of Indian waters.

India's Struggle for Freedom Continues

By Manu Vimalassery



Father Thomas Kocherry, radical priest and poor people's advocate, died in Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala on May 3. As local fisher people and priests gathered to pay respect, they were joined by Kerala's political leaders, trade union leaders, and members of the World Forum of Fisher Peoples. They shared memories of their work alongside Kocherry, gathered around his

body, and sang through the night. Thirteen days later, the neoliberal Hindu nationalist Bharata Janata Party (BJP) swept the national elections. The victory of the BJP and its standard bearer Narendra Modi are eddies in the currents of a larger struggle.

Over more than three decades of leadership in that struggle, Thomas Kocherry articulated a vision of social and economic justice grounded in ecological principles. "Development cannot be measured solely by the quantity of production, but by its sustainability, by its capacity to protect the livelihood of all human beings. The life of the planet and the dependent health and welfare of humanity must not be sacrificed to the greed of the few."

Thomas Kocherry was born on May 10, 1940, in Changanassery, then part of the royal state of Travancore. This area in what would become Kerala had been one of the centers of the anti-caste and literacy campaign that continues to mark Kerala's politics. The first dividend of this long tradition was the victory of the Communist Party of India in the 1957 state elections. Kocherry came of age in the generation of national independence and communism.

In 1962, he declared his intention "to work among the poor," and chose religion, not communism, as the main framework for this work. Kocherry began his vocation in 1971 as a parish priest at Poothura, a small fishing village near Thiruvananthapuram. For the rest of the decade, Kocherry took to his parish with gusto — he went to sea and ran nets alongside villagers, and helped organize health clinics and nurseries. Readers of Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai's classic socialist realist novel *Chemmeen* will have a degree of familiarity with the social outlines and fissures in these coastal communities.

"My decision to spend my life defending the oppressed was further consolidated when I began to work in Poothura," Kocherry recalled. "Middlemen led by one politically well-connected family were using muscle-power to keep fisher folk permanently on the edge of starvation even though they worked harder than any community that I knew. I decided to arm them with knowledge by teaching them to read and write."

The villagers had developed technologies tailored to their socio-ecology – boats and nets to fish the waters without destroying the integrity of the ecosystem. Early into his time in Poothura, Kocherry could see that new ships – egged on by government policy – lingered on the horizon. An Indo-Norwegian project brought large-scale trawlers to scrape the sea bottom and rapidly deplete fish stocks. The trawlers that followed did not only go after fish. They also went after the small boats run by villagers, cutting nets and ramming the little boats. Demands for fish and fishmeal (for animal and pet feed in the Global North) moved the trawlers to much more aggressive practices. The future of beach-based fishing was under assault.

Trawlers resulted in technological polarization of the fisheries. The traditional fishing craft, the catamaran, on the other hand, is built out of wood, bound by rope. While its materials are relatively cheap, its construction and use require a high degree of technical skill and sophistication. 40% of fishing crafts in southern India continue to be of this type.

A 2010 Marine Fisheries Census recorded 3,288 marine fishing villages in India, a population of about four million people along a coastline of over 8,000km. The great majority of these villages lack roads, schools, primary healthcare facilities, or drinking water. In many of these communities, women handle the distribution and trade of the catch, and often walk five to ten km to sell their fish in market, and up to five km on foot to collect drinking water. Most of these villagers and villages have no legal title to their lands and waters. The coastline has been earmarked as a space for development by state governments, and fisher people face tourism, commercial harbors, industrial, chemical, and nuclear plants, and Special Economic Zones, all of which not only occupy their lands but also pollute their waters.

Fishworkers Federation

In the early 1980s, Thomas Kocherry helped organize the Kerala Swatantra Matsyathozhilali Federation (Kerala Independent Fishworkers Federation), a trade union of small-scale Fishworkers in southern Kerala. Their first victory was the Marine Fishing Regulation Act, passed in Kerala in 1980, which prohibited trawlers from a 12-mile zone. Narendra Modi's home state of Gujarat, incidentally, was the last coastal state to adopt this act, in 2003. In 1981, Kocherry and fellow movement leader Joyachan Antony underwent an eleven-day fast for a ban on trawling during the monsoon, an important breeding season, as part of a larger movement that saw success by 1988.

In 1982, Fishworkers formed the National Fishworkers' Forum (NFF), choosing Kocherry as their president. In 1989, the NFF organized the "Kanyakumari March," in which two core groups walked the eastern and western coasts of India. They stopped at fishing villages along the way and gathered information about struggles and grievances in these communities. The groups covered about three-fourths of India's coastline and converged

on May 1 at Kanyakumari, the southernmost tip of the subcontinent, where the waters of the Indian Ocean meet those of the Pacific Ocean.

In the early 1990s, the NFF, with Kocherry as President, coordinated a series of militant protests, which included marches, fasts, and blocking of fishing ports around the country. Fisher people protested the Indian government's proposal to open the national fish fleet to 2,600 large foreign-owned trawlers. This was an opening salvo in the liberalization of the Indian economy, and it was met by the disciplined opposition of millions of poor fisher people across India. The protests forced the government to withdraw the proposed policy, marking an early and powerful victory against neoliberalism.

In 1995, Kocherry again fasted for the inclusion of fisher people on the Murari Committee, established to review Indian policy on joint ventures between Indian and foreign fishing firms. The next year, the Congress-led government ignored a Parliamentary committee report that suggested rescinding all foreign trawler licenses, and Kocherry again led a fast until the government reversed its policy.

In 1997, Kocherry was elected to coordinate the World Forum of Fisher Peoples, a group of thirty-six world-wide organizations of artisanal fisher peoples. All these important positions put Kocherry in the spotlight. The Pew Foundation of Sunoco (the oil company) wanted to give Kocherry an award for marine conservation. He declined. There is no irony in an oil company wanting to brand itself as ecological. "A polluter giving an award for marine conservation," Kocherry said, "is a contradiction."

The fisher peoples' struggle crosses national borders, following their experiences at sea. In 2000, the Indian navy arrested 180 Sri Lankan Tamil Fishworkers on a pretext of security against terrorism. Kocherry spearheaded an effort in India to secure their release from jail, while actively supporting the Fishworkers' wives, whose organizing efforts led to the founding of the Sri Vimukthi Fisher Women Organization. Muhammad Ali Shah, of the Pakistani Fisherfolk Forum, wrote after Kocherry's death, "We have lost our leader, a source of inspiration and support, as Kocherry always united the fishermen of Pakistan and India to fight for their common issues."

After the wave

The NFF helped form the National Coastal Protection Campaign, against a 2005 recommendation by the Indian Ministry of Environment and Forests, to pivot from regulation to management of coastal resources. Beach-based fishing communities were at risk of being displaced in post-tsunami redevelopment. In the words of the late Harekrishna Debnath, another leader of the movement, this would result in "an open general license for privatization and vandalism of the coastal zone in the name of investment and development."

In his last months, Kocherry was actively involved in agitation against the Kudankalam Nuclear Power Plant at a coastal site in Tamil Nadu, in an area that was hit by the tsunami. Construction of this plant, India's largest, began in 2002, and has met consistent and organized opposition. In 2011, local villagers commenced a daily protest, with the support of anti-nuclear activists from around the country. In 2012, police repression of this movement swept neighboring villages and resulted in the deaths of a young girl and a fisherman on the shore, within eyesight of the plant.

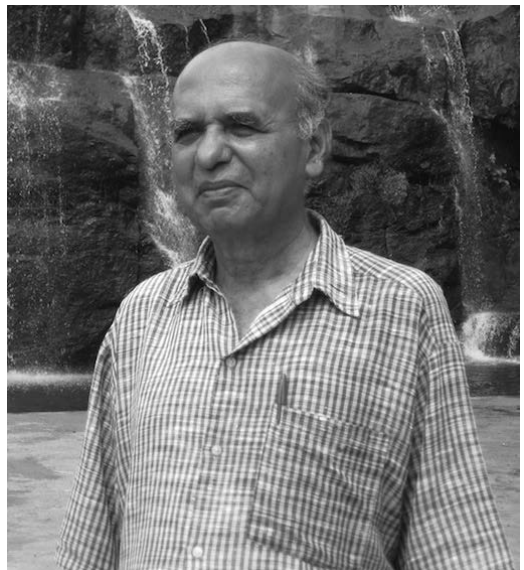
By this date, massive industrial fishing fleets have depleted the oceans of the world, feeding the development of aquaculture in coastal areas and converted rice paddy. The results include oceanic dead zones, highly polluted aquaculture sites, and seafood that appears cheap to consumers. In this era of collapsing global fish stocks, Kocherry articulated a simple program for renewal. "You simply cut from the top. The biggest, most destructive trawlers go first and you work your way down until you reach a sustainable fishery."

In his last message, sent hours before his death, Kocherry reflected on the election that was then in progress. "Modi wants the growth of wealth. But he forgets, in the process, that the vast majority of the country does not have the basic needs of life. All people in India should have education, healthcare, food, water, employment and a house."

India's struggle for freedom is ferociously local, and it also international in scope, drawing links across the South Asian region, and across the world. In Seattle during the run-up to the WTO protests, Kocherry stated his guiding principle, "I want people who live close to the earth to be protected from those who have detached themselves from the earth." Kocherry, whose voice carried palpable force when turned against his opponents, had a gentle and encouraging laugh for a child. He modeled a life of struggle that was simultaneously a life filled with joy.

India's struggle for freedom is a living tradition, with memories of ancestors breathing life into commitments to coming generations. This struggle continues, and Narendra Modi and his government are powerless to stop it, or to contain the force of its impact upon a world of suffering and inequality.

Manu Vimalassery is a co-editor of The Sun Never Sets: South Asian Migrants in an Age of U.S. Power (NYU Press). He is editing a history of the National Fishworkers' Forum.



Friend of the Fisherfolk

M.G. Radhakrishnan



Thomas Kocherry takes fight for fishermen's rights from Kerala backwaters to national stage

Thomas Kocherry is tall, stocky, bald, clean shaved. Don't be fooled, he is not your everyday man. There is a megaphone stuck somewhere in his throat for his voice rises out like rolling thunder. If he is loud, he is fast. He has no concept of full stops or punctuation, his words rush forth resembling some never ending waterfall of sentences. He can

be heard on Sundays, cassock clad, when he stands bowed in front of his congregation and God.

On other days he is a saviour in another form, wearing a khadi dhoti and standing tall in front of politicians, police, unions, shipping companies or anyone who dares bother his beloved fisherfolk and ruins the oceans. Kocherry is by vocation a priest but his Bible and cassock are about where his similarity with most other priests ends.

For eight years between 1982-96, he was president of the National Fishworkers Forum (NFF); today, to use a more godly word, he is the spirit that drives it. At 57, he has a young man's energy. Recently, he traveled 3,000 km in two weeks churning up support against the proposed Aqua Authority Bill already passed by the Rajya Sabha.

The bill gives sanction to hundreds of aqua farms involved in industrial prawn culture. The result, he says, will be the depletion of fish stocks and desertification of the coast. The local people are listening. So is the international community, for this year, he became the first Indian to be awarded the \$150,000 (Rs.54 lakhs) Pew Fellowship in Conservation and the Environment for his contribution for protecting marine life.

For a priest, Kocherry has a lot of fight in him. If the '80s go down as a crucial period in the history of the Fishworkers movement, then he is a symbol of that battle. A man who understood that in all the talk of ecological disasters on land, the coastal belt - where both human and marine life were dying - had been ignored.

Large ships were exploiting waters reserved for traditional fishermen; mechanised vessels were using bottom trawling that damaged the marine environment; licences were given to hundreds of large-scale foreign vessels to conduct fishing operations in a

joint venture agreement with local partners in the Indian seas, their muscle and money too much for the locals to combat.

The small fisherman's protests were drowned out, till Kocherry stepped forward as their voice. Sometimes literally so, for trained in law he spoke for them in court. But more than that, from the backwaters of his native Kerala he would take this fight for survival on to a national stage. As he says, "Neither the organised religion nor the organised trade unions want these people." But he did.

Kocherry's story began in those very Kerala backwaters where he was born to a farmer. As a young man, sitting at his headmaster's feet - also a priest - he was moved by the tales he heard. "Father Kocherry used to tell me how the fishermen led a dangerous and risky life and yet lived in penury exploited by middlemen and large scale marine businessmen."

Already he had found his calling. Soon he would find his role model: St Alphonsus Legoury, an 18th century priest who founded the Redemptorist Congregation. A man, says Kocherry, "who abandoned his lucrative legal profession to become a priest and work with the poor shepherds of Scala in Italy". Just his sort of priest. Kocherry joined the Order, for he too believed that "service of God means not just conducting mass in church but to work among the poor and needy".

