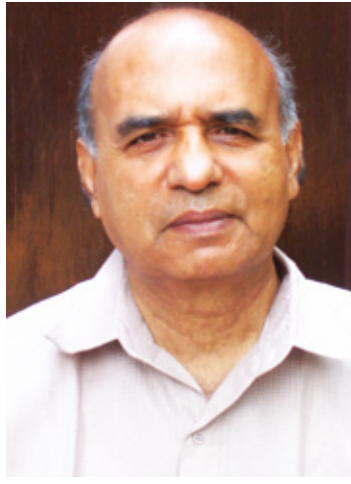


THE SEA CALLS...





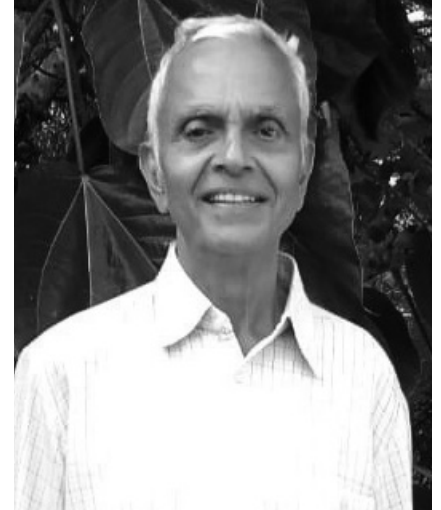
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1. THE STORY INTONED

This is my story. This is our story. This story is we/us. Who are we? We are a 'Legion'. Yes a legion and more.

Thomas Kocherry in our group was typical. He would report a group gathering or demonstration or picketing counting a hundred when there were ten; thousand when hundred; ten thousand when a thousand people participated. He would always confuse the CBI with his anticipated account of people expected to participate. And he was correct in the right sense. We were always a 'legion'.



JOSE KALEEKEL

The sheer fact is that we were a few handful people only. Men and women. Lay and clergy. Diocesan and religious. Priests and nuns. Catholics, Muslims and Hindus, under the banner of a trade union: KERALA SWATHANTHRA MALSYA THOZHILALY FEDERATION. (KSMTF)

The stories are from around 1970s. The move got initiated much earlier: the times of the Second Vatican Council. The beginnings of Liberation Theology and the Latin American Conferences of Medellin and thoughts from the World Council of Churches and so on and its ripples in our academia. It got a momentum in the Indian Soil in the 80s and 90s. The waves and ripples of the same continue to today in 2021, for eyes that can behold.

We were quite an ordinary gang. Very ordinary people. But we grew to be big and strong. We grew to be big enough to challenge the mighty and powerful in church and politics. That was no small thing- whether you approve it or not. The Almighty has done great things. We want to shout MAGNIFICAT. Hence this book. The book is about the struggle of a few of ours in their faith journey and involvements.

We thought of bringing it out on the occasion of one of us reaching her ninety one: Sr. Philomine Marie MMS. She belongs to the religious order of Medical Mission Sisters. Sister stands a mother figure after the model of Mother in the novel by Maxim Gorky in the Russian Revolution. Sister grew to be the mother figure in the KSMTF agitation of fishers in 1984. She offered to take on a fast unto death to vindicate the cause of traditional fishers. She is mother image to a big number of people on the Kerala coast and beyond, after the image of mother earth, mother

sea and our own mothers at home and even as Mother Godde, ready to offer their total self for others.

Mind you. Sr. Philomine Marie is not alone in this narration of her story. Her growing into the image is tied to her congregational story and to the communities with whom she posited in Anjengo coast. A bit of that congregational story and stories of some of her companions along finds a place in the book.

Plus a few male radical clergy in mission. I in person had gathered this group in March 1990, the first time. My diary notes of 30th March describe the gathering with the images picked from psalm. 2 and Isiah. 1.1-9: - "Breaking their swords to making ploughs to furrow the grounds to sow seeds of the NEW KIN(G)DOM."

So, this is the story of us as Individuals and in Communion, as Ecclesia and Eucharist.

Allow me to quote one of our comrade Ms. Nalini Nayak's letter in 1981.

Dear Jose, Tom, James, Augustine and Fr. Paul,

The agitation has come to a temporary halt after discussions with the minister for which everybody is glad. But nobody regrets a minute of those days of action which have brought to light so many positive things which proves that only real involvement can build the revolutionary consciousness in the true sense of the term.

