Since fishworkers' movement is studied as a 'case study' in this thesis, it is important to know the genesis and growth of this movement. Besides, to analyse fishworkers' movement as a social movement, its organisation, ideology, strategy and effects, which are basic components of a social movement, should be described objectively with available data. This thesis focuses on the non-party political character of KSMTF which spearheaded the movement. So there is need to study how KSMTF as a non-party political organisation, organised its various agitations and activities to develop itself into a social movement without the support and guidance of a political party. As the organisation was very important for fishworkers' movement, the year 1977 in which a state-level organisation was formed, is taken as the starting point of the history of the fishworkers' movement.

I. Formation of a State Level and Secular Organisation of Fishworkers

As mentioned in the previous chapter on the factors of the fishworkers' movement, there were six district level fishermen unions organised by social workers. The leaders of these unions came together in 1977 to form a state level
organisation. It was the macro-level dimension of the problem of mechanisation in fishing that prompted the scattered unions to come together to form an independent state-level organisation of fishworkers. The destructive mechanisation could be controlled only by legal measures for which the state-government had to be influenced. To influence the government, a state-level organisation was found to be a must. Besides, only a state-level organisation could bring together fishworkers of the entire state to build up their solidarity and organisational strength.

In a meeting of different district unions held in St. Joseph's Parish Hall, Alapuzha, on 25th May 1977 the unions decided to federate themselves into a state-level union. It was named Latin Catholic Fishermen's Federation (LCFF). In the beginning it was only a forum for local unions to meet together for mutual support. The annual report of LCFF for 1978 said, "LCFF is a coordination of diocesan unions of fishermen belonging to Latin Catholic community." (Kaleekal 1988: 30) The federation allowed the member unions to keep their identity and registered name. LCFF was not affiliated to any political party. In that sense it was a non-party political organisation.

The state level organisation submitted a memorandum to the government containing twenty two demands to the chief minister of Kerala on 20th October 1977, with the main demand of restricting mechanised boats to operate only beyond five
kilometers from the shore. A second memorandum with thirteen demands was submitted on 7th August, 1978. The main demands included a ban on mechanised trawling from June to August, steps to curb water pollution in the inland waters and a ban on fishing nets with small mesh size.

A major event in 1978 was the formation of a national level organisation of fishworkers. The problems of mechanisation in fisheries were faced by all the marine states in India. So there was an urgency for a national organisation to exert pressure on the Central Government to guide the fisheries policies of the states. With this in view, the representatives of fishworkers' unions of Kerala, Goa, and Tamil Nadu met in Madras and formed a national organisation of fishworkers called "National Fishermen Forum for Kattamaram and Country Boats Fishermen's Right and Marine Wealth." Mr. Madhani Saldhana of Goa was elected its Chairman and Mr. A. J. Vijayan of Kerala its general secretary. The new organisation then decided that its state units should organise a 'relay satyagraha' in November 1978 with the demand for a comprehensive marine regulation act.

In the light of the call of the National Forum, LCFF organised a relay satyagraha in different districts of Kerala from 16th November 1978. In Alapuzha district it continued for
59 days with four persons fasting daily in front of the collectorate till it was stopped at the request of the national chairman. (Kaleekal 1988)

1. Jeep Rally to Trivandrum

In spite of the promises of the government to enforce the marine regulations, mechanised boats continued to operate in coastal waters. As a result many clashes took place in the sea between the fishermen and the mechanised boats causing loss of life and property to the fishworkers. Newspaper reports of the time also revealed this fact. "A country craft which went for fishing yesterday afternoon, was hit and destroyed by a boat. People had a narrow escape." (Kerala Times, 1-6-1979) "A few fishermen burned a boat in Kochi for fishing within the five kilometer prohibited area." (Kerala Kaumudi 27-12-1978)

It was in this background that a young fisherman named Babu was killed when a mechanised boat rammed into his country craft on 30th December 1978. Protest marches and attacks on boats followed. LCFF took up the issue and decided to have a jeep rally to Trivandrum, followed by an indefinite fast by Fr. Paul Arackal, the president. The demands were the introduction of a marine regulation law, adequate police protection for traditional fishworkers in the sea, enquiry about police attack on fishworkers and adequate compensation to the family of Babu.
When the rally reached Trivandrum greeted by thousands of people along its 150 kilometer long coastal route, Fr. Arakal began an indefinite fast in front of the state secretariat. Demonstrations were held in various districts, and in Trivandrum city by fishworkers and university students. On the same day the Finance Minister, Mr. K.M Mani called the representatives of the union for a discussion and conceded to all their demands. Accordingly the fast was withdrawn within a day. (Alakal March 1979)

The agitation created awareness among fishworkers about their solidarity as a working class and the problems of the fisheries in Kerala. Thus it was "the first popular struggle to protect the traditional marine sector and to get their demands." (Kaleekal 1988: 43), and "a new chapter in the organisational history of fishworkers." (ibid :38)

2. Change of Name of Latin Catholic Fishermen Federation.

An important outcome of the jeep rally was the change of name of LCFF. During the rally there was a realisation that fishworkers of all religions should come together to muster maximum organisational strength at the state level. So the executive committee of LCFF met on 20th March 1980 and took the decision to change the name of LCFF to KERALA SWATHANTRA MALSYA THOZHILALI FEDERATION (KSMTF). But there was strong opposition to this change, and so the change was effected only
with a margin of one vote in the committee. Later this opposition was to create problem for the organisation. Yet "it was a significant step which reflected the growth of the federation. It became a broad forum which included all fishworkers as a class beyond the confines of caste and religion." (Kaleekal 1988:47)

The general council of LCFF later approved the name with its bylaw. The main objectives of KSMTF among other things were,"to work for the socio-economic and political development and education of fishworkers who are involved in fishing and marketing of fish in inland and coastal waters, and to work to get the rights and benefits of fishworkers from the government." (KSMTF bylaw:1980:3) It was not to be affiliated to any political party. That is why the word 'swathantra' meaning 'independent' was used. In this sense it was a non-party political organisation of fishworkers. After the change of name the new office-bearers were also elected. For the election also there was a controversy whether a priest or a layman should be the president of the organisation. Finally Fr. Albert Parasivila, a Catholic priest, was elected President. A state executive committee of seventeen members with Miss Shila Rosario as vice-president and Mr. Joychen Antoy as general secretary were also chosen. (Kaleekal 1988)
3. Formulation of Demands

When KSMTF was formed there was a lot of differences among member unions about the ideology and approaches of the organisation. "There was need of an ideological clarity among the leadership of KSMTF itself. The demands of KSMTF needed a scientific basis and the leadership needed an analysis of their political stand." (Kaleekal 1988: 50) To achieve certain commonality in this area many seminars and training programmes were conducted in various districts.

A coordinated effort in this line was taken at state level by leaders of KSMTF under the name Beach Conscientisation Group known in short form as 'Beacon Group'. Fr. Dominic George.S.J., Director of Socio-Religious Centre, Kozhikode, was put in charge of this programme. Under this scheme 52 seminars lasting two to fifteen days were conducted for over 3000 participants on various topics like socio-political analysis, Kerala fisheries, leadership and organisational skills. Other major seminars conducted in various districts included the topics on fish depletion, protection of fish resources, problems of fisheries and social analysis. Social workers and fisheries scientists played the role of intellectuals to create awareness among fishworkers through this process.
The educational programmes helped the fishworkers to understand better their experiences and problems. Science was able to explain their experience of diminishing fish resources in the sea. In this way scientific knowledge came as a support to the experience of fishworkers. From the training programmes and collective thinking emerged the ideals and goals of fishworkers' movement. It can be summarised as follows: There is a crisis of fish depletion in Kerala due to mechanised trawling, purse-seining and pollution with adverse impact on traditional fishworkers and fish resources. To protect fish and fishworkers there is need of control on destructive mechanisation.