It is not empty rhetoric now, neither was it then. For in the terribly poor fishing village of Anchuthengu near Thiruvananthapuram - his first choice as parish priest - the battle began. Successful agitations against the local politician-bureaucrat nexus, which siphoned off money granted by the Government to purchase boats for the fisherfolk, made him an instant hero. The respect accorded to him was almost mythical in its proportion.

In 1981, when he was assigned to Delhi and violent clashes erupted between two fishing villages of Anchuthengu, only he could boldly walk into the war zone and restore peace: his word was final for both groups. The police was not impressed.

When Kocherry protested their brutal methods to control the warring fishermen, he was arrested and charged with attempting to murder a police official. The priest fasted. And the fishermen of Anchuthengu waited. "Days and nights in front of the police station for his release," recalls Maserene, a local fisherman.

Each action of Kocherry's was spurring considerable reaction. This time from the Church. Upset by his arrest, the local fisherfolk turned away from their traditional political party, the Congress, and backed the communists. "The Church did not like it," says Kocherry and he was summarily transferred by the Bishop to Bangalore. It was merely a minor irritation to a committed man, his daily agenda overflowing with skirmishes to attend.

A major battle, one already underway, was the NFF's struggle to enact the Marine Fishing Regulation Act to keep big vessels at a 22 km boundary, an area earmarked for local fishermen. Today, triumphs Kocherry: "Except Gujarat, all other states have implemented the Act which is a major achievement."

Not all agitations went smoothly. In 1989, the NFF's long march from Delhi to Kanyakumari protesting against coastal pollution, assaults on the marine environment and the proposed atomic plant at Koodamkulam ended violently on the beaches of Kanyakumari where eight Fishworkers were killed in police firing.

Kocherry fought on. When he couldn't argue in the courts, he used the old Indian weapon - the fast. In 1995, his fast led to the inclusion of Fishworkers in the Murari Committee which was formed to review the 1991 policy on joint venture fishing; in 1996, when the Government again ignored a parliamentary committee's recommendation on cancellation of all licences to foreign trawlers, he fasted till the United Front rescinded it. He, says Harekrishna Debnath, now NFF head, "personified the struggle of Indian Fishworkers".

Not everyone is as complimentary. By attempting to organise an unorganised sector, Kocherry has enraged not just corporate marine exporters but the trade unions. CITU Secretary M.K. Panthe blasted the NFF as an organisation thriving on foreign money.

INTUC's Kerala boss V.P. Marakkar echoed that, saying: "The American fellowship is proof of NFF's foreign links." Kocherry is unperturbed; he is also not a man fool enough to pocket the fellowship money, entrusting it to the Centre for Education and Communication to "conduct research in the field of marine conservation".

They have to help, he is too busy. Arguing, protesting, debating - dead of night or break of day he is ready, consumed by a passion that refuses to diminish. Finish one topic and he will thunder on about another: they are dumping toxic wastes in Third World nations, opening up a port in Thane where berthing ships will pollute the area.

Does this priest, this friend of the fish and the fisherman, ever sleep? Not much it seems, just snatched hours at nondescript NFF offices or in fishermen's homes when on tour. In some of these homes, where the pictures of Jesus and Mary adorn the walls, his photograph can be found too.

Many years ago he believed, "For me this work is the service of God." His photo on those walls suggests that he has not let himself, his God or his people down.

India today

Read more at: <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/thomas-kocherry-takes-fight-for-fishermens-rights-from-kerala-backwaters-to-national-stage/1/276719.html>



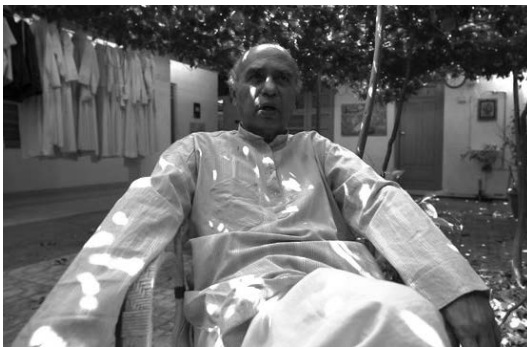
The Last Article

Written by Fr. Thomas Kocherry #RIP

What Is The Main Issue Of Modi, BJP And NDA During The 2014 Lok Sabha Election- Development or Majority Communalism?

By Thomas Kocherry

This is the last article written By Thomas Kocherry. He sent out this article at 3.50 am and he passed away a few hours after sending out this article.



Modi started his election campaign with Development as the main issue. He wanted Gujarat as the model for development of India. In any point of view Gujarat is not the best model for development. Let us take one example that Modi was working at a tea Stall. Even after 40 years the tea Stall remains the same and it remains closed forever. The village where the tea stall is,

remains without any development. I do not know what is he talking about development? Is it Mudra of Ambani? Or Adani?. There are many states in India better development that is more inclusive. Development is only a cover for something else. This is becoming more and more clear.

Is it Majority Communalism as the hidden agenda?

Now the real colour of Modi is coming out. He has proved that majority communalism works out very well in Gujarat. By killing thousands of Muslims, majority Hindu communalism worked out very well in Gujarat. BJP tried that during the destruction of Barbari Mazjid. And then the PM of India Narasimha Rao gave a silent approval of it. In Kandamal the Majority Communalism was tried against Minority Christians. Now Modi wants to try that whole of India. This is coming out from the mouth of Togadia and Giriraj. Giriraj is holding on to his stand. And on the other hand Togadia says it was fabricated. Once the issue was raised to the Majority Community, the purpose is achieved.

It is a One Man Show with the help of RSS?

Modi is pushing this Majority Communalism with the help of RSS. He is pushing this with fascism. He is a Hitler of our times. He wants the Majority Communalism like in Pakistan. He does not respect Indian Constitution (IC). He does not respect Secular Nature of India where Majority and Minority Religions are equal and respected. He does not respect Democracy. He is an autocrat and he speaks and behaves like an autocrat. It is a one man show.

Exclusive Development of Modi?

He talks about unearthing black money and stopping corruption. If he is honest he has to publish his expenses and income of all the rallies and his travel by helicopters. RTI should cover all the political parties. Most of the candidates are criminals and corrupt. Modi's main organiser Amit Shah is an accused of two murder cases. Ultimately All Inclusive Development is forgotten. Modi is the champion of an Exclusive Development, Growth of a few and Privatization. A few are making profits at the expense of the vast majority who do not have the basic needs in life. Price rise and corruption are organically linked with this kind Exclusive Development. He is better than Congress in this kind of Exclusive Development.

A False Presentation of Development of Gujarat?

Modi talks as if he is already PM of India. He makes a statement that he will bring back all the Black Money when he himself is a victim of black money from the MNCs. He makes a statement that he will enquire into the corruption of Vadra, husband of Priyanka. If he is so sure about Corruption why should he act only after being PM. He says lies after lies. If he says a lie hundred times common people believe him as if he is saying the truth. All he talks about Gujarat Development are lies. Farmers, and Common people do not experience any Development. Let us listen to what Gopal Menon has to say : "We have to expose his false propaganda about development. We will have to look into issues like female infanticide, education, toilets, health, education, child malnutrition, manual scavenging and other similar issues. All the public services in Gujarat are privatised. There is no doubt that there is infrastructure development in Gujarat. But it is a completely non inclusive development model which leaves out all the marginalised sections including the Dalits, Adivasis and religious minorities. Gujarat has the highest number of farmer suicides after Maharashtra. There are no minimum wages for worker even in private companies and in Government service."

Hate Speeches?

Now Modi is saying that the leaders should stop speaking Hate Speeches. It is a big advise when the leaders have done enough harm. All these are planned and that is why

these are coming out one after another. FIR is filed against Togadia. What does this mean to correct the harm he has done in society? This is a national agenda of NDA to have Majority Communalism to win in the election. Personal attacks and non-issues are raised and again. Modi cannot talk of anything serious but talks like a goonda. The latest is coming from Kadam of Shiva Sena, attacking Muslim Minority.

Legitimising Majority Communalism?

In a context of justifying Majority Communalism, the recent statement by Shazia Ilmi, justifying Minority Communalism belittle NDA pushing Majority Communalism all over India. Similarly Amarinder Singh Justifying Capt Jagadish Tytler, has created uncalled for protest by the Sikhs. Majority Communalism is a national agenda to come to power. On the other hand Amarinder Singh's statement and Shazia's Statement are not a national agenda, but only two individuals' opinion. These have no effects upon people. However the UPA was not honest with handling the 1984 killing of Sikhs. The Sikhs have shown their anger now inspite of we were having a Sikh Prime Minister. In any case Congress has to be blamed for not conducting the real enquiry and running the case to find out the real culprits.

Is Modi honest with removing Corruption?

Modi's latest statement is that he will create special courts to try corrupt political leaders of all the political parties. Great Modi is talking like Hitler because he is free from being Corrupt. Sovereign is not bound by the law. Is there any honesty in Modi? Whom is he fooling, poor common people, who want a leader like Modi!!!! He is embodying himself as the Saviour of the poor common people!!!!Can he bring all the political parties under RTI and LOKPAL?????Every account of the political parties and their leaders including Modi should be audited by CAG. There is no need of Special Courts, Modi. Please stop bluffing people to get votes!!!!

Do we want true Democracy?

Do we want a Helicopter Democracy or Democracy with people in their context? Even during election time it is one way traffic. Modi and Rahul are addressing big crowds that they give promises. No interaction with people. This is the new Helicopter Democracy for all the big leaders like Modi, Rahul, Sonia, Jayalalitha and so on. They want their votes. Even now these leaders are not interacting with people. This is the only time people see their leaders from far. Afterwards people will not even see these leaders at all.

A study on Gujarat Model Development?

The main focus of Modi has been Gujarat model Development. It is very good that he is proud of his Governance. But the acid test in a Democracy that Modi's proposal should be scrutinised through objective study by anybody. The great service in a Democratic

set up has been done by the students of St. Xavier's College. This objective study was not done by any political party bias. This study should be communicated to the people of India. The Principal of the said college has done only this service to the people. This is the democratic right of every citizen in India. Democracy is not one way traffic. It is two ways communication and interaction. The principal is saying this: "So what lessons does a reflection on the approaching elections teach us? The prospect of an alliance of corporate capital and communal forces coming to power constitutes a real threat to the future of our secular democracy. Support for people who pledge to work to take Human Development Indicators higher and who commit themselves to a pluralistic culture in diverse India – this is the hope for the future" .However UPA also has been standing for Exclusive Development of a few MNCs, Indian Companies, and a few rich people forgetting the majority. Everything is getting privatized and price rise of everything is on the increase in the way private companies want to make big profits. The majority got some crumbs like employment guarantee Scheme and so on.

Is there a Modi Wave in India?

Is there a Modi wave in India? There has been a big game being played through Mega Rallies spending a lot of money, Mega Advertisements spending a lot of money, Using Media for surveys, Using Media to show even the road show in Varanasi before filing his nomination showing the same in all the places where the election is taking place for 7 hours. If there is money and media support one can bring any number of people in India. Amit Shah says it is not a wave but Tsunami!!!!. But does he know that Tsunami is dangerous and killed lakhs of people when it happened last time 26th. December 2004. Amit Shan has no idea about fisher people, wave and Tsunami. Wave can be positive but Tsunami is dangerous. Amit Shah is using an imagery of Tsunami but does he mean with regard to Modi? Fisher people in India gets frightened of Tsunami. Let us go through some of the states. Gujarat, and Madhya Pradesh, are fully with NDA. There is no Modi effect in Kerala, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Jharkhand, Tripura, and North East states. Modi effect is debatable in all the other states and nobody can predict until we see the results on 16th May. No survey will work in all these states. Will Varanasi Road Show during Modi's filing Nomination change the situation? It is a very complicated situation in all these states including UP, Karnataka, Haryana, Odisha, Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh, Punjab, Delhi, Utteraghand, Chathisghar and Maharashtra. Let us wait and see the results on May 16th. Then let us see whether there was Modi effect or not, whether there was Modi Wave or not, whether there was Modi Tsunami or not? If Amit Shah is using the imagery Tsunami in the Context of Fisheries and fisher people Modi Tsunami is very dangerous for India.

Attack on Minorities?