I want to thank you, as priests, for what you did, for the stand you took. It is a sign of hope to us lay Christians that even in India, where we are the minority, we can enter the liberation struggle supported by our faith and the 'institution'. Yes. I say the institution, the Church, because this was another realization during the struggle. Despite the fact that the people and we would have liked the Bishop to support the cause - nobody seemed to worry that he didn't.

Nobody's faith or hope or commitment was shattered because he didn't. It was the bishop and others who probably were keener to disqualify the struggle, because it was led by 'defrocked'





priests and openly come out with a statement against the people who claim that they too are Christians - as they did about PCO. They couldn't stomach the fact that the Sunday services were also moments when people were encouraged to take part in the agitation and when they prayed for its success.

As the struggle has proved, **this is the church, where fast was not symbolic, where the places of worship were, where the people were - the shed, the police camp, under the burning sun at the railroad, the airport and the secretariat.**

This is the new life, faith and the new Church which has to be kept alive to face the new struggle that still awaits us. On one hand is the larger need to develop political base, on the other is the path of transferring the faith and religious fervor of the people into something meaningful and to nourish it as it deserves.

Jose, we look forward to seeing you back when you feel strong again - to see you really animated by your desire to live what you believe.

Love. "Nalini"

Again, let me quote another letter sent out by a fasting clergyman from the Secretariat agitational pandal on 30.07.1986.

"Dear Friend",

He was tired, old and sweaty, pushing his homemade cart down the alley, stopping now and then to poke around in somebody's garbage.

I wanted to speak to him about Eucharist. But the look in his eyes, the despair on his face, the helplessness of somebody else's life in his cart told me to forget it.

So I smiled. Said 'hi'. And gave him Eucharist.

She was cute. Nice build. A little too much paint. Wobbly on her feet as she slid from her barstool and on the make. “No. Thanks”. Not tonight. And I gave her Eucharist.

She lived alone, her husband dead, her family gone. And she talked at you, not to you. Words. Endless words, shewed out. So I listened. And I gave her the Eucharist.

Down town is nice. Lights change from red to green and again flashing blues, pinks and oranges. I gulped them in and said: “thank you father”. And made them Eucharist.

I laughed at myself. You. With all your sin and all your selfishness. I forgive you. I accept you. I love you. It is nice and so necessary to give yourself Eucharist.

My father, when will we learn? You cannot talk Eucharist. You cannot philosophise about it. YOU DO IT.

You don't dogmatize Eucharist. Sometimes you laugh it. Sometimes you cry it. Often you sing it. Sometimes it's wild peace. Then crying hurt, often humiliating, never deserved.

You see Eucharist in another's eyes. Give it on another's hand held tight. Squeeze it in an embrace.

You pause Eucharist in the middle of a busy day. Speak it in another's ear. Listen to it from a person who wants to talk. Eucharist is life.

For Eucharist is as simple as being on time and as profound as sympathy.

I give you supper. I give you my sustenance. I give you my life. I give you ME. I give you Eucharist.” R. Vought.

I request you to join me celebrating Eucharist in the form of my own oblation in some small measure as I declare solidarity with the agitating fishermen to go on an indefinite fast from the



1st of August 1985.

Yours in solidarity.

Fr. Jose J. Kaleekel.

St. Xavier's. Puthur. 691507.

Well, from those times and beyond, some stories are picked. Just story narration only. No theology or dogma making. Just events. Telling of them. Our life lived for the fisher people, the poor, the oppressed - the last, the least and the lost.

The book is brought out to honour Sr. Philomine Marie, to honour her on her 91st birthday. To honour her Congregation of MMS, whose foundress Mother Anna Dengal who mused into her and her companion's ears these words of inspiration that moved them to act radical. Mother Dengal's words: "If you have real love, you are inventive. If you love, you try to find out, you are interested. If you really love, you accommodate yourself. If you love, you want to give, you are tireless, selfless, and generous. If you love you really try to serve and not just work.

One does not spare oneself if one loves".

The spirit of the foundress inspired Philomine Marie, Patricia Kuruvinakunnel, Mercy Koottiyani, Luke Cherian, Theramma Prayikalam, Alice Mylady, Valsa Paraparakath and on and on.

The whole of us is not present in this book. A few of the clergy and the Congregation of MMS. I am including the writings in my collection. The others I am to search. Hoping that I will get to another set of faith sharing at a second attempt.