Since major varieties of fish in Kerala coast breed during the month of June, July and August which is the monsoon season, mechanised trawling during this monsoon season destroys young fish and eggs leading to fish depletion. So one of the means of conserving fish resources is a ban on monsoon trawling and the other being ban on purseining. Based on this scientific conclusion KSMTF framed one of its basic demands: ban mechanised trawling during the spawning season of June, July and August. This and other demands of KSMTF had a scientific basis which was only slowly recognised by the scientific community. In this
sense, the principle of "struggle for scientific social revolution was implemented in the case of KSMTF." (Kaleekal 1980: 55)

4. Demonstration in Trivandrum

Once the demands were formulated KSMTF organised a huge jeep rally from Ernakulam to Trivandrum followed by a mammoth demonstration in the city of Trivandrum in 1980. A memorandum containing thirty eight demands including a ban on purse-seining and prevention of mechanised boats within 20 kilometers from the shore, was submitted to the government. KSMTF also prepared a model bill for marine regulations to be presented in the state legislative assembly by an M.L.A. (KSMTF Executive committee minutes, 20-7-1980) "It was the first show of strength after the formation of KSMTF." (Kaleekal 1980:64)

There was some effect for the show of strength by KSMTF. The government of Kerala passed a bill in the state assembly in December 1980. "The objectives of the bill called Kerala Marine Fishing Regulation Act of 1980 are to avoid conflict in the sea between traditional fishermen and mechanised boats for their ground of operation, to provide protection to traditional fishermen and to prevent destruction of fish resources through the scientific management of fisheries." (Paul, Malayala Manorama, 18-1-1981) The bill divided Kerala sea into different zones based on depth and would regulate the
operation of various mechanised boats giving exclusive right to traditional fishermen over inshore waters up to ten to twenty kilometer fathom depending on the nature of the shore. The bill also provided ways and means to enforce these regulations. (ibid.)

The law was a vindication of the stand taken by KSMTF on fish depletion and conservation of fish resources. It also showed how the organisational work of fishworkers started yielding results in legal changes.

5. The state-level Agitation of 1981

After Kerala Swathantra Malsya Thozhilali Federation was formed in 1977 the first major state-level agitation took place in 1981. The campaigns of KSMTF about the need of regulating the mechanised boats in the coastal waters was already in the air. Some fisheries officials sympathetic to the cause of fishworkers were also convinced of the need of such a regulation. In this background, on 24th of May 1981 the Left Front government banned trawling during monsoon season throughout Kerala coast. But because of the pressure from boat owners the fisheries Minister Mr. P.S.Srinivasan amended the order within ten days of the ban, to exempt Neendakara in Kollam district, the biggest centre of mechanised boats in
Kerala. The reason given by the Minister was that a particular variety of prawn called 'karikkadi' found only at Neendakara would be lost for ever if not caught during this season.

The Trivandrum district union of KSMTF decided to organise an agitation against the decision of the government to exempt Neendakara from monsoon trawling. It demanded that the ban should be implemented throughout the state. On 12th June about fifty fishworkers forcefully entered the office of the fisheries director and got themselves arrested. For the next five days fishworkers picketed the residence of the fisheries Minister in batches and got arrested. "The police arrested three fishermen for picketing the residence of the fisheries Minister for the third day demanding a ban on mechanised trawling during the months of June, July, and August organised by the Trivandrum district fishermen union. (Kerala Kaumudi, a Malayalam daily, 17-6-1981)

On 25th June Fr. Thomas Kocherry and Mr. Joychen Antony started an indefinite fast in front of the secretariat, in Trivandrum. Thousands of fishworkers including women took part in a 'dharna' and demonstration in Trivandrum on this occasion. (Kerala Kaumudi, 26-6-1981) KSMTF supported the agitation of the Trivandrum district union, though only Kollam and Alapuzha district units were willing to participate in the agitation.
In Kollam and Trivandrum several picketings were organised. Fishworkers picketed trains in two places in Trivandrum. Trains were delayed for over two hours. About 1,500 fishworkers including women got arrested and later released. (Kerala Kaumudi 28-6-1981) Fishworkers also picketed the airport in Trivandrum. "Because of the picketing of the airport by 300 fishworkers led by Mr. T. Peter, the airbus to Bombay was delayed almost by an hour. (Mathrubhumi, a Malayalam daily, 29-6-1981) A novel demonstration by the fishworkers carrying baskets full of fish on the head was held before the secretariat. (Kerala Kaumudi 28-6-81)

On 1st July about twenty five priests observed a one day token fast with the leaders. With front page photo Mathrubhummi wrote, "Twenty five priests wearing cassock gave enthusiastic support to the children of the sea shouting slogans with fixed fists. (2-7-1981) On the next day All India Catholic University Federation, a national organisation of university students, held a 'dharna' in front of the secretariat. The Provincial superior of Jesuits in Kerala in a statement declared support to the demand of the fishworkers and their struggle, and urged the government to take steps to ban monsoon trawling. (Mathrubhumi 3-7-1981) Many political organisations like Trivandrum district fishermen union of CITU, Revolutionary
Socialist Party, and Bharatya Janata Party of Kerala also supported the agitation of the fishworkers. (Kerala Kaumudi 6-7-1981)

The state fisheries Minister accused the agitation as politically motivated and led by extremist elements. (Malayala Manorama, a Malyalam daily 5-7-1981) All Kerala Federation of Mechanised Fishing Boat Owners asked the government not to yield to the demand of the traditional fishworkers. (Hindu 6-7-1981)

On 4th July picketings were organised in Trivandrum and Kollam in support of the fasting leaders, in which 1000 fishworkers participated. (The Hindu 4-7-1981) In Kollam thousands of fishworkers including women and children surrounded the district collectorate with the plan of picketing. "Boats, nets, oars, fish baskets, rice boiling pots were carried during the demonstration in which women with small kids also took part." (Malayala Manorama 5-7-1981) The gathering was turned into a 'dharna' at the advice of the Bishop of Kollam who inaugurated it. He said that the government had understood their problems and so they should disperse after the dharna. The people followed his advice. (Ibid.) The intervention of the Bishop was one of the reasons which ultimately led to the split of KSMTF in 1983. Many in the organisation disagreed with the action of the Bishop and the attitude of Fr.Parasivila, the president, on the incident. (Kaleekal 1988)
On 4th July Fr. Kocherry stopped fast, and Fr. Paul Valiyakandathil took up the fast while picketing of trains and road blocks continued in many places. In Kozhikode also there was a 'dharna' in support of the agitation (Kaleekal 1988)

On 13th July, the fisheries Minister invited union leaders of fishermen for a talk on the issue. He invited representatives of KSMTF separately on the following day and promised to appoint an expert committee to study the issue and include KSMTF as a member. Based on this assurance Fr. Jose Kaleekal and Mr. Pulluvila Lordon who were on indefinite fast before the secretariat stopped the fast, and the 19-day old agitation was called off. Being the first major struggle of fishworkers in the state, the agitation had many achievements like appointment of an expert committee by the government to study the issue of mechanised trawling and creation of awareness among the public about destructive mechanisation in fishing. (Kaleekal 1988: 70)

As was agreed upon, the government of Kerala appointed on 19th August 1981 a thirteen member committee consisting of scientists and representatives of various fishermen unions including KSMTF. A.J. Vijayan represented the independent union. Mr. Babu Paul, the Special Secretary, Fisheries, Government of Kerala was the chairman of the Commission. Because of him the
commission was later known as Babu Paul Commission. The objective of the commission was to "probe into the need for conservation of the marine resources and allied matters." (Paul 1981:2)

The commission went to all the major fishing centres in Kerala to receive the views of fishworkers about the issue. KSMTF meanwhile took initiative not only to prepare its members to appear before the commission but also to encourage other fishworkers' unions to take a common stand. As a result all the unions except the one led by Congress-I took a common stand that trawling should be banned during monsoon season. Incidentally, the Congress-I was a partner in the ruling front in Kerala. So the suggestion to ban monsoon trawling was rejected by one vote. But the commission suggested thirteen recommendations supported by all to preserve fish resources. About the issue of monsoon trawling a dissenting note prepared by KSMTF but endorsed by all unions except Congress-I was added to the official report. "The commission is a clear example of how KSMTF was taking ideological leadership among all the unions of political parties in Kerala." (Kaleekal 1988)

The experience of working together with other unions in Babu Paul Commission gave an impetus for KSMTF to collaborate with them for the broader issues of fishworkers. The idea of
cooperation with others was based on the conviction that religion or political affiliation should not further divide the fishworkers in Kerala to work together for their common good.