Now the latest is from a BJP yoga sanyasi Ram Dev. He goes with Modi everywhere and sits with Modi on the stages and embraces. Ram Dev says that Rahul goes to Dalits Villages to have Honey moon with Dalit women. Some time back Modi said that Rahul lives in palaces and he does not know the culture of the poor people who have tea stalls. Ram Dev is contradicting that!!!!. Here Modi talks of Majority Communalism but he has the superiority complex of Brahmins. In that context Modi and BJP are using Ram Dev to abuse Dalit Women. Dalit women all over India should stand against this abuse from Modi's friend Ram Dev. Now Modi will come out with an apology, but the harm is done to the Dalit Women all over India. No apology can take away the harm done by Ram Dev. However both UPA and NDA have betrayed Dalit Christians and Dalit Muslims. Both are afraid of Majority Dalits. Both minority groups have been demanding amendment to the 1950 Presidential Order, which holds that only Dalits who practice Hinduism can be treated as SC. Later, there were two amendments to the order — in 1956 and 1990 — to grant SC status to Sikhs and Buddhists. The case has been before the SC waiting for the response from UPA. But UPA let them down. NDA will be worse than UPA in this case. Here comes both are standing for Majority Communalism. What Mayavathy is saying is true” Had the upper castes, which constitute the core of the BJP, not treated Dalits as untouchables, the Schedule Castes would have progressed, she said, adding, Dr Bhim Rao Ambedkar launched a struggle against untouchability and embraced Buddhism for the dignity of the community. “Only BSP is the well wisher of the suppressed community,” she said while calling upon the Schedule Caste members to vote for the BSP in the Lok Sabha election.”.

Priyanka Vs Modi on giving land at Cheap prices?

Both Priyanka and Modi are fighting each other on giving land to the companies and the rich with a throw away prices. It is a very losing battle for Priyanka. Both have indirectly agreed that UPA and NDA have done this. Vadra has received land from Haryana and Rajasthan, with a cheap price. UPA has done this in Coal Scam, SEZs and so on. Modi has done in Gujarat helping MNCs and companies by giving land in cheap prices. If they continue to fight, they will be exposing each other their own sins. This is like pot calling kettle black. Both are in the same soup. The only question remains is that who has done more than the other. This should come out.

Why Modi is contesting from two places?

Modi, BJP. NDA claim that there is a Modi Wave , Tsunami all over India. If there is money you can play this kind of game anywhere in India. But if they are so sure why is Modi contesting from two places.? The very reason Modi is contesting from two places

shows that he is doubtful of winning!!!??? If Modi is not sure, what about others? They will be in much more conflicting situations. Let us ask Modi if he is winning from both the places which one will he give up? In any case he will have to betray the people in one place. People are used by the leaders for their own gains.

A fight between David and Goliath?

Modi claims to be honest, he will remove all corruptions from India, he will unearth all black money etc. But what did he do in Gujarat regarding all these? He was not willing to implement even the existing laws in Gujarat. Why did he not implement LOKAYUKTHA? This is a clear sign that he is not sincere with what he says. He is once again fooling the people to get votes!!!???Honesty and transparency is not shown in all his campaigns. Just imagine AAP is fighting against Modi with a few rupees and Modi with Crores. This is a fight between David and Goliath, Pandavas and Kowravas.

Is Modi a champion of the poor?

Another autocratic statement of Modi in West Bengal was that he would send back all the Bangladeshis from West Bengal to Bangladesh. This is typical of Modi who has no idea about these people. They are not migrants like Odisha workers. These people in West Bengal are Refugees from Bangladesh. They have legal protection in any country. Modi cannot chase them back. Modi has no idea about the world situation. He is still in the well, Gujarat. Further these Bangladeshis are the kith and kin of the people in West Bengal. If Modi is serious he should send Advani back to Pakistan, so that Modi is more safe in becoming the next PM of India!!!??? Modi claims to be a man from Tea Stalls. But Modi cannot recognise the poor refugees from Bangladesh. Does he know how many Refugees are West Bengal without Indian Citizenship??. Millions and millions are there. Modi as PM cannot touch them. These are all big talks to fool the people.

Is Modi true to honouring the Martyrs?

Here is the real colour of Modi and BJP coming out. Modi's reference to the late Captain Batra in an election speech in Himachal Pradesh on Tuesday, has disturbed his family. Since Modi invoked late captain Batra's name purely with an intention to increase his electoral prospects, he should now respond to the family's concern on why he never found time to visit the family. Mrs Batra has rightly pointed out that Mr Modi was the BJP in charge of Himachal Pradesh when the Kargil war took place in 1999 and despite having visited Palampur, the martyr's hometown, Modi did not get time to visit his home. The BJP leader should not try to invoke the names of those who laid down their lives for the country in such a casual manner, particularly when he and his party did nothing to respect the martyrdom. The ongoing election campaign has seen the BJP indulge in mudslinging to divert the attention of the people from real issues, but attempts to belittle

the sacrifice of those who gave up their lives for the sake of the country in their prime youth, is unacceptable and those aspiring to occupy the highest offices, should show some degree of respect for their families. The soldier's father, GL Batra, joined his wife in the attack. "He was a brave son of the country who sacrificed for the nation. Now if they are remembering, doing politics over it, I think it does not behove," he said.

Do we want Growth Model coupled with Distributive Justice?

Now it is very clear that Modi wants Growth Model, Exclusive Development. It is a concern of the Companies and MNCs. By all means Modi wants growth of the wealth. But he forgets in the process that the vast majority of the country does not have the basic needs in life. We want an inclusive Development. All the people in India should have Education, Health Care, Food, Water, Employment and a House. Dr. Amartya Sen is analyzing UPA's performance is a good lesson for Modi to learn. On subsidy, particularly in the light of the Congress manifesto promising to retain only the absolutely necessary subsidies, Prof. Sen said: "There has to be an attempt to cut subsidies. But before that there has to be an understanding of where the subsidies really go. The government spends a little over one per cent of the GDP on food security and employment regeneration (MGNREGA) but spends more than twice that much on subsidising electricity, cooking gas and other petroleum products, including diesel for luxury cars as well as fertilizer subsidies, which go primarily to rich farmers." If the vast majority are not included in the Development, they will revolt. Modi cannot survive as PM without Inclusive Development. He will not survive as PM with Majority Communalism. The Minority's will start revolting, which is Indian history. He has to respect Minorities.

Is there any difference between UPA and NDA?

They are interested only in toeing the line of big industrialists. Both are not interested in the issues of the people at large like price rise, Corruption etc. Because their main concern is Globalization, Privatization and Capitalism. They are competing with each other on these. They are involved both in personal attacks like Mother, and son, when all the political parties are involved in Mother, Father, Son and daughter? We should know 50 candidates in different political parties are contesting either Father and Son or Father and daughter, Mother and son or mother and daughter, husband died or widow is contesting. The best example is Menaka and Varun. Is there any honesty in their attacks? In the past few days, we have only heard of Robert Vadra [son-in-law of Congress president Sonia Gandhi] and Adani [Gautam Adani, industrialist]," he said. "The BJP has raised such rubble on Mr. Vadra. If they are sincere, what is stopping them from filing an FIR against him in Rajasthan where they are in power? Both UPA and NDA are trying to sell India to multinationals. They accuse each other of murder of the Minorities. They forget the

hands of both are bloody. They cannot escapes, one is killing the Muslims and the other is killing Sikhs. Another difference Congress is talking about that they are Secular, but how can Congress be Secular when Congress is not taking a stand on Dalit Christians and Dalit Muslims.??? The only difference is that BJP is talking Majority Communalism directly, but Congress acts on Majority Communalism indirectly???!!!. Whether NDA or UPA come to power the lot of the Majority Common People, Marginalised, Dalits, Tribals and Fisher People will not have the basic needs met????!!!!. On nuclear issue both NDA and UPA are in the same boat. Both are not serious about Renewable Energy like Solar Energy!!!!???. For Manmohan Singh the greatest achievement, he claims during his 10 years is Indo-US deal, not RTI, RTE, MGNREGA, stopping Polio, and action against AID/HIV!!!!???. When we talk about Criminals, Corrupt, and assets of the Candidates are in Crores all the Political Parties are in the same soup including all the Regional Political parties and AAP? Imagine people have to make a choice in the midst of all these???!!!. We have to look for LESSER EVIL!!!!???

Expenditure by Political Parties?

EC has given permission for each candidate to spend up to 70 lakhs. What about the expenditure by each political party? Who is calculating this? Who is calculating all the rallies, road shows, helicopter travels by the leaders? Sidharth Varadarajan says that NDA has spent 484 Crores and UPA has spent 384 crores? Will Sidharth publish the details of this? Can the political parties publish the income and expenditure of each party?? Will EC look into this? What kind of Democracy in which we are? If I cannot have 70 lakhs I cannot be a candidate? AAP should publish all their income and expenditure particularly in Varanasi?

Take action instead accusing each other?

The government today said that a judge will be appointed to conduct probe into Gujarat 'snoop-gate' before counting of votes in Lok Sabha polls and rubbished BJP leader Arun Jaitley's claim that no judge will "lend" himself to the "political and malafide" exercise targeting Narendra Modi. "The Cabinet had taken the decision to appoint a Commission of Inquiry to probe the incident of snooping on a woman in Gujarat. We will soon appoint the judge....before May 16," Home Minister Sushilkumar Shinde told a press conference in Shimla. Asked whether the appointment of a judge in the midst of Lok Sabha elections would not amount to violation of the Model Code of Conduct, Shinde said, "It will not" as the decision had been taken more than four months ago by the Union Cabinet. EC has responded too: "The Election Commission has decided to ask the government to defer the appointment of the next Army chief until after the Lok Sabha polls, but will not block the Centre's move to name a judge to head the judicial probe into "Snoop-gate".

But Arun Jaitley says that this is politically motivated action, the NDA Govt can change UPA decision. This is very funny that when BJP was demanding a commission, but no Judge would take it up. Once the UPA was forced to take action NDA is getting scared. If NDA scraps UPA decision, it shows NDA commitment to TRUTH. This is the kind of a bold action by UPA we need if we want to prove any allegation. Similarly BJP should file a case against Robert Vadra in Rajasthan, instead of keep on accusing Priyanka. If NDA does not file a case against Robert Vadra, it shows that they are not serious with the accusation.

What is the greatness of 2014 Lok Sabha Election?

It is historic. During this election. Many issues are discussed, Corruption, Price Rise, Black Money, Exclusive Development, Inclusive Development, Democracy, Secularism. Majority Communalism, Election Expenses, Assets of the Candidates, Criminal back ground of the candidates, Representation of Women, Autocracy etc. And in the process many outstanding people got involved. Election Commission was very active and involved, and the running of the election in a very super manner. We should be proud of Indian Constitution. We should be proud of our Democracy. We have to be grateful to our past, our great leaders, who showed the way and we should be proud of them. In spite of all shortcomings, we can manage a Democratic Election like this, we are surviving with Wealth as the third country in the World according to the recent study of the World Bank. We have to learn a lot from all these to go forward. Who ever comes to power, they have to learn the art to have an ALL INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT WITH DISTRIBUTIVE JUSTICE. We have to respect Majorities and Minorities. We should be proud of India.





The Sophie Prize

Speech by Sophie Prize winner Thomas Kocherry



Oslo Sophie Prize Ceremony June 15, 1999

Dear chairperson and friends,

First of all I want to thank the Sophie Foundation for honouring me with the Sophie Prize. In particular I thank Jostein Gaarder for creating the Foundation for honouring such ventures to recognise and to encourage re-imagining a world where every human being is equal in opportunities; without discrimination on the basis of caste, class, creed, religion or gender. Please accept my heartfelt thanks.

Today we are in the context of GLOBALISATION - LIBERALISATION. The words look very attractive, but the vast majority of the people, are the victims of Globalisation. Globalisation began with COLONIALISM. In the sixteenth century Europe was overpopulated and the people began to migrate from Europe to other continents as if they were discovering new places. It ended up with conquering other places and people. Sword and Cross went together. They forcefully enslaved and converted natives and indigenous people's. They conquered lands, exploited the resources and accumulated wealth.

In the 20th century, the world witnessed the uprising of people's for political freedom. However economic exploitation continued through Multi-National Corporations (MNCs) and Trans-National Corporations(TNCs). But the rich and the ruling class of the newly freed 3rd world countries generally sided with the MNCs for their own advantage, against the interest of the common people. Again the natives and the indigenous people's were the worst hit. As a result, according to a UN study, today 20% Northern minority of humankind has:

- 82.7% of world gross national product
- 81.2% of world trade
- 94.6% of all commercial lending
- 80.5% of all domestic investment
- 80.6% of all domestic savings
- 94.0% of all research and development

It is in this context that we should understand GLOBALISATION today. Those who have more are bound to get more. This means more accumulation and centralisation. The Northern 20% people are better placed to take away even the 10-20% of the wealth in the hands of 80% people in the South. The real Centre is G8 countries and of course the USA is the real centre of the centre. They are wielding POWER of WEALTH and ARMS. They are placed in a better position for quick profit at the expense of the vast majority of people and the environment. All the rest are in the periphery. Thus, PHERIPHERALIZATION of the vast MAJORITY is the other side of Globalisation. In the period following decolonisation and political independence of the Third World (South) countries particularly after World War II, the international relationships among the countries at bilateral and multilateral levels were considered very important and viewed as mutually beneficial. This language and practice seems to be in the wane today. The Northern MNCs want to take over the control of UN. If the UN does not dance according to their tune they will not give their share. They are more interested in strengthening the WTO than the UN. They talk of DEMOCRACY and HUMAN RIGHTS but they have NO CONCERN FOR PEOPLE IN THE SOUTH. Market economy determines everything, there is no other value in life. MONEY HAS MORE VALUE THAN PEOPLE OF THE SOUTH. The UN has become a weak instrument. Globalisation is beneficial to those who have. All those who are have-nots are the victims. Globalisation is a mechanistic process (and therefore most easily manipulatable by the wielders of power) in the face of which there is no choice and alternative. This is the most insidious aspect of this ideology: that it could present itself as the only possible way of being. It creates a certain sense of inevitability and absoluteness. Outside Globalisation-and Market Economy, there is no salvation.