I am thankful to the comrades who shared these pages. Let me thank Sr. Dr. Pia Poovan, the leader of the sector at that time, for sharing a small script from her memory of the initiation





that time. She reminds me of the mother of Maccabees in the old testament strengthening her children to stand up to challenge injustices of that time. I would have loved to add a note from Josita Myladiyil who stood by the movement in the very confusing times of the 1984 struggle. She was very much the OT figure Rispah in 2nd Sam. 3.6-11 and 21.1-11. When the situation was reaching that Philomine Marie (PM) would die for the cause, Josita came with tears to ask if the federation would give the body of PM back to the Congregation or what. The point in question was of obedience to the congregation and PM had replied saying that she had made community with the people there in Poothura as advised by the directives of Congregation and any reference had to go to the people. But Josita's present health conditions do not contribute to that desire. Sorry for that.

A big thanks to Manju Kulapuram SCSC, the former National Executive Secretary of Forum for Justice and Peace (FORUM) in India asking me to initiate the process of making this book. Number of writings were forwarded by Manju. Her hope was that these stories could offer valuable insights and inspiration to the younger generations to charter their own journey along the path of justice in their attempt to make religious life more relevant and meaningful today. Thanks Manju.

Thanks to everyone listening.

Thanks to Godde now and forever.

Love.

Jose J. Kaleekel.

2. INTRODUCING

I consider it as a very providential intervention of God that this book is published at this time when the entire Church - laity, consecrated and ordained - are called to engage in the exercise of deep and respectful listening to one another to participate in the Synodal process of Synod 2021 - 2023 to help the Church to make pastoral decisions that correspond as closely as possible to God's will (ITC, Syn., 68). Listening to the experiences narrated in these pages would help us to be better prepared to be on the Synodal path and become the Church we are meant to be today.



MANJU KULAPURAM SCSC

It is very striking that immediately after Vatican II, the Medical Mission Sisters (MMS) during their General Chapter 1967 took very radical steps to implement the decisions of the Vatican II. Their Superior General, Sr. Godlive Proove, met the Sisters who were ready to leave the comfortable life in the hospitals and move out into the villages to live among the poor. In the southern part of India they took up the mission among the fisher people in Poothura village next to Anjengo, Trivandrum in 1975 and in 1978 at Mampally. This model of leadership given by Sr. Proove decades ago poses a prophetic challenge to religious congregations today that religious life of the 21st century India is lived with greater courage and commitment, in solidarity with the marginalized.

My association with the MMS sisters began with meeting of Sr. Philomine Marie (PM) during





the National Workshop of Forum of Religious for Justice and Peace (FORUM) in Hyderabad in 1990. I was very much inspired by the sharing of PM who had fasted 23 days along with the fisherpeople demanding the implementation of the ‘Babu Paul Commission’ recommendations. In 2007 I had the opportunity to visit the simple house of PM and her companions among the fisherpeople of Poothura. PM took me around their karmabhoomi, met many fisher people, and also visited the Medical Mission Sisters at Mampally. Later I met PM at different national and local meetings of FORUM. On December 24, 2012 PM and myself went to Idinthakarai, the epicentre of Koodamkulam struggle against the nuclear power plant and spent the Christmas Eve with the protesting people in the Church courtyard under the samara pandal (agitation site) after the mid-night mass.

Since I was very much interested and inspired by their lives of struggle with the people and their spirituality, PM shared with me some of her earlier writings. I felt that these might inspire more young religious and clergy who may be seeking new ways of involvement in the struggles of people. From Valsa MMS I came to know about Fr. Jose Kaleekel and our conversations paved the way for publishing this book.

Let the life experiences of the religious and clergy in this book “help us to renew our mentalities and our ecclesial structures in order to live out God’s call for the Church amid the present signs of the times.” (Vademecum- EN-A4)

3. MEDICAL MISSION SISTERS

RESPONSE TO LIFE AND MISSION AFTER 1967 CHAPTER, HIGHLIGHTING MISSION AMONG THE FISHERFOLK

The 1967 chapter was a call to reform the society - The government structure, mode of activities (Mission), Community life and formation, Decentralization, equal participation, importance to individual call, diversity, changing the world perception and spirituality - apostolic spirituality, contemplation in action were the challenges put before us.

In order to make it workable, workshops, seminars, discussions etc., were organized locally, sector wise and at global levels. District Assembly, local assembly were the new decentralized structure. Sr. Gabriani Vetticapally was the first District Superior. Her reflections at that time was: "Indeed our 1967- chapter event

was a jubilee, an acceptable year of the Lord for years to come. To my mind, it has been to our society what the Vatican Council for the entire Church. It opened wide all vistas of mission. The remnants of colonial concept put to an end with geographical division of society in Sectors.