When the Babu Paul Commission delayed its report KSM TF decided on 2nd April 1982 to start a joint agitation. But Fr. Albert Parasivila, the president and a few others were not for such a move, which, they thought, would undermine the independent character of KSMTF. So the idea of joint agitation did not progress much, and the issue became one of the reasons for the split in the organisation.

6. The Split in the Kerala Swathantra Malsya Thozhilali Federation

After the Babu Paul Commission submitted its report to the government, KSMTF planned an agitation to press for the implementation of the Commission’s recommendation. The main features were the observance of a solidarity day and a jeep rally from Kannur district in the north of Kerala to Trivandrum in the south. A five member action council with Fr. Albert Parasivila as convenor was chosen.

As preparations for the struggle were going on, the president unilaterally decided to cancel the agitation. The reason, according to him, was that he was unwilling to work with Fr. Thomas Kocherry, a member of the action council, who had been asked to leave the diocese of Trivandrum by the Bishop but had
refused to leave the place. Fr. Parasivila was not ready to go ahead with the agitation without Fr. Kocherry also. Then the action council asked the president to call the general body to discuss the matter.

When the general body met the president did not attend the meeting and so it was presided over by Mrs. Sheela Paul, the vice-president. The meeting decided to call the general council again to elect the new office-bearers and to get the organisation registered. (Kaleekal 1988)

On 3rd May, 1983 the general council which met under the chairmanship of the vice-president removed Fr. Albert Parasivila from the post of the president. Fr. Jose Kaleekal was elected as the new president, Mr.T.P.Krishnan as vice-president and Mr.A.Joseph as general secretary. The executive committee members were also elected, and the council decided to go ahead with the agitation according to the earlier plan. Soon Kerala Swathantra Malsya Thozhilali Federation (KSMTF) was registered under the trade union act with the No. 155/83.(KSMTF general council minutes, 3-5-1983)

The group under the leadership of Fr.Albert Parasivila took the name of Akhila Kerala Swathantra Malsya Thozhilali Federation (AKSMTF) meaning All Kerala Independent Fishermen's
Federation, and got it registered later. Mr. Kallada Lawrence was its general secretary. Thus the split in KSMTF was complete.

The split in the organisation created conflict and clashes between rival factions in Kollam district where AKSMTF had a strong base. The split was unfortunate in the sense that it weakened the movement of the fishworkers. But from the interviews the researcher had with the leaders of both groups it was clear that the split was inevitable. It helped KSMTF to emerge as a secular organisation freed from the patronage and control of the religion. It is pertinent to note that all the district units of AKSMTF have Catholic Bishops of the place as their patron. (Lawrence 1984) No wonder it was considered the official fishermen union of the Latin Catholic hierarchy.

According to Fr.Kaleekal (1988:92) "The split was painful, but historically that surgery had to take place. An independent organisation was not to dance to the tune of a religion... the split helped KSMTF to emerge as a working class movement." Thus it is a case of a split in a social movement due to ideological reasons, and of the splinter group taking a more radical ideology than that of the other group. KSMTF proved itself to be more radical than AKSMTF in freeing itself from the religious control and being open to cooperate with secular unions of fishermen and of other forces.
After the split KSMTF organised the jeep rally as planned earlier from Kannur to Trivandrum and mass dharnas were organised on June 20th in all the districts. (Theerasabdam, A Malayalam Monthly, June 1983)

AKSMTF organised a series of agitations in 1983 itself. They submitted a memorandum to the government with thirty one demands many of them similar to those of KSMTF. After a jeep rally through the coastal villages, they had an impressive demonstration on 28th of September in Kollam with the march of 1000 volunteers called 'Jala Seva Sangam' wearing blue uniform. (AKSMTF Executive Committee Minutes, 8-10-1983) Then for a month they organised relay fasts in various places and a series of picketings in front of the secretariat in Trivandrum. On 2nd January 1984 Mr. Kallada Lawrence, the general secretary, and two others went on an indefinite fast in front of the secretariat. But on the 4th day of the fast the agitation was withdrawn after a discussion with the chief minister. (Theerasabdam, December 1983)

Since the promises made by the government at the end of the agitation were not implemented even five months after the agitation, AKSMTF gave a separate memorandum as a reminder of the earlier assurances. (AKSMTF, executive committee minutes, 16-6-1984) By this time KSMTF also started its long agitation of 1984. Thus, though the agitation of AKSMTF, a non-party
political organisation, contributed positively towards the cause of the fishworkers' movement, it was not effective to produce results for the fishworkers. The reason was that organisationally AKSMTF was not a political force at the state level.

There was a gradual decline of AKSMTF in its membership and activities over the years. It had its main base in Kollam district especially among inland fishworkers. But slowly many of them especially from coastal areas became inactive or joined KSMTF. The Catholic Fishermen union of Alapuzha, though joined AKSMTF, was already inactive, as was revealed by its leaders in the interview with the researcher. Besides, many of the fishworkers in Alapuzha district joined KSMTF. The Alapuzha Inland Union affiliated to AKSMTF was also functional for some time. In 1985 it organised some agitations including an indefinite fast by a few people to highlight the problems of inland fishworkers. (AKSMTF general council minutes 3-9-1985) But it either became inactive or many of its members joined KSMTF.

The founding members of AKSMTF admitted in the interview with the researcher that AKSMTF was not capable of continuing its activities in future as its leadership, cadres and resources were weak and limited. They expressed their wish and hope that
both the groups joined together as one union. They were already cooperating with each other on the basic issues of fishworkers.

7. Growth of Fishworkers' Unions in Malabar and Other Districts

As KSMTF emerged as a secular trade union after the split, there was a spurt in its growth in the northern districts of Kerala and in Ernakulam district. Compared to the southern districts the Malabar region in north Kerala was a late comer to KSMTF.

Though a fishermen union called Malabar Swathantra Malsya Thozhilali Union (MSMTU) was formed in Malabar in 1982, it became active only with the issue of mechanised trawling in the coastal waters. When the fishworkers became aware of the violation of marine regulations by the mechanised boats they started taking direct action against those which encroached the in-shore waters reserved for the traditional fishermen. They captured many such boats and gave them to the fisheries authorities. Many such incidents took place in Kozhikode throughout the second half of 1983. They created tension in the sea. In the land the issue got the attention of the government and the public as the fishworkers resorted to a number of 'dharnas', road blocks and public meetings against the inaction of the government. In this process MSMTU grew in number and organisational units in the districts of Kozhikode and Kannur.
With a wide representation the organisation elected its new office-bearers: Mr. K.K. Velayudhan as president, Mr. Seythali as general secretary, both of them active fishermen. The members of MSMTU were mostly Hindus and Muslims. Thus "by 1983 MSMTU had become a vibrant union. Its members were getting ready to put up a brave battle." (Kaleekal 1988: 94) Naturally MSMTU played a leading role in the agitation of 1984. (ibid.)

In Ernakulam district KSMTF became active in 1982 with the leadership of Mr. Jose Kunnel. Later Fr. Luis Panikulangara and Mr. F.V. Pavithran gave vigour to the union helping it to establish many units throughout the district. By 1984 a good percentage of Dheevara fishermen joined KSMTF. They led innumerable agitations on various issues. In 1983 new units of KSMTF came up in the inland sector of Alapuzha district. Kollam district union also grew strong with its struggle against purse-seine boats. (Kaleekal 1988)

In short, the year 1983 was marked by grass-root level mobilisation of fishermen in many districts. In this process KSMTF emerged as a secular trade union taking in fishermen of all three religions - Hindus, Muslims, and Christians, from north to south of Kerala, covering almost the entire state. Thus the background was well set to launch the fishworkers' struggle of 1984.
In the history of fishworkers' movement in Kerala the year 1984 is a landmark for its long agitation which made the movement known at the state and national level. This agitation was organised in the background of the split in KSMTF and of the publication of the report of the Babu Paul Commission appointed by the government to study the issue of monsoon trawling in Kerala. Since the government did not implement any of the recommendations of the commission after almost an year, KSMTF decided to launch an agitation to press for its implementation. An action council with Mr. Joychen Antony as convenor was formed. An appeal was sent out to all well wishers for financial help.