Let me show how this is true as regards the fisheries sector. In the 1990s fishing reached the point of diminishing returns. Many fish populations have fallen to levels from which they can no longer recover without significant reductions in the catches or a moratorium on fishing. There are simply too many boats catching too many fish. The first surge in numbers of fishing vessels occurred during the industrial revolution. This upwell tapered off during the two world wars, but boomed again in the 1950s through 1970s. The world's fishing fleet doubled between 1970 and 1990.

More than 100 million people in developing countries (South) are dependent on fisheries for our livelihoods. For us fishing is a way of life, not just a source of income. Sea is our MOTHER. Traditionally, small-scale or artisanal fishers have provided fish for local consumption; but as fish becomes scarce and its value increases, it enters the global market and becomes unaffordable for common people. In the process we are displaced and the MNCs take over completely.

Most governments, particularly of the North, are trying to prop up an unsustainable fishery. According to the FAO, every year governments world wide pay US \$ 116 billion to catch just \$ 70 billion worth fish. Developed nations, which have over fished their own waters, have headed into the waters of the developing nations. The European Union (EU) has around 40% more vessels than necessary to catch fish on a sustainable basis. Volatile 'fish wars' are a common place. There are more than 1 million large industrial fleets in the world. They have depleted all the oceans in the world. They have become a threat to the 100 million fisher people in the world. Further these have organic link with the coastal mono shrimp culture. The fresh fish caught by the industrial vessels are converted into fishmeal for the production of shrimp. Ten thousand tons of fish that would have been available for common people are converted into fish-meal to produce one thousand tons of shrimp that only the rich can afford to buy. Further coastal shrimp industry depletes fishing grounds, salinates drinking water, destroys mangroves and displaces fisher people and agriculturists who depend on these resources for their livelihood. Further, the North American Free Trade Agreements (NAFTA) have shifted polluting industries to the coastal belts of the developing nations, threatening the very lives of small fishing communities who are totally dependent on fishing and fishing alone. All over the world the victims of Globalisation -the small fishing communities- are realising the need of coming together to establish our right to life. We want to establish our right as persons. The World Forum of Fish Harvesters and Fishworkers is the result of this realisation. The Forum is involved in a campaign to establish the right of the fishing communities to own the water-bodies, including seas and rivers, fishing implements and distribution of the catch. The management of the distribution of the catch should be done by the fisherwomen. We have declared November 21 as WORLD FISHERIES DAY to claim and to campaign for this right. We wish to establish our right by exercising our duty, even through struggles and sacrifices. The 10 million fisher people in India were able to change the government policy of Joint and Lease Fishing through long standing struggles. The Canadian Fisher People have been fighting against huge fishing vessels. The Gloucester Fisherpeople in the USA, particularly the wives of fishermen, have succeeded in banning factory trawlers through legislation. In Senegal, fisher people are on a war path against destructive fishing. In Brazil the Fisherpeople are involved in a struggle against predatory fishing. In Pakistan and in South Africa the fishing communities are struggling to establish their right to life. Thus the fisher people both in the North and South, who are victims of Globalization, are involved in establishing a new paradigm of Development and Politics.

We, the fisher people in India, are part of a larger alliance - the National Alliance of Peoples Movements (NAPM) - all of whom are victims of Globalization. There are over 150 people's movements in this alliance, not only struggling to survive, but searching for

alternatives to the present form of development, which in the long run is destructive for all. It is through these struggles that the whole of humanity is going to be saved. True development is not by conquering and enslaving, not by accumulating and centralizing, not by displacing people and destroying cultures. True development is only by integrating and working together, through distributive justice and decentralisation by nurturing and including Native and Indigenous people's.

It is here that the struggles of the victims of mega dams in India can be understood. There are 3600 mega dams in India. These have displaced 50 million natives, Tribals and Fisherpeople and have proved to be MASS DESTRUCTION'S rather than DEVELOPMENT. These victims are involved in a long standing struggle to create a new paradigm of DEVELOPMENT, where native skills and technologies are enhanced, small is accepted as beautiful and sustainable and simplicity has become a way of life with due respect to native cultures. We have gone to the extent of JALASAMATHI- sacrificing ourselves in the rising reservoirs- rather than inflicting violence upon others, for the creation of this new paradigm. Right now, about 400 leaders, representing different movements in India -Farmers, Fishworkers, People displaced by the Narmada project and others- are in Europe campaigning against MNCs, TNCs and the WTO. For the first time such a mass campaign is taking place. The victims of GLOBALISATION are asserting their rightful place in this planet. We feel an urgent need to create a new paradigm of development and politics, a paradigm in which all human beings have right to live, with equal access to the resources and opportunities. Development cannot be measured solely by the quantity of production, but by its sustainability by its capacity to protect the livelihood of all human beings. Production should be coupled with distributive justice. There is no Development for the sake of Development. True Globalisation should make free movement of labour unhindered by national boundaries. Let the year 2000 be a real Jubilee Year; let the debts of the developing countries be wiped out; and let all nations experience true freedom and equality.

THE LIFE OF THE PLANET AND THE DEPENDENT HEALTH AND WELFARE OF HUMANITY MUST NOT BE SACRIFICED TO THE GREED OF THE FEW.

Thomas Kocherry

FISH WARS IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH

Anosh Malekar
(AGENDA)

...In this interview to Info change, Kocherry speaks at length about the challenges facing India's fisher people and their struggle since the 1970s...

Thomas Kocherry was born in 1940 in Changanassery, an inland fishing community in Kerala. He studied chemistry and law at Kerala University. As a young man, he started working for Bangladeshi refugees and fisher communities, and went on to help found the Kerala Independent Fishworkers Federation and serve as chairperson of the National Fishworkers Forum from 1982 to 1996. He continues to mobilise fisher people to fight against destructive fishing and water pollution, organises coastal communities around the right to fish, and pushes for a stronger voice in Indian fishing policy.

Kocherry was general coordinator of the World Forum of Fisher Peoples and helped organise the World Summit for Sustainable Development. He is a co-convenor of the National Alliance of People's Movements, a national network of community struggles in India. An ordained priest, he is also a Member of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer, a Roman Catholic congregation founded in 1732 to work among marginalised people in over 77 countries around the world.

Tom, as he is referred to in close circles, also teaches the theology and spirituality of people's Movements at a number of seminaries across India and abroad. In this interview to Info-change, Kocherry speaks at length about the challenges facing India's fisher people and their struggle since the 1970s.

What challenges do fisher people face today?

India's coastline stretches over roughly 7,500 km and is dotted with small villages inhabited by around 13 million traditional fisher people. Most of them live below the poverty line and are illiterate. They catch around 40 lakhs tonnes of fish annually. The lives of these fisher people have been organically linked to the coast for centuries.

The aim of multinationals, and some rich local inhabitants, is to transform the coast into a money-making haven. In the name of Special Economic Zones (SEZs) and tourism development, more and more people are being displaced from the coast. And, in the midst of it all, there are natural disasters like tsunamis, cyclones, floods, etc.

The coast is also closely linked to inland waters, rivers, lakes and reservoirs, many of which are slowly drying up and becoming polluted. The condition of the fisher people is fast deteriorating. Catch per vessel is decreasing, and debt among fishermen is on the rise.

Is globalisation responsible for this?

Globalisation began with colonialism. In the 16th century, Europeans began to migrate and conquer other continents. The sword and the cross went together. The conquerors forcibly



enslaved and converted natives and indigenous peoples. They took their lands, exploited the resources, and accumulated wealth. In the 20th century, the world witnessed a number of people's uprisings for political freedom. But economic exploitation has continued through multinational and transnational corporations. The rich and the ruling classes in the newly-freed Third World generally side with the foreign corporations against the interests of the common people. As a result, according to a UN study, today, a 20% minority in the northern hemisphere has cornered or controls 82.7% of the world's gross national product, 81.2% of world trade, 94.6% of all commercial lending, 80.5% of all domestic investment, 80.6% of all domestic savings, and 94.0% of all research and development.

It is in this context that we need to understand 'globalisation'. Those who have more are bound to get more. This means more accumulation and centralisation. The North's 20% people are better placed to take away even the 10-20% of wealth left in the hands of 80% of the people in the South.

But how has globalisation impacted fisheries in particular?

The first surge of fishing vessels came during the Industrial Revolution. It tapered off during the two World Wars, but began again in the 1950s through the 1970s. The world's fishing fleet doubled between 1970 and 1990. In the 1990s, fishing reached the point of diminishing returns. Indeed, many fish populations have fallen to levels from which they can no longer recover. There are simply too many boats catching too many fish.

More than 100 million people in developing countries in the South are dependent on fisheries for their livelihood. For them, fishing is a way of life, not a source of profit. The sea is like a mother. Traditionally, small-scale or artisanal fishers provided fish for local consumption; but as fish became scarce and its value increased, people found they could no longer afford it.

Most governments, particularly those of the North, promote unsustainable fishing. According to the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) of the United Nations (UN), every year governments worldwide pay US\$116 billion to catch just \$70 billion worth of fish. Developed nations, which have over-fished their own waters, have headed into the waters of developing nations. The European Union (EU) has around 40% more vessels than is necessary to catch fish on a sustainable basis.

Volatile 'fish wars' are commonplace. There are over 1 million large industrial fleets in the world that have depleted the world's oceans. These industrial fleets have organic links with the coastal mono shrimp culture. Fresh fish caught by industrial vessels is converted into fish meal for the production of shrimp. Ten thousand tonnes of fish that would have been available for the common man are converted into fish meal to produce 1,000 tonnes of shrimp that only the rich can afford to buy.

What is the impact on traditional fisher communities in India?

With its long coastline and innumerable rivers and lakes, India has one of the largest populations of fisher people in the world. Estimates vary between 10 and 13 million, of

which one-third constitute marine fisher folk and two-thirds depend on fishing in inland waters. The Indian fishing community covers a wide spectrum — Tribal, Dalit, Hindu, Christian and Muslim. They are generally extremely poor and have low social status and little political power. Each community is socially stratified, particularly on a class (rather than caste) basis. Local merchants often hold positions of power, as moneylenders.

Each religious group generally lives in a compact geographical area, though there are a few exceptions where Christians, Muslims and Hindus live together. Traditionally, they have lived as enclosed societies gathered around the church, mosque or temple which gives them their identity. Incidents of communal clashes over fishing rights are rare.

Because there are usually clearly demarcated areas and times for fishing and landing among the various communities, fishing populations have worked together in harmony. Over the centuries, the fisher people have amassed a vast fund of knowledge about the resources in their immediate vicinity, and have developed a variety of technologies tailored to specific ecological niches along the coast. This accounts for the immense diversity of artisanal fishing techniques in the country, the hallmark of which has been their ecological sophistication rather than an orientation towards quick monetary gain.

In the south of India, 40% of fishing crafts are still the traditional catamaran — a canoe built out of three logs of lightweight albyssia wood, bound together by rope.

When did the process of modernisation begin?

The modernisation of Indian fisheries started in the 1950s with a Norwegian-financed project involving the introduction of mechanised boats and renovation of a port in Kerala. The aim was to help traditional fishermen increase their production, but in reality the project brought them nothing but trouble as they did not have the necessary capital to invest in the more expensive gear and fuel needed for mechanised boats. Nor did they have access to markets to sell their larger catches. This was only the beginning of their woes. In the following decades, outsiders started coming in with trawlers that scrape the bottom of the sea and deplete fish stocks by destroying larvae and young fish. The economy underwent a marked technological polarisation, with traditional fisher people rapidly losing their hold on a livelihood that had kept them going for generations. By 1975, Kerala alone had 3,500 mechanised trawlers. In 1997, their number across India was around 23,000. But it was the arrival of purseiners (mechanised trawlers that encircle the fish with a long net and draw the bottom closed to capture them) in the 1970s and 1980s that caused near panic among the fish workers and led to violent clashes. The trawlers cut the nets and damaged the boats of smaller fishermen. The government of Kerala had set apart inshore waters up to a depth of 20 meters exclusively for traditional fish workers, but the trawlers did not keep to the rules because prawns are normally found within these waters.