All names of continents in common use. We at chapter experienced oneness, sharing equal base whether we hail from first world or third. All debts were condoned, all areas were open. We fully belonged as equal partners in our onward move. Each one of us has the chance to give our excellence for healing ministry as suits one's taste and talents. Of course, it took U-turn to our roots to reverbalise our spirit and life meaning for all. Sure, it costs a lot of letting go which indeed baffled many. Again, I say it was a kind of jubilee with its thanksgiving role of liberation from so many irrelevant strings of conventional conceptions, that blurred the vision of who we are and what we want to be. Just a healing presence in our wounded world."

To many of us it took time to understand the consequences of this radical change. The first two to three years were a struggle with the old and new. Darkness and light, security and insecurity, enthusiasm and inaction, rooted in the old and experiencing freedom. The society had to recourse to behavioural scientist to help sisters to find themselves. The openness to all missions was a joyful experience. Many sisters opted for Kenya, Ethiopia, Ghana, North India etc.

In the midst of all these exoduses a call from the North-East for a mission in 1970. Sisters Agnes Mylady and Vincentia were chosen to respond to this call. The intension was not to establish a hospital of the old model. They had no idea what to do. The sector superior will tell you what to do was the trust. It was like Abraham going to Morea Mountains. In 1972 another



SR. PHILOMINE MARIE

mission among the Gharo tribal was opened in Meghalaya.

1973 chapter clarified the underlining of 1967 chapter. The option for the poor was the charism that we must follow everywhere was recognized. The question of who is the poor became irrelevant.

The socio-political economic analysis of the hospitals done in 1974 helped to open our eyes to the reality of the institutional health services. We cannot be satisfied with the public health services done by the hospitals. The hospital should be reoriented to the service of the local ordinary people. We made an attempt to an experiment in St. Thomas Hospital Chethipuzha. As we felt this was ideal place to try. The studies were made in great enthusiasm.

Few sisters were ready to experience life in an inserted community of the poor. The first group went to Narasigapur in 1974 in M.P. They lived in simple set up with minimum facilities. They gave importance to prayer and making relationships with the neighbours, who were Dalits and outcasts. Fr. Swamy Pramanada was a great support to them and the Ashram where he lived was a Christian Presence.

The realization that the root cause of sickness and poverty was social injustice that existed in the society inspired many sisters to live with them and share their pathetic situation and together with them to resist the evil. The sisters slowly started to move to the village situation among



the poor. In 1975 three sisters moved to Trivandrum Poothura fishing village. In 1977 few sisters went to Panakachira a colony near to Mundakayam Town. Those were the people who were evicted from the roadside in Mundakayam Town. They were given 25 cents of land, but no house, drinking water, electricity, or transportation facility and above all no employment.

In 1978 a group of sisters went to Erattupetta, a Muslim colony. Two sisters went to Bangalore slums and one went with Dr. Arole in a community development project.

During this time strategies and plans were made to make St. Thomas



Hospital Chethipuzha a community-based health care unit. But many of the top priests of Changanacherry diocese did not agree to such kind of development but wanted to develop specialties. MMS could not be partners to this move. They found it be contradiction to their vision of mission. In that situation MMS made the decision to hand over the hospital to the diocese. In 1979 February officially the hospital was handed over to the diocese and the sisters left the place.

The sisters who left the hospital in groups or individually found services where ever needed and suitable to our version of mission. Few sisters opted for other sectors - Africa, Latin America and North India.

The two hospitals in Kerala continued without specialization, with essential services, and training programs and community health with more humanness, protesting consumerism, competition, corruption etc. They encouraged social justice, equality and participation. They also encouraged developing local leadership. We cannot quantify the successes of such services. They developed health projects taking up human rights issues, environmental and other local problems with the participation of the local people. This was Good News.

In the Eighties two centres were opened in M.P. First in Khanduwa Diocese, Roshini Village among the Koku tribes and another in Raipur Diocese, Seluide Village among Hindus. Social welfare programs, conscientization, Mahila Samajams, Balavadies, Youth groups training, integrated health programs were initiated for the development of the people. The scarcity of water was overcome by 'watershed' program.