The process of agitation started on 10th of April, 1984 when KSMTF submitted a memorandum to the chief minister of Kerala containing seventeen demands with the signatures of 10,000 fishworkers. "The fishworkers put forward mainly two types of demands- one demanding stringent steps to protect our fish resources and the other to implement properly the developmental and welfare programmes announced by the government two years back..." (Vijayan 1984) The demands were the following:
1. Ban mechanised trawling during the monsoon months of June, July and August.
2. Ban night trawling. 3. Ban purse-seining.
4. Ban trawlers within 20 kilometers of inshore waters.
5. Give pension to the fishermen.
6. Sanction educational lumpsum grant to the children of fishermen.
7. Provide transportation facilities for women fish vendors.
8. Increase accident and death compensation.
9. Introduce compensation for the damage of crafts.
10. Issue title deeds to the fishermen's land.
11. Conduct elections to the village welfare boards.
12. Include fishermen in the scheduled caste list.
13. Enforce strict licensing for fishing crafts.
14. Provide free ration to the fishermen during the lean months.
15. Prevent pollution of the seas, lakes and rivers by industrial effluents.
16. Remove middlemen in the marketing of fish.
17. Implement the recommendations of the Babu Paul Commission

(Kaleekal 1988)

The strategy of the struggle was to organise the agitations in all the district units of KSMTF simultaneously. But as the agitation progressed, attention was focused on certain districts at certain times due to a particular tactics evolved there.
As the government did not respond to the memorandum of KSMTF, publicity campaigns were organised in all districts from the last week of April. Route marches, vehicle rallies, demonstrations, torchlight processions, street corner meetings and door to door campaigns were extensively used to mobilise people at grass-root level. They helped people to become aware of the issues and demands of KSMTF.

On 2nd of May 1984 direct agitation got started with mass 'dharnas' organised in all the districts of Trivandrum, Kollam, Ernakulam, Kozhikode and Alapuzha. On 15th May, Mr. A. Joseph, general secretary of KSMTF, started an indefinite fast in front of Kollam collectorate. Attention at this stage was focused on Kollam district as other district units had agitations in solidarity with the fasting leader. On the same day picketings were organised in all district headquarters. The number of fishworkers courted arrest were: in Trivandrum 300, in Alapuzha 500, Kollam 6000, in Ernakulam 300 and in Kozhikode 500. (Malayala Manorama 16-5-1984)

On the third day of the fast hundreds of fishworkers' children had a 'dharna' and demonstration in front of the Kollam collectorate. (Kerala Kaumudi 19-5-1984) On the following day over 1000 fisherwomen picketed the national highway in Kollam for hours together. (Mathrubhumi 20-5-1984) About 1000 fishworkers blocked the trains at Kadakavoor in Trivandrum "to
focus attention to their demands" causing delay of many trains for several hours. (Indian Express 21-5-1984)

On the ninth day of the fast four mechanised boats which violated the marine regulations and fished in the coastal waters of Kollam were caught by the fishermen and handed over to the fisheries department. Earlier one boat was destroyed in the process. Thus "the agitation of fishworkers in the sea got intensified. " (Mathrubhumi 25-5-1984) During the same week four mechanised boats were set on fire by fishermen in Alapuzha district. Police reached the shore and resorted to lathicharge on the fishermen, and nineteen were hospitalised. A huge demonstration of 4000 fishworkers took place on the following day in protest against the police atrocity. (Alapuzha district annual report of 1984)

In Kozhikode fishermen entered the office of the deputy director of fisheries and 'gheraaed' the officials for hours before the police removed them. Two days later fifty fishermen observed a one day token fast before the revenue divisional office, Kozhikode. In the same district torch light rallies were conducted at night in seven villages. (Kozhikode district agitation report of 1984)

On 25th of May, Mr. A. Joseph was arrested and removed to the hospital on the 10th day of his fast as his health got deteriorated. Fr. P.T. Agustine took over the indefinite fast.
On the same day there was a big demonstration of coastal youth in front of the satyagraha shed. In Kollam a group of Catholic priests organised a one-day fast in solidarity with the fasting priest. (Kerala Kaumudi 27-5-1984)

On 27th May, thirteen women including three nuns picketed the fisheries office in Trivandrum. They were arrested and remanded to judicial custody for one week. In protest against the arrest fishermen blocked the road in Trivandrum. There was a big demonstration of fishworkers in support of the agitation and fast. (Indian Express 27-5-1984)

The fishworkers’ agitation entered a new phase in Kozhikode when Sr. Alice, a Catholic nun belonging to the Assumption religious congregation and Mr. K. K. Velayuddhan, the district president of Malabar Swathantra Malsya Thozhilali Union (MSMTU) started an indefinite fast on 26th of May in front of the revenue divisional office(R.D.O). There was a big rally of women and children in the ancient port city in solidarity with the fasting leaders. There was also a torch light rally of fishermen in the evening. A forum of supporters of the agitation was also constituted in Kozhikode. The forum did commendable work to mobilise the support of the public for the agitation. (Indian Express 27-5-1984)

When several Catholic priests and nuns were actively involved in the agitation, there appeared a news report in the
front page of Indian Express of 28th of May 1984 with the picture of Sr. Alice and K.K. Velayudhan and with the title, 'Clergy's role in fishermen's stir'. The article written by Mr. N. Madhavankutty of Express New Service introduced the word 'liberation theology' in connection with the fishermen's struggle. This concept originally used in Latin America as a spiritual ideal for the Christians to work against their oppressive situations, gave a new twist to the entire agitation.

"The theology of liberation", he wrote, "seems to have come of age in Kerala with a group of Catholic priests and nuns taking to the streets on behalf of traditional fishermen agitating against unbridled mechanised trawling along the state's shoreline. Looked on as 'red priests' by conservative church leaders and suspected of harbouring Christian missionary motives by the trade union establishment, this new crop clergy have in the last two weeks gone about courting arrest, facing police and staging fast in the public even as KSMTF, an affiliation of NFF, has left a trail of violence on the coastal district of Kollam and Alapuzha." This write-up generated a whole lot of debate in the secular and ecclesiastical circle about 'liberation theology' and the role of religion in the emancipation of the oppressed.

With the fast in Kozhikode the media focus was shifted from Kollam to Kozikode. In support of the fasting leaders a group of fishermen together with Fr. Dominic George S.J. picketed the office of the deputy director of fisheries,
Kozhikode, and got arrested and remanded to judicial custody for fifteen days. Fishermen then blocked the beach road in the city and fifteen of them 'gheraaed' the assistant director of fisheries, Kozhikode and got arrested. (Indian Express 1-6-1984)

In the meantime, the chief minister ruled out any discussion with the agitating fishermen, and alleged political motives and foreign connections of the priests and nuns who were involved in the agitation. (Indian Express 31-5-1984)

One speciality of the fishworkers' movement was that innumerable groups and individuals from the public came out in its support at various stages of the struggle. This was very conspicuous in the case of 1984 agitation. Trade unions of fishermen like those of CITU, AITUC, and UTUC supported the agitation led by KSMTF and wanted the government to solve the problems of fishworkers. (Deshabhiman 2-6-1984) Prominent citizens like Mr. M.P. Virendra Kumar, the Janata Dal leader, Mr. Sankaran, the major of Kozhikode Corporation, and writers wanted immediate steps to be taken by the government to end the struggle. Municipal Council of Kozhikode Corporation passed a resolution in support of the struggle of fishworkers. Religious leaders who gave full support to the fishworkers' just agitation were major superiors of six religious congregation, six priests of Kozhikode Catholic dioces, Kerala Catholic Congress, an organisation of Catholic laity, and Caldian Bishop Paulose Mar Paulose of Thrissur. (Indian Express 31-5-1984)
In Trivandrum eleven persons including Fr. James Kulas, a Catholic priest and Sr. Philomen Mary, a Catholic nun along with two other nuns started an indefinite hunger strike in front of the secretariat. Nineteen Catholic priests observed a one-day fast in solidarity with them.