In recent years, the greatest predators of all have been industrial fishing vessels whose trade is sustained largely by demand in the United States and Europe for fish meal for farm animal feed and pet foods. Jobs provided by industrial fishing are few, and working conditions rarely comply with the labour standards set by the International Labour

Organisation. Even if these huge vessels were to be prevented from encroaching on coastal waters, the ecological damage caused by deep sea industrial fishing would still mean the destruction of species essential to coastal fishing.

In the mid-1980s, the Government of India began to support the motorisation of traditional fishing craft. By 1993, however, only around 13% of vessels had been fitted with engines, and the expected massive transformation from artisanal crafts to boat fishing did not take place. Fishermen who fitted outboard motors to their crafts became dependent on multinational companies whose high prices for their machines and spare parts soon led those with little capital into debt. Moreover, kerosene and diesel were in short supply, therefore expensive.

In the landmark judgment of June 23, 1993, the Supreme Court of India summed up the situation: “Over the years, while the population of the traditional fishermen has increased by more than 20.8%, the average production of each fisherman declined by more than half, which resulted in 98.5% of the fishermen population descending below the poverty line.”

What about inland fishing?

The plight of inland fish workers as a result of four decades of ‘development’ is probably even worse than that of marine based fishermen. Water pollution, construction of huge dams, deforestation due to industrialisation and other encroachments, siltation, and land reclamation have all drastically reduced fish availability.

In recent years, these problems have been compounded by the government’s push for industrial fishing and aquaculture, involving large tracts of land being taken over for prawn farming by national elites and multinational investors. The prawns are destined for the apparently insatiable markets of the United States and Europe. Usually, after about 10 years, productivity declines and disease sets in among the prawns. So the aquaculturists move on, taking over more land and leaving saline, toxic wastelands in their wake.

My contention is that an alternative already exists in the form of traditional small-scale coastal aquaculture and coastal fishing operations that are presently being carried out by millions of fisher folk in Asia. These coastal communities that are facing the threat of displacement and loss of livelihood are the human foundation on which an alternative should be built. And the numerous low-lying inter-tidal coastal zones and inshore seas are the ecosystem foundations on which to build this alternative. An important aspect of the alternative is to support the cause of small-scale coastal marine fishery and actively promote techniques that do not distort ecosystem dynamics. In a sense, it is like going back to the future. There is a need to harmonise strategies for food production with nature’s principles of ecosystem dynamics. This is the only sustainable manner in which we can maximise the benefits derived from it, with the least possible negative social and ecological impact.

Could you recount the struggle of fishing communities in India?

From the mid-’70s, there have been spontaneous outbursts of violence in different parts of the country between small trawlers and the catamaran fishermen. The first big

clash occurred near Chennai on the east coast of India, in May 1976, resulting in loss of human life. Tamil Nadu was under President's Rule then and no serious action was taken despite the fact that the state government, as early as 1964, had issued an order granting artisanal fishermen exclusive fishing rights within three miles of the coast. But, although buoys were placed at sea to demarcate fishing areas they could hardly prevent trawlers in pursuit of shrimp coming closer to the shore. Peeved at official inaction, traditional fishermen took the law into their own hands and started burning trawlers. The bloodiest revolt was witnessed in Tuticorin where, by the end of 1976, fishermen had destroyed 11 trawlers, risking 16 lives in the process. Simultaneous protests broke out in the former Portuguese colony of Goa on the west coast, where ramp-on nets are used for fishing. These eco-friendly nets give a good catch and have traditionally provided hundreds of fisherfolk along Goa's 150 km coastline with a good source of income.

In 1977, no longer able to accept the way the catch was dwindling, ramp-on fisherman Piedade Fernandes of Velsao in south Goa, declared: "Velsao is a quiet bay. The entire population of 3,750 people is engaged in traditional fishing. There are 28 shore-seines here and around 145 smaller canoes for gill net fishing. First, the Birla-owned Zuari Agro Chemicals Ltd ejected its effluents into our bay, polluting the waters, now the trawlers are destroying our nets and taking away the fish. We have to hit back." The otherwise-fun-loving Goans suddenly woke up to the fact that they were being colonised once again, this time by business interests targeting their shores. New chemical industries were depositing poisonous effluents in the sea; the tourism industry was privatising beaches for foreign tourists; and, worst of all, newly-introduced purseiners and trawlers were depleting their fish stocks. Goans were angered not only by rising fish prices but by the fact that certain varieties of fish were no longer available. 'Goan fish for the Goans', 'Save Goa, Save Our Beaches': these were the dominant slogans as hundreds of ramp-on fishermen took to the streets and, for over a year, sustained a struggle demanding marine fishing regulation.

Mathany Saldanha, a young schoolteacher, took the lead in an organisation called Goenchea Ramponkarancha Ekvott (GRE). In June 1978, Mathany and Xavier Pinto, an enthusiastic young Redemptionist priest, began traveling along the coast making contact with activists, citizens' groups and NGOs involved with the fishing community in the south. They met large groups of women net-weavers in Kanyakumari who spoke about their apprehensions that machine-made nets were entering the market and would eventually render them jobless.

They invited all these groups to a meeting in Chennai where around 30 representatives from 13 fishing organisations decided to set up a national organisation and make a representation to the prime minister. Thus, the National Forum for Catamaran and Country Boat Fishermen's Rights and Marine Wealth came into being and held a nationwide action programme culminating in New Delhi on July 15, 1978.

Although the Goa struggle made national news, most members of parliament in Delhi knew nothing about coastal communities. The National Forum received some support from leftist

groups and, on July 27, a delegation met Prime Minister Morarji Desai and presented a memorandum with the following demands: introduce a marine fishing regulation bill that would reserve 20 km of coastal waters for the artisanal sector; fix a minimum mesh size for different fishing gear; restrict the number of trawlers and purseiners; introduce regulations to prevent pollution of coastal waters; and initiate fishermen's development banks.

In order to control and study the violence at sea, the government appointed the Majumdar Committee that submitted its report in 1978. The main recommendation was the creation of a consolidated legislation, called the Marine Fishing Regulation, to end the dichotomy between territorial waters (22 km from the coast) and national waters. But, instead of it being discussed in Parliament, the draft bill was sent to the state governments where it got stuck.

The beginnings of local organisation started in Anjengo, Trivandrum, in 1978, where the fishermen came together under the banner of the Anjengo Boat Workers Union (ABWU) to expose corruption in the Anjengo Refinance Scheme. This was a scheme initiated during the Emergency to assist fishermen in acquiring mechanised boats for which they received soft loans. But the boats were of bad quality and the fishermen could not repay their loans. As a result, many boats were confiscated. Supported by a group of Redemptorist priests and Medical Mission sisters who lived in the village, ABWU members went on a fast in front of the Kerala secretariat. As a result, the government was forced to return the boats and order an inquiry into corruption in the scheme. Subsequently, along with the parish priest and local NGOs, the Trivandrum District Fishworkers Union was formed. With the enthusiasm generated, people felt empowered to take up other issues as well. Women fish workers demanded that the exorbitant tax in Chirayinkil market be reduced. In Kanyakumari, thousands of women took to the streets when a merchant who dealt with the sale of nylon yarn imported a net-making machine. This, again, was a three-month struggle.

The National Forum, still a loosely-knit body, at its second general body meeting in Bangalore in August 1979, came up with the following nine common demands: central marine regulation reserving 20 km of coastal seas for artisanal fisherfolk; a ban on trawling between 6 pm and 6 am (night trawling); diverting fund allocations for trawling and purseining to the artisanal sector; nationalising deep-sea fishing and shrimp exports; preventing the pollution of common water-bodies; prohibiting the removal of sand from beaches; stopping licences to mechanised net-making machines; organising pisciculture to benefit traditional fishing communities; ending the eviction of traditional fishing communities in favour of tourism.

In November 1979, fishermen's organisations in different states initiated fasts and carried out public action to pressurise the government into enacting the marine bill. In Goa, a fishermen's relay fasted for 367 days. In Kerala there were relay fasts in Trivandrum, Quilon and Alleppey. Picketing action took place in Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra and Karnataka. In 1980, the National Forum presented the central ministry of agriculture with a model copy of the marine law which the minister agreed to forward to the states. From 1981 onwards, a few state governments began to formulate and pass a Marine Regulation Act

but these were instantly opposed by the boat-owners associations. Thus began the long battle between the state and the fish workers.

1981 also saw a series of protests in Trivandrum, ignited by the fact that the government issued a ban on trawling during June, July and August, but, within three days, had exempted Neendakara, a major harbour in Kerala at the confluence of the Arabian Sea and Ashtamudi lake, because of pressure from boat-owners. Following an 11-day hunger strike and a series of protests, the government agreed to institute the Babu Paul Committee to consider the “scientific and technological issues and assess the socio-economic consequences of the fishery management demands of the fishermen”.

The agitation was originally led by the Trivandrum District Fishworkers Union, that later became the Kerala Swathanthra Malsya Thozhilali Federation (KSMTF) led by a fisherman, Joyachen Antony. The KSMTF started a series of agitations for a seasonal ban on trawlers during the monsoons. Today, this seasonal ban has been legislated all along the Indian coast. Tamil Nadu also witnessed a series of protests on the issue. Unlike in Kerala, it was the local party organisations of the DMK, the AIDMK and the Janata Party that came together under one banner to lead the struggle. In 1983, the National Forum was rechristened National Fishermen’s Forum (NFF) and worked to finalise a national manifesto. On June 15, 1985, the NFF observed National Demands Day.

When did the march to Kanyakumari take place?

Members of the fishing community commenced a march from Kolkata on the east coast of India on April 2, 1989, and from Mumbai on the west coast, on April 3, 1989. The slogan was ‘Protect Waters, Protect Life’. The core team of activists travelled in vans alighting at fishing villages to talk and walk with people en route to St Anthony’s High School in Kanyakumari on May 1. At 3 pm that day, the marchers assembled at the venue and launched a procession towards the seashore. They waved blue flags and banners and shouted slogans. They were greeted by fishermen with banners in boats on the sea. The most spectacular part was the massive participation of women who constituted about three-quarters of the crowd that stood against the backdrop of the Vivekananda memorial.

The march to Kanyakumari was supposed to represent the people’s desire to resist dominant development concepts. It was also meant to be a call to start a people’s movement. However, the people’s voice was drowned in police firing; several people were injured in the skirmish that ensued.

It was after this that the struggle was taken up in Umbergaon. Umbergaon was once a quiet fishing village on the southernmost tip of Gujarat. It is now known to social activists all over India as the home of Lt Col Pratap Save, a martyr in the struggle for alternative, more humane, development. After retiring in 1995, Save settled in his hometown and was looking forward to a quiet life working the family land. In 1999, word spread about the Gujarat government’s plans to set up the Maroli-Umbergaon port. Save was among those who vehemently opposed the proposed port and helped form and lead the Kinara Bachao

Sangharsh Samiti (Save the Coast Action Committee). The Samiti organised nonviolent protests to prevent survey work from being conducted at the site.

In April 2000, there was a sudden crackdown by the state police and several activists of the Samiti, including Save, were taken into police custody. Save's family and fellow activists allege that the police beat him up, causing severe brain injuries that killed him a few days later. The police claim he suffered a cerebral hemorrhage out of natural causes. Friends and colleagues have filed criminal complaints and petitions in the courts alleging that Save was murdered in cold blood. But justice is still awaited. Although the Gujarat government has instituted a judicial inquiry into Save's death, the report is not yet out.

Save's son, Nikhilesh, maintains his father was murdered at the behest of those who had a vested interest in the port's development. Save's martyrdom did serve a purpose: the government of Gujarat dropped its plans to construct the port.

When was a national policy formulated?

After the adoption of a new economic policy, the Indian government announced a Deep Sea Fishing Policy in March 1991. The policy allowed foreign fishing vessels into Indian waters beyond 12 nautical miles (18 km) of the coast. Further, it permitted duty-free import of vessels under joint ventures, and the sale of diesel at international prices. Also, vessels could transfer their catch on the high seas and carry away fish from Indian waters.

The Indian government had plans of importing 2,660 foreign fishing vessels. At the time this policy was introduced, there were around 35,000 small mechanised boats and about 2 million artisanal crafts with a wide range of gear suited to tropical waters. The NFF presented a paper opposing licences for joint venture fishing at a national workshop organised by the government in Kochi, in 1992, to arrive at a consensus on a proposed National Fisheries Policy. By this time, fisher people's groups from Maharashtra and West Bengal were actively opposing the intrusion of deep sea vessels into coastal waters.