Till 1990 Shembagannur in TamilNadu was used for holidays and renewal programs. From 1990 home visits, Parish clinic, Basic Christian Community formation and other Social Service Programs were started by the community there. In 1993 another house was started in Mylapore diocese among the harijans in Gnadipet parish. The parish priest was very supportive of MMS version and philosophy.

In 1979 North East become a separate District

MMS IN POOTHURA - MAMPALLY, TRIVANDRUM, KERALA

In 1975 MMS were invited to the coastal area of Anjengo, Trivandrum District by the then parish priest of Poothura parish, a Redemptorist Priest. The Redemptorist Priests were there since 1972. They were in search of the cause of the pathetic situation of the fisher people in that area. Fr. Thomas Kocherry who was the leader of the Redemptorist was watching the move of MMS in response to the call of 1973 chapter, to identify with the poor and marginalized.

In 1975 August 1st three sisters, Sr. Luke Velithumalil (50), Maria Kumblanthanam (39), Theramma Paryikalam (25), came to Poothura Village in Anjengo, Trivandrum. Within a month Sr. Alice Vadserry joined them. In order to identify with the people, they adopted their life style, the food habits and their living conditions. The people there had to go without food (sometimes) which we never had to do. MMS had an open house where people can come in at any time of day or night – no walls or gates. MMS lived in a rented house paying Rs. 20 per month. The toilet facilities were in the “country style”. With their enthusiasm to identity with all the new experiences were a thrill to them. From the beginning they decided to search for the real needs of the people. They did not want to have a regular dispensary, but kept medicines in the house for emergency.

In the beginning they gave importance to education. Sisters contribution to this made the tuition program started by the Redemptorists more attractive. They started a nursery for the wandering children who were kept there when the mothers go for work. The children were made interested to learn through plays, songs, storytelling etc. Sr. Theramma Praykalam took leadership for this. Sr. Theramma along with few young women selected from the village attended the training programme of Marianad Development project.

The community discussions and reflections and praying together with the Redemptorists helped their move towards identification. Sr. Luke went with the women for preparing the coconut fiber for coir making. Sr. Maria K joined those who carry sand for buildings. Sr. Alice went to a local dispensary to give free service. They also jointed the women in drying fish and take them to the market for sale.

Through MMS involvements, they became aware of many of the exploitations and injustices in the work field. Through the women they also came to know about the mishandling of the CRS food distributions through the parish.





The group gatherings for discussion and prayers were occasions for highlighting the reality of their life and work. The women became more alert and enthusiastic.

The employed fisherpeople were exploited by the owners of the fishing equipment's. To fight this the Redemptorist Priests along with fishers started a co-operative, in a

simple way with a group ownership, for the "Shore Scene" (Kampa Vala). The fathers were members of this along with the fishermen. The Priests also went with the fisherpeople for fishing. This caused some enmity with the owners of the "Shore Scene" as they lost few of their employees.

To democratize the Parish Council and simplify the activities of the Parish, the sisters were actively involved with the priests. One family along with few followers objected to all these since they were in control of the parish. They worked as an underground force. They also had the support of the political party. This family was able to buy people with money. So, from the beginning the sisters had to face threats from the opposite forces.

MMS IN MAMPALLY

At this time the then parish priest of Mampally which is next to the Poothura parish Fr. Cletus Gomes was attracted to the activities of MMS in Poothura especially the growth of the children in the nurseries (which he witnessed while attending one of their anniversary program) wanted to have MMS in his parish and he invited MMS to Mampally Parish.

In 1978 May four sisters - Srs. Philomine Marie, Leonie, Bridgit and Elise Kurisumoottil came to Mampally. Sr. Philimine Marrie was a regular visitor to Poothura during her work with the Kerala Voluntary Health Association (KVHA). She was very much wanting to be involved in a situation like Poothura.

As the Poothura Nursery was most inspiring for Fr. Cletus Gomes, he wanted to start a nursery immediately. Since no building was available, we started under a tree in the Church yard. When it rained, we used the verandah of the parochial house. Later we requested 'Miserior' for a building and they graciously donated.