On 3rd June fishworkers picketed trains and roads in various places in the state. The Hindu of 4-6-1984 had this report: “Traditional fishermen led by KSMTF today picketed the railway track at Kadakavoor in Trivandrum district and national highway in Alapuzha, Kollam and Trivandrum delaying trains and disrupting road traffic...The police arrested over 3000 fishworkers in all these places together.” A wide coverage was given in the newspapers about the police lathicharge on agitators including nuns and priests who picketed the trains in Trivandrum. “There was a brutal lathicharge on fishworkers at Kadadavoor. Many including nuns like Srs. Mercy and Luke were beaten up and got injured.” (Kerala Kaumudy 4-6-1984)

About 200 inland fishworkers in Alapuzha district picketed the bus stand at Mavelikara town and got arrested. (Deepika 31-5-1984)

In Kozhikode also there was a picketing of trains by 600 people including Muslim women causing delay in the running of trains. (Kerala Kaumudi 7-6-1984) Earlier women and children forcefully entered the office of the deputy director of
fisheries Kozhikode. In the mean time Sr. Alice and Mr. K.K. Velayudhan were arrested and removed to the medical college hospital, Kozhikode, on the 8th day of their fast. They, however, continued their hunger strike inside the hospital. A member of the district executive committee of MSMTU took over the fast. Innumerable rallies were led to the hospital in support of the fasting leaders there, and a one-day token fast was conducted by a group of people in Kannur district. (MSMTU Annual report of 1984)

As the agitation got intensified many more organisations declared support to the ongoing agitation of fishworkers. Kerala Gazetted Officer's Association, The South Malabar Bank Employees Union, Muslim democratic Party, youth front of the Kerala Congress Party, Peoples' Union for Justice and Action, Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana (SNDP) were some of them. (Indian Express 4-6-1984) The trade unions of the left front parties announced an agitation for fishermen's demands if the government did not solve their problems.

The support of organisations and individuals cutting across party, religion and caste lines showed the support of the public for the cause of the fishworkers, and their just agitation led by KSMTF. The news coverage by the state and national dailies given for the fishworkers' agitation is another indication of public support to the struggle. Many newspapers
gave editorial on the agitation, apart from the news report. Some of them are highlighted here.

Kerala Kaumudi, a leading Malayalam daily, in its editorial of 30-5-1984 wrote under the title, 'The agitation of fishworkers' " A significant section of fishworkers in the state are on struggle... Uncontrolled trawling and purse-seining have hit the livelihood of the traditional fishermen... The government should be ready to take necessary steps immediately without allowing the struggle to prolong further."The Desabhimani, an organ of CPI(M) in Malayalam, in its editorial of 5-6-1984 under the title 'Fishermen struggle and the attitude of the government' had this comment to make. "Since it is for the interests of the working class we support the priests and nuns agitating with the fishermen for their just demands." Janayugam, an organ of CPI in Malayalam highlighted the participation of priests and nuns in the fishermen's struggle in its editorial of 6-6-1984, under the title, 'Nuns also in the arena of the agitation' when it said, "The secretariat gate which has witnessed different 'dharnas' and fasts is witnessing the agitation of priests and nuns, which has caught the attention of the public."

When the agitation was at its peak Mr. N. Bhaskara Pillai, the president of the state federation of mechanised boat owners threatened to create a 'Punjab model' agitation in Kerala
if their right to catch prawn was violated. He cautioned that
the agitation would destroy the fisheries industry. (Mathrubhumi
5-6-1984)

As the agitation with wide public support exerted great
pressure on the government, the chief minister who initially
refused to talk to the agitating fishermen called a meeting of
the fishermen unions in the state and discussed their demands.
He assured them that night trawling would be banned and a grant
of Rs.18 crores would be allotted to the fishermen cooperatives
for their welfare programmes. But since he did not yield to the
basic demand on monsoon trawling the talk failed. The joint
action council of left parties decided to go ahead with their
plan of agitation. (Indian Express 9-6-1984) As announced by
the chief minister the government later banned night trawling
throughout Kerala coast. (Malayala Manorama 14-6-1984)

Meanwhile the Kerala Catholic Bishop’s Conference
appointed a seven member committee of bishops to discuss the
issue of the fishworkers’ agitation with the chief minister.
They exhorted the priests and nuns involved in the struggle to
work according to the rules and guidelines of the church. The
committee of bishops later met the chief minister and discussed
the issue with him. Based on his assurances they wanted the
agitation to be withdrawn. (Kerala Kaumudi 19-6-1984) But the
leaders of KSMTF rejected the appeal of the bishops. “We will
not accept the suggestion of a new commission for the issue of
trawling, even if it is supported by the bishops," they said. (Malayala Manoroma 19-6-1984)

As the agitation reached its 45th day, some more organisations and eminent citizens declared their support to the fishworkers' struggle. They included Mr. N.E. Balaram, CPI state general secretary, Mr. P.K. Vasudevan Nair, former chief minister of Kerala, Rtd. Justice Chandra Sekharan, twenty six lawyers from Kollam, and the Kerala Bank Employees Association. (Kerala Times 12-6-1984) The Indian labour Congress state committee had a day's token fast in support of the fishworkers. (Deepika 14-6-1984)

Meanwhile the chief minister repeated his "plea to fishermen for withdrawing their agitation" and announced lumpsum grant to the education of fishworkers' children, welfare board for the fishermen, strict enforcement of marine regulation and appointment of an expert committee to study the issue of trawling. But KSMTF rejected the offer and planned to intensify the stir. (Indian Express 15-6-1984)

On the 16th day of the fast, Sr. Philomena Mary, the longest fastig person in front of the secretariat, Trivandrum was arrested and removed to the hospital. But she continued her fast there and said, "until monsoon trawling is banned I will not stop my fast. I am ready to offer my life to the cause of the fishworkers." (Deepika 16-6-1984) But she was forced to take
medicine under police security. Later KSMTF leader Mr. Joychen Antony gave a habeus corpus writ petition in the high court for the release of Sr. Phelomen Mary. The court ordered the release of the Sister which the police did. She went back to the satyagraha shed and continued her fast in a weak condition. (Malayala Manorama 20-6-1984)

Though the hunger-strikes and agitations continued in all the six districts, the focus of media attention was shifted to Trivandrum with the prolonged fast of Sr. Phelomen Mary and the proposed agitation of opposition parties there. In the face of mounting pressure of the fishworkers' agitation on the government the mechanised boat owners organised a boat demonstration and a demonstration cum 'dharna' by about 5000 workers with the demand not to ban monsoon trawling. (Mathrubhumi 16-6-1984)

The fishworkers' struggle took a new turn on 16-6-1984 when the leaders of opposition parties including two M.L.As started an agitation with hunger strike before the secretariat in support of the fishworkers' agitation. (Kaumudi 17-6-1984) "This was the first of this kind to support the agitation of an independent union like KSMTF" (Kaleekal: 1988: 105)

On 18th of June the entire opposition parties staged a walk-out from the state legislative assembly in protest against the government's callous attitude to the problems of fishworkers
and their agitation. Earlier the chief minister gave a detailed report of what the government was doing for the agitating fishworkers. When the opposition members were not satisfied with the explanation and when their calling attention motion on the subject was rejected by the speaker they made the walkout. (Mathrubhumi 19-6-1984) The issue was given wide coverage in all the newspapers especially since it was in support of an agitation led by a non-party political organisation. "The entire opposition made a walk-out at not discussing the life and death struggle of the fishermen and the negative attitude of the government." wrote Janayugam, a Malayalam daily, (19-6-1984)

On 18th June, the opening day of the state legislative assembly KSMTF organised a March to the assembly with thousands of fishworkers from various parts of the state, declaring it a 'black day.' This also got a wide media coverage. "Hundreds of fishermen and their families marched to the secretariat and thus entered a new phase of the agitation", wrote Malyala Manorama of 19-6-1984. The report also quoted the melodious and meaningful slogans used by the fishworkers. "There is no sea without us, if there is no fish we are not there, if we are not there the country is not there," The slogan showed the significance of fish industry for the country. In Kozhikode and Ernakulam the 'black day' was observed by marches to the collectorates by hundreds of fishworkers.
In the mean time the chief minister met representatives of the opposition parties and their trade union leaders to discuss the issue of fishworkers. But the discussion failed on the issue of monsoon trawling. (Kerala Kaumudi 22-6-1984) He also announced in the state assembly that he would give lumpsum grant to fishworkers' children and pension to the fishermen. (Enad 21-6-1984)

As the agitation was continuing without an end in sight, many newspapers wrote editorials on the issue. Deepika, in its editorial of 20-6-1984 urged the unions to stop the agitation based on the assurances of the chief minister and the appeal of the catholic bishops. Malyala Manorama in its editorial of 15-6-1984 under the title "Give up adamant position" said, "both sides should give up adamant postures and should be ready to exchange views in a spirit of reconciliation." Mathrubhumi of 17-6-1984 in its editorial titled, "Fishermen Struggle" wrote about the complexity of the agitation, and said," KMIF should give up its uncompromising stand and be ready for adjustment to bring peace and order in this troubled sector."