By the end of 1992, the Maharashtra Machhimar Krithi Samiti stated that the NFF should unequivocally demand a ban on deep sea fishing and begin efforts to reserve this sector for traditional fishing communities. Just as there are regulations on the use of agricultural land, it said, the coastal belt should be reserved only for fishing communities. No foreign and multinational intervention should be permitted in this area of 'primary production'.

In September 1993, the NFF organised a National Seminar on Deep Sea Fishing where the problems of deep sea fishing were analysed. The report read: "In 1992, India's fisher people caught 23 lakhs tonnes of fish; 98% of this comes from territorial waters. The exploitation of territorial waters has reached a saturation point... Despite such a grave situation, the Government of India feels that 15 lakhs tonnes of fish can further be caught from the deep sea. Therefore, the Government of India appointed a technology mission to look into the matter. The mission recommended 2,600 deep sea fishing vessels in the range of 12-40 meters and recommended the promotion of joint ventures. A number of big industrial houses have queued up to enter deep sea fishing with foreign equity

participation. Most of these are 100% export-oriented units. The past experiences of deep sea fishing were not taken into account. All the deep sea fishing vessels including the public sector ones are being operated from Visakhapatnam. Out of 148 vessels, only 20 are running at a profit. In spite of this, the food processing ministry has already issued 39 licences to Indian entrepreneurs and three joint ventures — Japanese, American and Mexican. It is interesting to note that the Mexican vessels have six purseines that are each 15 km long.

These are going to be a big threat to the artisanal fisher people and the small mechanised sector. This conflict has already appeared in West Bengal between the gill-netters and the 148 deep sea fishing vessels. In spite of continuous requests, the central government has refused to do anything to resolve the crisis. Despite several declarations on its intention to enact deep sea fishing regulations, the food processing ministry has not done anything concrete in this regard.”

Of course, there were dissenters at the seminar who were of the opinion that, rather than oppose joint ventures, the NFF should try to fight for the rights of workers on joint venture vessels, thereby protecting the interests of traditional fish workers.

A series of state-level seminars were held to discuss these issues at greater length, bringing together the small mechanised sector and the artisanal sector to work out a strategy to face the onslaught. Finally, it was decided to organise an All-India Fisheries Bandh in the first week of February 1994. The struggle against joint ventures in deep sea fishing had just begun. The strike on February 4 was a huge success, serving as an example of united action within the traditional and mechanised sectors, merchants and exporters. Gujarat led the struggle, supported by no less than the Gujarat fisheries department. Wholesale fish merchants in Howrah and Mumbai too actively participated.

Leaders from various states went to Delhi and staged a dharna before the Ministry of Food Processing. The only response from the ministry was the appointment of the Dr D Sudarshan Committee to study conflicts between the traditional sector and deep sea vessels. As this was seen merely as a means to postpone a decision, the NFF went ahead with its plans that included an indefinite hunger strike by me in Porbunder, on May 2, 1995.

What about the Murari Committee? What were its recommendations?

The P Murari Committee, constituted by the central government in 1995 to look into issues concerning deep sea fishing in Indian waters, was a 41-member panel comprising a diverse group of bureaucrats, experts, politicians and activists. It was expanded to include 16 members of parliament and six representatives from the fisheries sector.

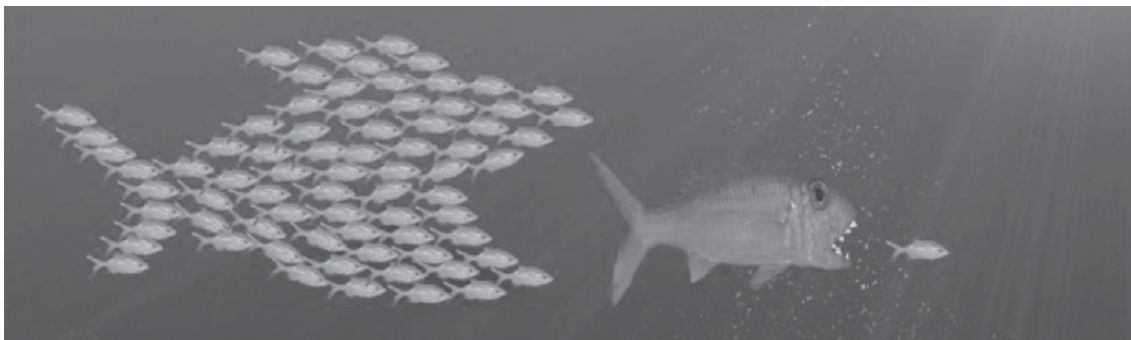
I was nominated as one of the members of this expanded committee that made 21 recommendations. The important ones are:

- All permits issued for fishing by joint ventures/charter/ lease/test should immediately be cancelled subject to legal processes as may be required.

- No renewal/extension of licences/permits should be issued in future for fishing by joint ventures/charter/lease/test fishing vessels.
- All licences/permits for fishing should be made public and documents and copies made available for inspection at the office of the registered authority.
- Areas already being exploited by fishermen operating traditional crafts or mechanised vessels under 20 meters in size, or areas which may be exploited in the medium-term, should not be made accessible to vessels above 20 meters in length, except for Indian-owned vessels currently in operation that may be given three years to move out.
- Parliament should enact deep sea fishing regulations after consulting the fishing community.
- Coastguards should be strengthened, expanded and technically upgraded with state-of-the-art systems of navigation, surveillance and weaponry, and properly tasked to prevent poaching by foreign vessels and the observance of zone restrictions.
- All types of marine fisheries should be put under one ministry.
- Fishermen and women need to be trained in handling new equipment, larger vessels and new fishing techniques besides fish-handling and processing. The government should give this priority under a new deep sea fishing policy.
- The new policy should be reviewed/evaluated from time to time (three to five years).
- Government should take decisions on the recommendations of the committee within six months.

Have any of these recommendations been implemented?

The recommendations of the high-powered Murari Committee constituted the first victory for the fisher people against globalisation. However, the government has made no move to implement them though it was expected to arrive at a decision within six months. Forty foreign vessels continue to operate within Indian waters. Apparently, they have life-long licences although no such facility exists for Indian fishermen who are forced to renew their licences every year. Meanwhile, the struggle continues...



CATHOLIC PRIEST STARTS INDEFINITE FAST FOR FISHERFOLK'S RIGHTS

A Catholic priest has begun an indefinite fast in western India to push the federal government to implement a charter of demands for fisherfolk's rights.

Redemptorist Father Thomas Xavier Kocherry started fasting July 10 in Umergaon, Maharashtra state, where a protest against a US\$604 million commercial harbor that threatens thousands of fishermen has his support.

The priest, who has campaigned for fisherfolk's rights for three decades, said his "Fishers Storm Again" fast will continue until the government implements eight demands to which it agreed earlier.

The charter he has drawn up includes subsidized fuel for fishermen, a ban on foreign vessels and trawling July-September, the monsoon months, and extending relief aid for fishermen to cover fisherwomen and inland fisherfolk.

He also wants the government to press for the release of fishermen held in jails in Pakistan for fishing in its territorial waters.

Father Kocherry is also calling for an adherence to a Supreme Court order to scrap all non-traditional aqua-farms and for inclusion of traditional fishermen in a proposed government committee to look into the implementation of a 24-point plan devised by an earlier committee.

His other two charter demands are a check on the import of fish, and the scrapping of the Umergaon port project and arrest of those responsible for the death of anti-port activist Pratap Save, who died in police custody in 1999.

These are "simple" requests, said the priest, who claimed that the government had agreed to them, among demands presented by the National Fish Workers Forum (NFWF), during his earlier protest in January.

He said he regretted that although the jailed fishermen are "treated worse than prisoners of war," their release is "never a government agenda."

Father Kocherry told UCA News July 11 that the government has ignored fisherfolk, who he said face increasing exploitation in the name of development and globalization.

The Redemptorist priest who formed the NFWF and the World Forum of Fisher Peoples has organized fisherfolk to fight for their rights since the 1970s.



He has won several national and international awards, including the Sophie Prize in 1999, for his fight for human rights and environmental protection.

At Father Kocherry's fast-shed in Umergaon, some 180 kilometers north of Mumbai, some 500 people gather every evening to express solidarity with him.

Nathalal Ramjibhai Dhanjibhai of neighboring Valsad town said that the involvement of an internationally famous person has helped local fishermen.

"I am least bothered whether he is a Christian or Muslim, but what makes us happy is his commitment to our cause," Dhanjibhai told UCA News.

He and other fisherfolk say their demands are for "basic rights and not privileges" and that they will fight until these rights are upheld.

Fisherfolk are planning to hold meetings and demonstrations in New Delhi, the western coastal city of Mumbai and southern cities of Bangalore and Thiruvananthapuram.

One of Father Kocherry's charter demands relates to a 1996 Supreme Court order freezing non-traditional commercial aqua-farming and obliging federal authorities to submit an assessment of the farms' environmental impact.

The priest alleged that the federal government tried to turn the judgment in its favor by asking the Marine Product Export Development Authority to conduct the assessment.

"It has submitted the report, but it was something like asking the violators to evaluate their own violations," Father Kocherry added.

A year ago, he and other social activists also opposed an amusement park in Mumbai that they alleged threatened fishing and the natural habitat.



PRIEST ENDS FAST AFTER GOVERNMENT AGREES TO FISHERFOLK'S DEMANDS

A Catholic priest who was on an indefinite fast to push for fisherfolk's rights in western India ended his protest July 14 after the federal government agreed to the people's demands.

Redemptorist Father Thomas Xavier Kocherry who began the hunger strike on July 10 at Umergaon coastal town said he ended it after the government agreed "in writing to implement most of our demands."

However, "we need to further pressure" the government to see that the demands are "actually implemented," he told UCA News July 17.

The priest who championed fisherfolk's rights for the past three decades, said he fasted to push the federal government to implement a charter of demands to which it had agreed earlier.

A July 13 press statement by the federal Ministry of Agriculture, which takes care of fisheries concerns , said National Fishworkers' Forum representatives met government officials in the backdrop of the priest's fast.

The issues discussed include a water-farming bill, implementation of a government committee's recommendation on deep-sea fishing and enhancing kerosene quota for coastal states to aid fishermen, the release said.

A subsidy on diesel, the control of fish import and action to release fishermen arrested by neighboring countries for straying into territorial waters are among other demands.

The Fishworkers and officials also discussed the demands to scrap a US\$604 commercial harbor that could threaten thousands of fishermen and the arrest of those responsible for the death of anti-port activist Pratap Save in 1999.

The government press release said the discussions help clarify "in details" the demands

and inform the fishermen's forum about "the present status of (government) action" regarding the issues.

The press release said most demands need action from state governments with whom the fishermen agreed to coordinate. The ministry also agreed to take up the matter with the states, impose ban on monsoon trawling and ensure that there will be no increase in the import of fish, it said.

After three days of discussions and in view of the satisfactory progress on the issues the ministry requested the forum "to call off their agitation," the press note said.

At Father Kocherry's fast-shed in Umergaon, some 180 kilometers north of Mumbai, some 500 people gathered every evening to express solidarity with him.

Chandrashekar Sagar and other fisherfolk leaders said they succeeded in making "a breakthrough in our long struggle," because of Father Kocherry's "stature as a national and international leader."

Father Kocherry founded and coordinated the struggle for fisherfolk's rights through the forum, which now has consultative status with the United Nations.

The forum also works through several state level forums of fisher people living on the Indian coast.



Thousands Join Rebel Priest's Funeral



In 1978, Kocherry was instrumental in setting up a cooperative for poor fishermen, saving them from exploitation.

Posted on May 7, 2014, 8:49 am

Thiruvananthapuram: For fishermen in India and across the world he was a leader. For anti-nuclear activists, he was an inspiration. And for the Church,

he was an unorthodox priest who simply could not be disciplined.

On Monday, some two thousand people including priests and nuns descended on the funeral of Redemptorist Father Thomas Kocherry held in tiny Muttada parish, 10 kms north of the Kerala state capital Thiruvananthapuram. Following his death from a heart attack, aged 73, at his south Kerala home on Saturday, Kocherry was laid to rest in the parish cemetery.

Born in the south Kerala town of Changanassery, 20 kms from the sea, Kocherry spent 43 years as a priest but rarely in a routine role. He started out his parish life in the coastal town of Punthura, teamed up with poor local fishermen and soon began running traditional nets with them out at sea.

The currents against the left-leaning South American liberation theology which had reached Kerala's shores by the 1970s meant Kocherry came in for heavy criticism from within the Church. He simply ignored it.

At a time when priests were not supposed to wander much farther than the church gates, Kocherry was vocally demanding workers' rights for fishermen on the streets of Kerala, eventually organizing them into unions for the first time.

"They were uneducated. He gave them direction and prepared them to fight for their rights," said TJ Anjalose, former MP for the coastal Kerala town of Alappuzha and himself a fishing union leader. "He had the guts to challenge the authorities."

In 1978, Kocherry was instrumental in setting up a cooperative for poor fishermen, saving

them from exploitation by mechanized boat owners. Five years later, he was leading them into fasting protests in which he threatened to continue until his own death.

In 1983, on the 21st day of the fast, the under-pressure government finally agreed to a ban on trawling that remains in place during the monsoon spawning season until this day, protecting fish stocks for poorer fishermen who operate in shallow waters.

“Many people could not understand his actions. Many said his social actions were unbecoming of a priest,” said Sister Philomene Mary, a Medical Mission nun who fasted with him 30 years ago. “He worked for the poor, and they were his only concern. History will record him as a great man who put into action what Jesus taught.”

In 1997, he was unanimously elected coordinator of the World Forum of Fish-workers and Fish-harvesters when the new global NGO was set up that year in New Delhi, making him the leader of some 100 million fishermen in 42 countries.

He made headlines during this period for refusing to accept a US\$150,000 award from the Pew Foundation which was at the time sponsored by the Ohio-based energy firm now known as Sunoco – accepting the award from a sea polluter would betray fishermen, he argued.

Kocherry was never a celebrity, and although he won Norway’s International Environment and Development Prize in 1999, he never received similar recognition by either the government or the Church in his own country. Instead he faced harassment: Kocherry was jailed 13 times during his life.

Hard work and stress began to take their toll on his health, leading to four heart-bypass surgeries during his old age.

Still, last year he travelled to the neighboring state of Tamil Nadu to continue his 15-year fight against a planned Russian nuclear power station in a small fishing village. It was one of his final acts of defiance.

“In 1989, when he found out about the government’s plan for the plant in Koodankulam, he led a massive rally of fishermen to tell they government they are doing a rubbish job and that they had no right to endanger these poor fishermen in the name of development,” said SP Udayakumar, head of the People’s Movement Against Nuclear Energy. “He was a great visionary.”

Source: ucanews.com

Thomas Kocherry, Fishermen, Rebel, Liberation Theology

Thomas Kocherry –

An Indomitable Fighter



Medha Patkar, Mumbai

To remember Tom alias Thomas Kocherry is to remember a tall personality and a life with integrity that is lost forever, leaving behind the spirit and strength. Tom who worked with and for the fish workers, not only fishermen but also women, across the country and the world, was, no doubt a trade union leader first. He was a man of organisation building. With great diligence and confidence, he would work out his strategies and organization's capacity. With

discipline which he didn't just follow but loved as a 'value', Tom would always carry out a meeting of mass movement without any dilemma or dilly dallying. That was like a good leader who built National and World forum of Fish workers and won many battles.

Tom's foundation and cultivation of the National Fish worker's Forum with indomitable commitment, successful battle against foreign fishing vessels, and resistance to all attacks as fisher people's livelihood is well known, he reached and contributed to World Fish worker's Forum through the same.

We remember Tom in National Alliance of People's Movements (NAPM) as one who always laughed at the crises and challenges. He would peacefully analyze the greatest of those and then plan. Always ready with a programme proposal he would participate in the debate with an open mind. His fast in Mumbai as his dialogues with the Ministers across the party, therefore were with confidence that always brought in some results. He had his heart in the struggle by the fish workers and was a master of those issues. But what made him gain a national stature and status was also his ideological clarity and strategic inputs on the wider issues. Whether it was people's right to land, water, forest, empowerment of women- among masses to leadership collectives- also nuclear power, Tom was committed to support, participate and guide. His role in the struggle against Haripura nuclear plant in West Bengal and Koodankulam was well known. His support was not just to the leadership but also to common activists, common people and all those who would be in the action which he participated in, made him relate to all.

I remember Tom would never behave like a 'Father' but a brother, a colleague, and a comrade. His simplicity and his sincerity were his assets which he presented till the end of his life. A disciplined soul that he was, he cultivated NFF...unfortunate demise of Harekrishna Debnath being a great blow to Tom and NFF both...but Tom's spirit continued to support it till his last breath. He was no doubt a reformer within the community of missionaries and a revolutionary visionary for all those who challenged the system. Not always with very radical words, his songs in open, raised voice reflected both...'Saathiyo, Salaam hai...with Neela, Narmada, Chilika...' The sound is faded but not memories, that will be an everlasting tribute with a salute.

Remembering Tom



Nalini Nayak, Kerala

When we all gathered to bid the final farewell to Fr. Thomas Kocherry or Tom as we called him, we were all struck by the peaceful face with which he lay. We were friends for around 40 years. Before he started work in the fishing village of Poothura, he had visited us in Marianad where we had been

Working with the fishing community for a few years already. We were wary of having a priest close by as we had experienced the way the Church connived with the powers that be leaving the fishers, poor and exploited.

Tom and his companions turned out to be different, desiring to live their Christian faith as taught by Jesus...close to the poor. They also attempted to earn their bread working with the fishers... all very radical for the Church of the early 1970s. This was an inspiration to us and as the years went by we not only created a strong group of Christians for Socialism but also saw the fishers organizing to fight for their rights to survival. Tom was a charismatic leader and gave unstintingly of himself. We all have numerous stories not only of his clever strategies as a leader but also the very humane way he reached out to us and others. For several of us who were disillusioned with the Church, Tom and a few other priest friends provided the space to read the Bible in a contextual manner and celebrated and broke the bread with us in true communion. It was this solidarity that also sustained our commitment to the struggle of the fishers.

Tom looked beyond the struggle of the fishers and made efforts to build alliances with the larger working class movements and struggles. In the late 1980s he participated and expressed solidarity with the textile workers as they fought their losing battle in Mumbai. In the early 1990s, he joined the National Alliance of People's Movements (NAPM). Even when the government was unaware of what was happening at the international level, the people's movements were opposing the signing of the Dunkel Draft that proposed the creation of the WTO. The Fishworkers participated in huge demonstrations against this. Tom was particularly aware of the links between the global and the local and tried to bring this awareness to the Fishworkers' movement.

Nevertheless, he was also very human. His assertive loud voice and daring nature which were his strengths as a leader were also his limitations hindering his ability to listen to others. As the Fishworkers' movement made considerable gains and achieved national recognition, the old solidarity bonds weakened, the open debate and discussion and search for the truth got stunted, and the dynamism of the movement got paralyzed by organization structures and hierarchies. While the base of the national movement weakened, Tom was building an international movement of Fishworkers which for similar reason again was divided at its birth. All said and done, when we old friends gathered to bid him the final farewell, it was a very sad moment for us all. We had seen him gradually lose his physical energy but his mind and spirit remained undaunted. His desire to fight and transform the world and rid it of its wrongs was his prime concern to the very end. He fought a great fight always faithful to his commitment to priesthood. He now rests in peace remembered by thousands around the world.

A True Friend, Guide and Inspiration



Theramma Prayikalam MMS, Kerala

I met Tom in 1972 in Ithithanam, Chaganacherry when I was in the Novitiate. That relationship lasted for 42 years till May 3rd 2014, when my sister Elsamma Prayikalam who was the first one who announced his death called and exploded her shock to me. Actually Tom and myself had a conversation through the phone on May 2nd night around 8 pm. The message was like this "I am

Sending some books to you through a boy, since I want to give my last gifts to you before my death" Then he laughed as usual. I replied "No, God will not call you now, it will take some more time". And the conversation went on for some more time and he sounded quite good and joyful. So when Elsa said, "Tom is no more" I couldn't believe my ears. And the boy brought the books to me a week after his death. One of his books was "Be not Afraid: Overcoming the fear of death" by Johann Christopher Arnold. He finished reading that book up to chapter 17 "Dying" page 160 and put a mark there. For each and every chapter he had written a comment in the book itself. It seems that he was fully prepared for his death. His letters to his provincial as well as the local superior are also a proof of that. He had mentioned the names and phone numbers of the people whom they had to inform of his death as well as his desire to have a 2 hour prayer service with reflections and Nadan Pattukal (folk songs on struggles) and the name of the people who could prepare that for him. So I rushed to Thiruvananthpuram to prepare that prayer service as my last gift to him.

In 1972 a year after his priestly ordination Tom came to Ithithanam, Medical Mission Sisters' convent to give a retreat to our sisters. That time I was in the Novitiate and he met me there while I was teaching Malayalam alphabet to some of our poor neighborhood children. He got interested in that and told me "if you can come to the sea shore in Poothura (one of the coastal village in Trivandrum) you can teach many poor children". Soon after my Religious profession as a Medical Mission Sister in 1975, I joined a group of

four Sisters who opted to live and work among the fisher people in Anjuthengu, Poothura, where Tom and three other Redemptorist priests had already started to work among the fisher-people taking care of Poothura parish. My life with those fisher people became not a mere 'immersion experience' but a continuous process of commitment for almost three decades of my active ministry from 1975-2004. Their life and struggle became part and parcel of my life, leaving unforgettable experiences and impressions, which, to a great extent were shaped by Tom, his reflections and inspirations. An experience of

Being challenged by Tom as well as by the fisher-women was the first stepping stone in The Process of the power I developed within me as a woman. After 8 months of involvement with fisher-people, one night around one o'clock, we found that our house was on fire. It was a small thatched house with only one entrance. Somebody who found us as a threat to their existence had set fire to our house. To our surprise, the next day the people around our house gathered together, and collected some money, thatched the house, and made it more beautiful. There we were asked by Tom and the women whether we would like to continue or not in the midst of such oppositions.

The process of development of the power within me challenged me to make conscious and deliberate choices in my life. In the seventies it was very difficult for others to comprehend Religious sisters getting involved politically. We had to face many objections, rejections, and criticisms from different sources: Religious, priests, our own families and relatives, and the Church, and even from our own Sisters. We were kicked out from all the activities in the Church and banned as "Communist –Marxist Sisters". But all that time Tom was with us encouraging us and supporting us reflecting and sharing with us the word of God especially Lk 4:18 and Magnificent.

The process of development of the power within me was a Process of Conversion and Change within me. Tom enabled me to look into myself, my own petty cherished values and to make a strong decision of being with the fisher people and it went on for 30 years impelling me to take a stand with the poor. My experience in the police station with the Adivasi men, in Muthenga, where I was abused by the police was a real experience of my own strength and power within. Where I was really strengthened by the words of Tom quoting the Scripture that God provides the words and the strength to bear witness (Lk 21: 9-19) In short Tom was my friend, he was like a member of our family, my companion, my teacher, my brother, my guide, my strength and my inspiration. And I believe that he will continue to be like that giving strength and inspirations to me.

Thomas Kocherry:

A Prophet of our time



Philomine Marie MMS, Kerala

In his book, *Religious Life and New Challenges* Thomas Kocherry wrote, "The story of my Religious life is a search and constant struggle for Justice and values of the Kingdom of God". In my thirty seven years of experience with him in the participation of the struggle for the rights of the people, protection of environment and equal status for women in society proved his total commitment to the cause even to the point of great physical hardships and mental suffering. He was convinced that truth and justice will prevail at the end.

In order to enter into the struggle of the people, he insisted that all of us should be aware of the socio- economic, political and religious realities around us. Action- Reflection-Action (ARA) was the method he used. Through the reflection process he brought to light the consequences of taking the side of the poor and marginalized – being criticized, excluded, unjustly treated and humiliated. In spite of all these he was convinced that the Priests and Religious should commit themselves to fight for the values of the Kingdom. This is our call.

I see him as a fully grown human person. Closely associating with him in his life and mission, I experienced him as a human person with great strength and weakness. At the same time through his commitment for the poor and the struggle for the establishment of God's Kingdom he was able to witness the mystic prophetic character of his life. His understanding of contemplation was to live truthfully, honestly and lovingly. It is deeply a revolutionary matter. 'This internal transformation is not more important than action for justice, but without it our search for justice and peace becomes another exercise of human will, undermined by human self deception.' (From Faith in Jesus)

His clarity of vision and his commitment to live this vision with selfless and self giving commitment in spite of opposition from the Church authorities, political parties, from his own organization he founded, and people who were closely related to him, confirmed that his movement was in the right direction.