When the agitation was at a peak point with Sr.Philomen Mary on the 22nd day of her fast and the opposition parties fasting outside the state secretariat, the general council of KSMTF met in Ernakulam on 21st June 1984 to discuss about the future of the agitation. After a long session lasting one whole night the council decided to call off the agitation the next
day. Accordingly on 22nd June 1984, the 50-day old agitation was withdrawn. The indefinite fast of Sr. Philomen Mary and others was stopped. Simultaneously the agitation of the opposition parties was also withdrawn. KSMTF in a statement gave reasons for the withdrawal of the agitation. "We suspended the agitation only to give some breathing time so that we launch an even more powerful offensive in the future." (KSMTF agitation report of 1984)

All the newspapers gave front-page coverage about the withdrawal of fishworkers' agitation. It was indicative of the importance the print media gave to the prolonged struggle. Many articles were published in the major Indian magazines on the fishworkers' agitation. Some of them are highlighted below.

The Business India in an article written by Kumar said, "In several ways the agitation provides object lessons in the catalytic potentialities of a mass grassroot movement, the effective and obstructive centering of powers, and the dubious role of 'experts'. About the outcome of the struggle the author said, "there have been definite gains. The fisherfolks' socio-political awareness has increased. In the end this one truly tangible success should abide." (Kumar July 1984)

Muricken in a booklet of justice series wrote, "The main impact of the struggle was the conscientisation and organisation of fisherfolk who have developed their own
leadership and self-confidence. They have become a bargaining force to be reckoned with in Kerala politics." (Muricken 1987: 17) Pauradhvani, a Malayalam weekly, under the title, 'From the seacoast to the struggle-coast' wrote: "This is the biggest fishermen’s struggle Kerala has ever seen. The Kerala which has deeply rooted revolutionary parties protecting the interests of those who shed their sweat needed priests and nuns to take leadership to know the tears and sufferings of fishermen and organise them." (Pauradhvani July 1984)

Some of the concrete effects of the agitation were the appointment of the expert committee by the government on the issue of monsoon trawling, ban on night trawling, lumpsum grant for the education of fishworkers' children, and old age pension. These were really achievements for a people who were neglected by all for years. Yet as KSMTF and other papers mentioned above the real achievements were that fishworkers became an organised strength in Kerala political scenario and that the issues like mechanisation of fisheries were very powerfully highlighted before the fishworkers, the government and the general public. It is because of these reasons and of the long duration of the agitation that the fishworkers' struggle of 1984 is qualified as
'epoch making' in the history of the fishworkers' movement. With this agitation, fishworkers' organised struggle emerged as a social movement.

Another important event of 1984 was an international conference of fishworkers and their supporters held in Rome from July 4th-8th. Four representatives of KSMTF apart from others from all over India, participated in the conference. It was a gathering conducted parallel to the world fisheries conference organised by Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO). The objective was to highlight the problems of artisanal fishworkers in third world countries in contrast to the views of their respective governments. The conference also aimed at building up the solidarity of artisanal fishworkers at the international level. The conference urged FAO to formulate policies which would protect the interests of the artisanal fishworkers and the fish resources. The solidarity which was kept up in future also, gave further impetus to the fishworkers' movement in India and especially in Kerala.
The history of fishworkers' movement in 1985 was marked by their longest ever agitation in Kerala. This agitation was the continuation of 1984 struggle as the 50-day old strike was suspended so that the fishworkers could come back with renewed vigour. Besides, even after almost one year the report of the expert committee appointed by the government was not yet ready. The government granted lumpsum grant to the fishworkers' children, as promised at the agitation of 1984, but it was tardy in enforcing the marine regulations.

The first step in preparation for the struggle was the election of office-bearers for KSMTF with Mr. Joychen Antony as president, and framing of a new slogan, "Protect fish resources and save Kerala", together with a charter of twenty demands. The main demand was the ban on monsoon trawling. Other demands different from those of 1984 agitation were, to fix the number of mechanised fishing vessels through proper license and regulation, to enforce strictly the marine regulations and night trawling, to ban purse-seining totally in the sea, to allow boats to anchor only in harbours, to reduce customs and excise duties for out-board engines and its spare parts, to regulate the wage and service conditions of mechanised boat workers, to include inland fishworkers in fish culture programmes, to hold election to the fishermen's cooperatives. The memorandum was submitted to the chief minister of Kerala on 20th of March 1985. A fund
A POSTER USED WITH THE SLOGAN "PROTECT FISH RESOURCES AND SAVE KERALA" DURING THE AGITATION OF 1985
collection of five lakh rupees was launched for the agitation at state level.

As an immediate preparation for the agitation KSMTF organised a cultural campaign through the fishworkers’ villages from north to south of Kerala. A cultural troupe of young fishermen trained in street dramas and folk songs toured the villages performing these art forms. The themes of these cultural programmes were exploitation of fish resources and fishworkers by the trawling boats, the callousness of the ruling class towards these problems, and the indifference of the religious leaders towards the miseries of the fishworkers. The cultural programmes together with a video film on fishworkers’ struggle called ‘We who make history’ really helped the fishworkers aware of the problems of fisheries and of the need of collective effort to solve them. Thus they were prepared for a fresh fight after the long agitation of 1984.

The agitation of 1985 led by KSMTF could be divided into three phases: ‘fill the jail’ agitation, hunger strikes, both in the districts, and the state level hunger strike centered in Alapuzha.

1. ‘Fill the Jail’ Agitation

The direct agitation of 1985 started with a ‘fill the jail’ programme in the districts from May 25th to June 9th 1985. The strategy consisted of ten to fifteen fishworkers picketing a
government office, and getting arrested and possibly getting punished by the court up to fifteen days of imprisonment. In most of the districts this agitation, and 220 fishworkers served imprisonment and several of them got arrested. "Thus thousands of fishworkers got arrested and jailed when the 'fill the jail' campaign started by KSMTF as part of its state-level agitation...(Satya Nadam, a Malayalam daily, 26-5-1985) The agitation helped the fishworkers to get rid of the fear of prison and the law enforcing agencies.

By this time newspapers started writing editorials supporting the agitation of the fishworkers. Mathrubhumi of 26-5-1985 with the title 'Again Fishworkers' Agitation' wrote, "Fishworkers of Kerala have once again started the agitation... In this background the government should try to find a solution to the issues through negotiations without allowing the agitation to get prolonged indefinitely and unnecessarily." "The Comrade, a CPM (L) Malayalam newspaper in its article of 7-5-1985 called on all democratic forces " to support the agitation led by KSMTF and jointly fight the boat lobby and imperialist powers."

2. Hunger-stikes in the districts

The second phase of the agitation consisted of hunger-strikes and other forms of agitations in the districts. For this, a 'demand day' was observed on 15th of June in all districts as announced by the National Fishworkers' Forum, by
means of picketing of national highways and government offices. Indefinite fast by leaders was going on in Trivandrum and Alapuzha. (Malsya Thozhilali, a Malayalam fortnightly, 15-6-1985) United Trade Union Congress also organised a picketing led by Mr. A.V. Thamarakshan.M.L.A, in front of the Alapuzha collectorate for various demands of the fishworkers.

On 20th June the expert committee appointed by the government at the instance of the 1984 fishworkers' agitation to study the issue of monsoon trawling released its report. The commission consisted of three scientists, Mr.A.G. Kalawar, the fisheries advisor to the government of Maharashtra, Mr. M. Devaraj, the central Institute of Fisheries Education Officer,Bombay, Dr. Arun Parulekar, the National Institute of Oceanography, Panaji. Since the commission was headed by Mr. Kalawar it was later known as the Kalawar commission. The commission was not in favour of a ban on monsoon trawling. But it recommended to reduce the number of mechanised boats operating in the Kerala coast to 1145 from the existing number of 2500 boats, to prohibit nets with mesh size less than 35 millimeter and not to allow trawlers within 22 kilometers from the shore. (Kalawar 1985) Thus the commission accepted the position of the fishworkers that trawling was destructive and that there was need of strict restriction on its operation to conserve fish resources.
Many fishworkers’ organisations totally rejected the report of the Kalawar Commission, while KSMTF wanted the government to implement a few of its recommendations like the reduction in the number of mechanised boats and control on mesh size of the nets. It, however, opposed the recommendation of the commission not to ban monsoon trawling, and reiterated its stand that monsoon trawling would help conservation of fish resources. It, therefore, modified its demand by asking the government to ban monsoon trawling for two years on an experimental basis and then to study its impact before a permanent decision was taken. (The Hindu 25-6-1985)

The government of Kerala accepted the report of the commission and decided not to ban monsoon trawling. However, it was ready to introduce strict measures in licensing of mechanised trawlers. This was disclosed by the chief minister who also assured adequate supply of kerosine for the outboard engines of the fishermen, election to the fishermen’s cooperatives and strict enforcement of marine regulations. He then appealed to the fishermen to withdraw the agitation.” (The Hindu 21-6-1985)

Rejecting the appeal of the chief minister KSMTF continued its struggle. As the agitation was getting intensified “four fishermen from Kattoor in Alapuzha district got drowned in the sea, when their canoe was hit by a mechanised boat.” (Kerla Kaumudi 24-4-1985) The incident sent shock-wave
throughout the coast, and the fishermen in Alapuzha district spontaneously struck work for a day with a strike of all shops in the coastal areas. (ibid.)

To highlight the issue of the death of the fishermen KSMTF organised a torch light march from Kattoor in Allapuzha to Trivandrum. The march consisted of a dozen fishermen athletes led by Mr. Johnkutty R. running through the coastal areas with torchers lit from the tomb of the four deceased fishermen. During the march which started on 30th of June, receptions and public meetings were held all through its 150 kilometer route. Hundreds of cyclists accompanied the marchers. Songs which composed by Mr. E.G.Peter(1985:1),a fisherman himself, sung during the march gave an emotionally charged atmosphere. The moving lyrics of the song included the following lines.

"You who turn the wheels of the government,
Do you know us who carry this torch,
The children of the sea.
Have you forgotten Babu who was killed in the past
Do you remember the four lives which were sacrificed
They went to the sea to earn their bread
We have not seen them alive ever since
When do we see them alive again."

When the march reached Trivandrum on the fifth day, thousands of fishworkers joined them for the picketing of the
secretariat, which lasted for about three hours and which attracted the public through its street dramas and songs. The fishworkers took an oath saying, "We pledge that we will protect the wealth of the sea with all our might as we did it in the past." (Indian Express 6-7-1985).

The agitation in the districts in the mean time continued with vigour. In Kollam 10,000 people courted arrest in front of the collectorate. (Janayugam 6-7-1985) Later fifty women entered the office of the deputy director of fisheries in Kollam and paralyzed its functioning till they were removed by the police. (Alakal, August 1985) Thousands of fishworkers got arrested in Kochi, Alapuzha and Kozhikode as the hunger-strike continued in all these places. Inland fishworkers of Alapuzha district organised indefinite fast in front of the village office. (ibid.)

On 23rd July 1985 "tens of thousands of fishworkers under the banner of KSMTF marched to Neendakara in Kollam, the biggest centre for mechanised boats in the state ... and got arrested for picketing the fisheries port office." (Enad 24-7-1985) People from all the districts took part in the event which created a lot of tension. The boat owners and workers and traders were ready to have a confrontation with KSMTF. They showed black flags and shouted counter slogans. They struck work and got ready to face the marchers. Because of a strong police force who controlled the crowd no untoward incident took
3. The state-level Hunger-strikes in Alapuzha

When sixty five days of the two phases of the agitation failed to produce any response from the government, the third phase of the agitation started on 1st of August by the indefinite fast of Fr. Jose Kaleekal, former president of KSMTF, in front of the collectorate of Alapuzha district. Thereafter the struggle was centred in Alapuzha with the indefinite fast of state leaders one after another, and so fasting in other districts were stopped. Hundreds of fishworkers had a demonstration and 'dharna' as Fr. Jose started his fast. (The Hindu 2-8-1985)

Hundreds of fishermen showed black flag to the chief minister in Kollam when he came there for a public function. Police blocked them and arrested them. Inland fishworkers of Kollam district organised a series of evening 'dharnas' and torch lit rallies in various villages and those of Alapuzha district organised a number of demonstrations and campaign rallies. (Alakal, September 1985)

People from all over the state showed support to the ongoing agitation in various ways. Sixteen Catholic priests observed a one-day fast in solidarity with the fasting priest. (Kerala Kaumudi 8-8-1985) A wide newscoverage with pictures was
given by the papers to a demonstration and a token fast by fifty Catholic nuns on the independence day in support of the fasting nun, Sr. Rose. She started the fast when Fr. Jose was removed to the hospital. "From the throats which were used to sing melodious psalms 'inquilab' slogans were heard. Demonstrations of nuns with raised fists and slogans caught the attention of the people in Alapuzha city. (The Hindu 17-8-1985)

On the same day two hunger rallies of fishworkers from Ernakulam and the border of Alapuzha district to focus the attention on their starvation, reached the 'satyagraha pandal' and greeted Sr. Rose, after travelling through the coastal areas for five days. Participants of these rallies did not carry any money or food but managed with whatever they got on the way. (Alakal, August 1985) Meanwhile P.V. Samson belonging to the fishermen union of Lokdal started an indefinite fast in Alapuzha in support of the agitation led by KSMTF (Kerala Kaumudi 19-8-1985)

Sr. Rose was removed to the hospital on the tenth day of her fast while Fr. Dominic George, S.J. an activist working among the fishworkers in Kozhikode, started the hunger-strike. Other youth organisations like All India Catholic University Federation, Yuva Deepti and Vimochana vedi, expressed their full support to the ongoing fishworkers' struggle through their token fasts and 'dharnas' (KSMTF Alapuzha district report of the agitation 1985)
As the agitation reached its third month the chief minister invited the fishermen unions for discussion on the 4th of September. Meanwhile Fr. Dominic George was removed to the hospital and Sr. Theramma Prayikulam took his place in the satyagraha pandal. (Alakal, September 1985) Fr. M.C. Joseph S.J., a former headmaster of two schools observed a silent fast for two days in solidarity with the fasting nun. (Enad 8-9-1985)

As the agitation was getting prolonged many leading newspapers wrote editorial articles on the agitations. Some of them are highlighted here. Deepika in its editorial of 4-9-1985 under the title 'The Fishermen' remarked, "We are wondering whether the basic problems of the ten lakhs of fishermen are again ignored in the midst of scientific and religious argument and counter arguments." Expressing concern at the prolonged agitation especially with the fast of priests and nuns, Kerala Kaumudi of 17-8-1985 in its editorial under the title 'Find a solution to the fishermen struggle' urged the government to call a meeting of all concerned to discuss as to what could be implemented in the recommendations of the Kalawar commission report.