Though there were many great events in his life that proved his commitment and conviction I would like to mention two instances that affected my life in the beginning of our journey with the fisher people. Once when we were reflecting during the Eucharistic celebration, a twelve year old girl was carrying water from the well for cooking for the family. Her sister had just given birth to her 4th baby and her husband had to go fishing

to feed the family. Tom explained how this little girl was life giving to six people by offering her services. This struck me deeply. I realized that even a small action with love and concern is life giving. Jesus' word, "I have come that they may have life and have it in abundance" (Jn. 10:10) is fulfilled here.

Another instance was when for the first time, Trivandrum District union decided to go on an indefinite fast as part of the struggle for trawl ban in 1981. It was suggested that the President Mr. Joychan Antony go on fast. But he insisted that Tom too join him. Since it was Tom's exam days for LLB, first he hesitated, but suddenly realizing the need for support for Joychan, he agreed. Though it seemed to be a small matter I was struck by the total commitment of Tom for the cause. He enjoyed coming together and celebrations. Before he got involved worldwide, our team met regularly for reflection and celebration of the Eucharist. It was always with emphasis on our solidarity and breaking and giving ourselves for others. He always carried a Mass – kit with him. The get together of the leaders of the union during Holy week every year was a symbolic expression of our solidarity with the crucified people, which was acted out depicting the realities around. As a result of his commitment he had to go through physical and material suffering. During the last days of his active life he was betrayed by his close associates. It was even suggested that he should be dismissed from the Federation. What he had told us in our reflections came true. He said "when we take a stand, we must be ready to suffer and die. Then only we can become fully human. This is real experience of love. That is what Jesus did; when he challenged authorities and the powerful they crucified him. Today when we challenge and take a stand with the oppressed, marginalized and fight for truth and Justice we also will be crucified. Only through crucifixion FORUM 10 and death we will be able to celebrate Easter. The Cross is the test for the authenticity of a revolutionary." His reflections on the last days of his life after the severe heart attack prove the genuineness of his life. "We all stand together as one family Thank one another and their support Their love and concern.

Now I was really to close my eyes. But God did not allow me to do that ... I am here again, another life... For what?

I am sure of my mission... I still long for a world that is all inclusive, no exclusion of any sort, No religious fundamentalism, No political fundamentalism, No racism, No gender Discrimination, No Economic Fundamentalism, No casteism, No division of believers and unbelievers, No greedy accumulation of private property, Land is meant for all, No pollution of Air, Waters, And land for a greedy profiteering We are all one family, Children of one God, Where everybody is equal, Free brothers and sisters. I continue fighting against All anti-Kingdom values, All temptations of power mongering, Hidden and subtle Money and position, fame and sex, In the process I also become enslaved By the temptation. I am sorry "Your mercy O Lord endure for ever Do not forsake the work of your hands" Ps 138/8 (From Magnificat by Tom)

Tom was a great person, human and divine!

Some Memories of Thommapappen



In 1962 I was 5 years old. Before leaving to Bangalore for his seminary formation, Thommapappen bought two teak to plant in front of the gate. He told me to water the plants every day and it was very fruitful.

In 1968, Br Thomas was training for the priesthood in Bangalore. Sizzy, my sister celebrated her first holy communion. I remember a gift (a rosary, and a rosary book in English) which was sent to her

from Bangalore. The rosary book was full of pictures and it was quite special for us and we kept it for years.

In 1960, we didn't have electricity in our homes. We studied using candles and it was quite difficult. We had a foreign type writer and Thommapappen sold it for Rs 300. He used that to get a current connection in our home. We all then had the chance to study in good light.

In 1975, my father (Michael Kocherry) was admitted in Chethipuzha hospital. We informed Thommapappen and this about 10 pm at night. Thomappaen left Trivandrum on a motor bike and reached at hospital around 1 am and donated blood to my father. In 1997, two days before my father passed away he came and donated blood. Thommapappen was there whenever there was a need.

When he used to visit our homes, he would say not to prepare anything special. He was happier to sleep on the floor. He was very caring towards the servants. He wished a good life or them and constantly asked about their wellbeing. These are some of my memories of our beloved Thommapappen, a great human being and a faithful priest of Isho Mishiha.

Saji Kocherry

A Prophetic Theologian and a Mystic of the Market-Place

Jacob Parappally MSFS

Thomas Kocherry literally slept in the Lord exactly a week before his 75 th birthday! In the early morning of 3rd May, at 4.30 I received an e-mail from him. He was worried about the outcome of the general elections! He could not see his beloved country being divided on communal lines with the consequent destruction of the ideals enshrined in the Constitution of India. He was worried about the development mantra that was chanted during the electioneering in favour of the corporate sectors, multi-nationals at the cost of the lives of the poor all over the country especially the Tribals, the Dalits and the fish workers for whose well-being he dedicated his life.

Many know Tom as a trade union leader, environmentalist, lawyer, social activist, one of the leaders of the national and international Forum of Fish Workers and active member of Indian National Alliance of Peoples' Movements (NAPM). But I know Tom as a contextual theologian for more than 20 years! He did not hold any doctorate in theology from any university or ecclesiastical institute but his theological reflections emerged from the multiversity of the life of the poor and the marginalized sections of the society. His thunderous prophetic voice amplified the silent cry of the oppressed and exploited in the society and raised questions about our faith in a God who is deeply involved in human history! He was an active member of the Indian Theological Association (ITA) and participated in all its annual meetings and seminars without fail. His down-to-earth-approach to God-talk could challenge the tendency of some theologians to make God-talk or theology too abstract, mysterious and other - worldly! At my request, as the section editor of Jeevadhara May issues, he wrote articles on Jesus' relations to society and the implications of our faith in him which he published later as a booklet, Faith in Jesus: A Passionate Call for Liberation. Tom emphasized the prophetic commitment of Jesus. According to him, our faith in Jesus demands that we move away from ritualism and dogmas towards liberation experience and prophetic proclamation.

Tom could experience God's presence intensely in the daily life of all who are struggling to secure the basic necessities of life including their recognition as humans with inalienable rights. He could sense the absence of God when the markets were manipulated by the powerful, forests were cut down by unscrupulous traders of timber, and trolling destroyed the lives of ordinary fish workers. By committing himself to change the situation he wanted to experience God's presence in the midst of it. Like Jesus he identified himself with the fisher workers and the poorest of the poor in the society. He was courageous to raise his voice against all forms of injustice without caring for its consequences. Like all prophets he had to suffer terribly when he saw the organization he built up not only abandoned him and his ideals but also hurled false accusations against him and spread calumnies about him. Tom suffered bitterly in those days and months but he consoled himself by accepting them as a sharing in the passion the Lord, whom he followed closely till the end of his life. Tom lived his theology not as an academic knowledge but an experience of the suffering God and he raised his prophetic voice without any fear or favour. He continues to live not only with his Lord but with us who are touched and inspired by his life.

Faith in Jesus

A Passionate call for Liberation

Fr. Thomas Kocherry



Redefining Faith

*By Chencho Sherin Thomas I ENS -
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM*

Published: 23rd September 2013 12:34 PM

Last Updated: 23rd September 2013 12:34 PM

"We cannot use rituals and dogmas without seeking the kingdom and its justice, without bringing about the acceptable year of the lord", says Fr Thomas Kocherry's book 'Faith in Jesus - A passionate call for liberation'.

Fr. Kocherry has been carving a niche in the conventional Catholic Christian congregation with his revolutionary outbursts, fights he led for the rights of fishermen and his strong aversion towards globalisation. His name reflects strength and integrity among the downtrodden especially fishermen of Manavalakurichy.

Clad in simple shirt and trousers, this priest, stands out from the priest clan with no cassock or cross adorning his body. His outlooks of the church and priesthood often arouse controversies inside the religion. Fr. Kocherry's latest book 'Faith in Jesus' discusses Jesus in depth and how with his life he has shown the message of faith.

In 22 segments, commencing from the very creation of human life under the name 'creation and the fall' takes us into a deeper and thought provoking journey.

It was Pope Benedict XVI who declared Oct. 2012- Nov. 2013 as the year of faith to rediscover the Faith and Church for the believers.

Nevertheless, Fr Kocherry feels that without reflecting on Jesus Christ and his life against the backdrop of Jewish history, one cannot but dissect Christianity and its concept of faith.

"There was a contradictory discussion in Kerala politics concerning Jesus. Pinarayi Vijayan said Jesus Christ was a revolutionary and church disagreed. I believe Jesus was a liberalising force assigned for the total liberation of the planet and the humanity. Jesus is prophet for liberation," says Fr Kocherry.

While digging deep into the Jewish roots and teachings of Jesus, Fr Kocherry does not shy away from expressing his own takes on globalisation, institution of church, women's liberation and sacraments of Christianity.

When he says: "Faith in Jesus clearly demands moving away from ritualism and dogmas and moving towards liberation experience and prophetic proclamation," one could sense the revolution exuding from his very core.

It is evident from his writings that Fr Kocherry is no quintessential priest. Unlike other ordained men he writes, "I feel that the Pope and theologians generally accept that there is no theological difficulty in ordaining women, but only the tradition in the church creates a barrier in acting in favour of women! What a pity, that we are tied down by the tradition, rather than motivated by the word of God."

In the context of globalisation and capitalism he says all evils of society including corruption, price rise, terrorism and even war are related to globalisation as it facilitates amassing of profits by a few at the expense of the vast majority of people. Hence, "Justice, morality, labour laws and respect for environment are thrown to the wind".

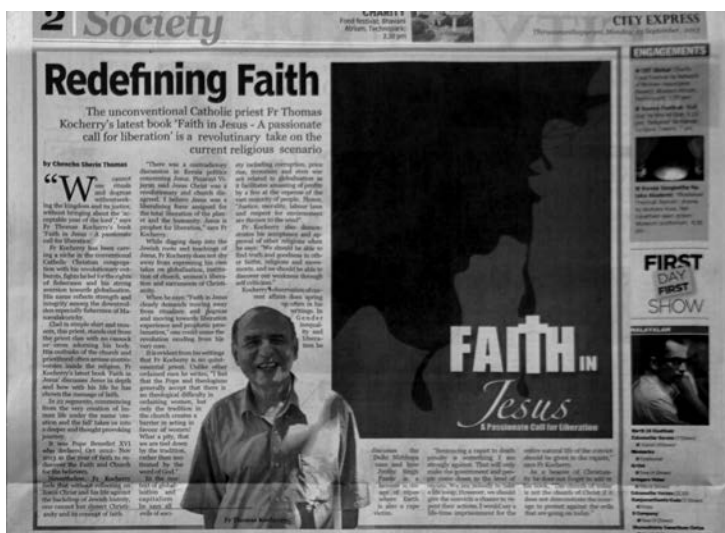
Fr Kocherry also demonstrates his acceptance and approval of other religions when he says: "We should be able to find truth and goodness in other faiths, religions and movements, and we should be able to discover our weakness through self criticism."

Kocherry's observation of current affairs does spring up often in his writings. In Gender inequality and liberation he discusses the Delhi Nirbhaya case and how Jyothy Singh Pande is a heroine in the age of rapes where Earth is also a rape victim.

"Sentencing a rapist to death penalty is something I am strongly against. That will only make the government and people come down to the level of rapists. We are nobody to take a life away. However, we should give the convicts a chance to repent their actions. I would say a life-time imprisonment for the entire natural life of the convict should be given to the rapists," says Fr Kocherry.

As a beacon of Christianity he does not forget to add in his book, "The church of today is not the church of Christ if it does not demonstrate the courage to protest against the evils that are going on today."

Indian Express





In Loving Memory of **Fr. Thomas Kocherry**



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NORKA Reg. No. 06/2006

Fr. Thomas Kocherry was an eminent personality who dedicated his life for the social upliftment of the fishermen community. The organisation of Non-residents Keralites of UAE - The Welfare Association of Trivandrum Organisations (WEATO) heartfully remember him in the occasion of his 1st death anniversary.

We remember Fr. Thomas Kocherry in the present context, wherein our administrators have taken ridiculous and unimaginative steps in the case of deep sea fishing, which has resulted in the looting of our marine resources by foreign companies. He was a great leader who fought against the unscientific policies of the Government like issue of licence to foreign companies during 1990,s and other measures that were adverse to fishermen community by organizing State wide and Nation wide strikes and strived hard to educate and empower the fisher folk. No doubt that, his strategies helped to resolve the issues faced by the traditional fishing community to a great extent.

We - the members of WEATO hereby bow before the everlasting memory of Fr. Thomas Kocherry who has left his imprints in the social service scenario of our Nation.

WELFARE ASSOCIATION OF TRIVANDRUM ORGANIZATIONS (WEATO)

General Secretary

Julius Peter

Chairman

Nelson Raji



In Loving Memory of *Fr. Thomas Kocherry*



Perfect Team Work at Every Step

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**Inaugurated on
WORLD FISHERIES DAY
November 21, 2014
Anjengo, Trivandrum, Kerala**