The India Today of 15th September 1985 in an article titled 'Storm at Sea' pointed towards the indifference of the state government to the problems of the fishermen, and mentioned how KSMTF was able to challenge the government and its tall claims of doing a lot for the fishermen not only by its
agitations but also by a "collage of newspaper headlines of the unfulfilled promises the Karunakaran government has made in the last four years" which was displayed during a session of the state assembly. Iyengar in her article titled 'Kerala fisheries: greed for profit is destroying fishermen and fishing grounds' published in 'Peoples' Democracy' of 15th September '85 tried to establish how the issues taken up by the fishworkers were concerns of all citizens and not of fishworkers alone. "It is interesting to note that the issues fishermen have raised concern not only their own immediate interests - indeed, their survival as fishermen- but are issues of the state and national interest, the marine fish resources of Kerala."

Mr. Abdul Rasik, a fisherman leader from Kozhikode, started fast in place of Sr. Theramma who was hospitalised. When he became weak after ten days of fast he was removed to the hospital. Mr. M.Y. Antony, president Kollam district inland fishermen union, started the fast on 14th of September. Meanwhile the conference called by the government to discuss the issue of the fishermen was indefinitely postponed.

At that time as CPI state secretariat called upon all the fishermen unions to come together for a joint agitation to press for the demands of the fishworkers. (Enad 15-9-1985) Responding to the call of the CPI, KSMTF decided to intensify the agitation in cooperation with unions of political parties. Six unions and KSMTF jointly organised a joint picketing on
23rd of September in all district headquarters for the demands submitted to the chief minister. (Kerala Kaumudi 24-9-1985) The joint agitation was a significant stage of the 1985 agitation. "The action council consisting of mainly opposition parties was an important step. That those who were agitating in different pandals in 1984 struggle joined hands together in one 'pandal' is a sign of awareness and growth of the unions." (Kaleekal 1988: 124)

As the agitation led by KSMTF reached 123rd day M.Y. Antony who was on fast was arrested by the police and removed to the hospital and Mathew Aerthayil S.J., an activist of the Koshikode district fishermen union and the present researcher, started the fast as part of the state-level agitation in Alapuzha. Meanwhile the Kerala legislative assembly unanimously passed the fishermen welfare fund bill on 19th September. The bill which aimed at a comprehensive improvement of fisherfolk, included compensation to fishermen affected by natural calamity, financial help to those not able to work, loan for marriage and death, lumpsum grant to the children, and job opportunities for the physically disabled. (Malayala Manorama 20-9-1985) This was the fulfilment of a promise the chief minister made at the agitation of 1984 led by KSMTF.

Mathew Aerthayil was arrested and removed to the hospital on the 10th day of his fast and Mr. Jyothi Prakash, a fishermen leader from Kozhikode took up the fast as the 58th person.
On the 9th October the chief minister once again called the fishermen unions for a talk on their demands. But three fishermen unions including KSMTF, UTUC, and AITUC jointly made a walk-out from the conference in protest against the absence of the chief minister for the discussion. They held that the discussion on policy matters would be meaningless without the chief minister. (Alakal 15-10-1985)

As the talk with the chief minister did not materialise, the action council of KSMTF met and decided to stop the six month old agitation. Accordingly on 10th of October 1985 Mr. Jyoti Prakash who was on fast in Alapuzha stopped his fast by drinking coconut water given by Mr. Joychen Antony, the president of KSMTF, in the presence of Mr. Thamarakshan.M.L.A, the convenor of the joint action council, and hundreds of fishworkers. (Alakal 15-10-1985) The statement issued by the state executive committee of KSMTF said, "We stop the agitation temporarily in order to gain more strength to have a joint struggle with other unions. But the boats which violate the marine regulations will be blocked in the sea." After reviewing the course of the 186-day agitation in which 46 persons fasted, agitation was said to be stopped in protest against the dictatorial mentality of the chief minister and the government. The walk-out from the conference was a sign of this protest.
"challenging the government which kills the democratic struggles to face the same people in the election arena." (Alakal 15-10-1985)

Theerasubdam, a fortnightly in Malayalam, wrote a detailed editorial on the fishermen agitation in its issue of October 1985. "The long agitation led by KSMTF powerfully projected the prominent problems of the fisheries sector before the public."

Though no concrete demand of the agitation was met by the government, this longest struggle of the fishworkers in Kerala, had many achievements to its credit. There was good publicity about the problems of fishworkers at national and international level. Secondly, the agitation forced the government to publish the report of the Kalawar Commission. Thirdly, the experience of joint agitation by all the fishworkers' unions was a gain for the fishermen as a whole. (KSMTF annual report of 1985 and Alakal, October 1985)

After the longest agitation of 1985, KSMTF did not plan any major agitation or programme in 1986. Instead, realizing the importance of art and drama for conscientisation especially in the light of the success story of street dramas used by KSMTF in its earlier struggles, it prepared a stage drama in 1986 called 'Purappad' meaning 'exodus'. The objective was to make the life and struggle of the fishworkers known to a wider public through the art form. Its themes consisted of working class
facing innumerable hurdles in their march towards the promised land of liberation. Presented in mythological symbols and actions the drama powerfully brought out the need of the working class to forge ahead towards the goal with hope and determination. (Kaleekal 1988) The drama was staged over 25 places throughout Kerala. (Alakal 1986) As cultural forms are an important means to build social movements, fishworkers' movement also made use of cultural forms for its growth.

IV. Participation of KSMTF in the National Level Agitation

The main events of fishworkers' movements in 1987 were two struggles under the directives of the National Fishworkers' Forum, minor agitations and organisational changes in KSMTF. The first agitation was for the demands of the fishworkers and the second one was of six militant trade unions.

Since basic problems of traditional fishworkers all over India were same, the National Fishworkers' Forum (NFF) took initiative to highlight them before the Central government. In order to highlight the need for conservation of fish resources and to protect 6.5 million fisherfolks and to guarantee cheap protein for the 100 million fish eaters of this country, the NFF launched a nationwide agitation on 16-17th of March 1987, with the demands like the implementation of marine fishing
AN EMBLEM USED FOR THE NATIONAL AGITATION OF FISHERMEN IN 1987
regulation Act in all the coastal states, ban on trawling and purse-seining up to 20 kilometers in territorial waters, (NFF brochure 1987)

In the light of the call of NFF, KSMTF organised the two-day agitation in Kerala through a press conference, one-day fast, route marches, and jeep rallies in all the districts. In all other coastal states too the agitation called by NFF was organised, and the government both the Centre and the state, came to know about the needs of the artisanal fishworkers. (KSMTF evaluation report of 1987)

The second agitation called by NFF and participated by KSMTF was of militant trade unions of industry, railways, agriculture, textiles, headload and stoneworkers, artisans and craftsmen, led by national leaders like Mr. George Fernandes and Mr. Datta Samant. NFF was also a member of this national forum. The main demands were control on the increase in prices of essential commodities, making employment a fundamental right, protection of jute, tea and fish industries, implementation of minimum wage, ban on foreign monopolists, and withdrawal of all black laws.

In response to the call of the militant trade unions, KSMTF organised a state convention of all the above unions in the state followed by a signature campaign, and road blocks in Trivandrum and Kollam. (KSMTF executive committee minutes 3-3-1988) The impact of above agitation on the fishworkers'
movement was significant. The movement was for the first time joining national level trade unions for issues of important for all sections of working class. In that way it was a growth for the movement and KSMTF which led the movement. It was a sign of solidarity of fishworkers with working class in general, and recognition for KSMTF and NFF among the national level trade unions. From 1987 onwards KSMTF started celebrating the workers' day on 1st May as a gesture of solidarity with the working class. (KSMTF annual report of 1987-'88)

Other minor agitations in 1987 included one state-level 'dharna' and other district level agitations... The dharna was organised in all districts on 15th October in protest against the decision of the Left Front government of Kerala to convert 222 fishermen welfare societies into 81 primary cooperative societies, and the attempt of the CITU fishermen union to capture all these societies. As response to the 'dharna' the government decided to make some changes in the cooperatives.

There was also a picketing of national highway in Kollam by the district unit of KSMTF on the 4th December against night trawling by the mechanised boats. The Kozhikode district fishworkers participated in the various agitations of the workers of Gawlior Ryons Factory in Kozhikode to get the laid-off factory open for the 5000 workers, while KSMTF gave full support to the three-year old struggle of these workers. (KSMTF annual report of 1987-'88)