When the sisters arrived on May 1st there was no house ready, though the Priest had informed "everything is ready come". The owner of the house where we had to stay had just moved to

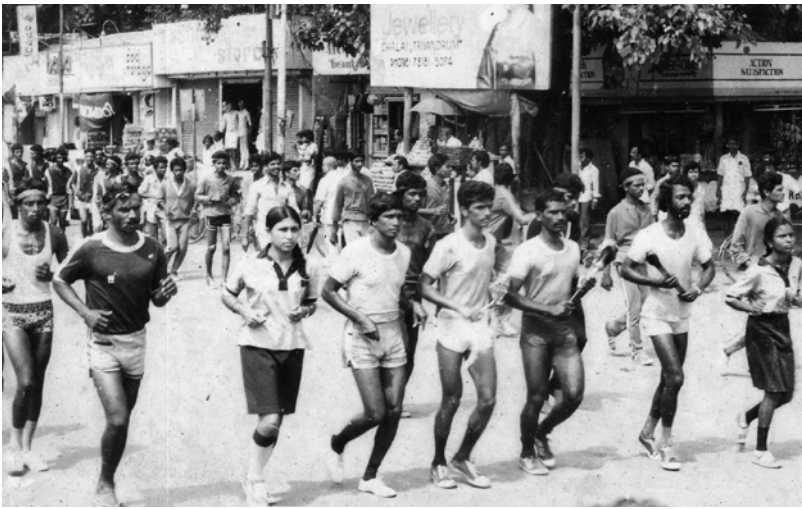
his family house for giving the house for us.

When the sisters arrived, they had to clean and prepare the house for blessing that evening. Of course, the sisters from Poothura came to help. At 6.00 pm the house was blessed by Fr. Cletus Gomes in the presence of the Redemptorist Priests and MMS from Poothura and a handful of people from around the area. After the people left, we had prayer together with the Priests and Sisters. Sr. Pia Poovan the District coordinator also had come for the blessing. The need to work in solidarity with MMS Poothura and also monthly recollections and evaluation with both groups was stressed.

From the next day the sisters got involved in the parish activities. Preparing children for first Holy Communion was a herculean task. There were children who were above 13 or 14 were among them. Since they could not read, we had to make them learn the prayers by repetition. In Mampally sisters immediately started a dispensary in their house and treated common illness and gave directions to them when further treatment is necessary. Diarrhea, vomiting, chest infection was very common among the children. By regular deworming these were reduced to a great extent. Children with malnutrition were given Vitamin and mineral tablets. Some of the children who could not walk even after three years old started walking after 2-3 months of taking the tablets. The people said the sisters are doing 'miracles'.

In Mampally Western side of the main road were fisherpeople who were Christians and on the eastern side Coir workers who were Hindus. In 1978 November there was a sudden inflow of water from the lake to the eastern side. There is very little contact between the Hindus and Christians. At this time Fr. Cletus and Fr. Thomas Kocherry together with the fisherpeople went with their Country Boats and Kattamarams (3 pieces of wood tied together) to rescue the Hindus. The water flow was so sudden that they could not escape from their homes. Many of them had only huts - no proper houses. When they were brought to this side, they were accommodated in the Parish School. The Priests had to leave immediately to save the people from other villages. By evening people especially, the children were hungry and started crying. The sisters together with few women got together and collected rice from the Ration Shop promising to pay later, cooked with coconut and served to the people that evening. It took a few days for the water to recede. Those days food was served to them which was collected from generous





people. The Sisters played a major role in preparation and distribution of the food. It was the occasion to recognize the leadership of the sisters.

In Mampally parish there was supply of CRS food which was distributed only to the Catholics, since it came through the parish, though it was specified that the beneficiaries should be chosen from all without discrimination of caste

or religion. Through a slow process of conscientization the sisters were able to change the attitude of the people to include others in the program. Through this bridge building process, we were able to create fellowship among the Christians and Hindus.

FIRST ACT OF PROTEST

During the rough season sea erosion happens and many of the huts are washed away. Usually when it happens, it was rebuilt from charities and also from their meagre earnings. The MMS were experiencing helplessness in these situations. In their discussions and reflections, they became aware that it is the responsibility of the Govt. and it is the people's right to get help in such situations. It was communicated to the people. They organized themselves and decided to go to the collectorate in Trivandrum with the remains of the house and shouting slogans along the road. This was the first act of protest for the sisters and the people. In this we realized the power of the people. It was a great experience in taking sides with the people. From then on this was the weapon we used to get the right demands of the people.

THE FORMATION OF THE UNION

For the development of the fisheries the government introduced a new project ARC (Agricultural Refinancing Corporation) Through this the traditional fisherpeople were given mechanized boats with gill nets. As usual there was great corruption. The boats were made of substandard quality and they were broken down within a short time with no facility for repair. The boats were distributed under loan basis. The fisherpeople were not able to repay the loan and the boats were confiscated.

Slowly the fisherpeople realized the exploitation and cheating done in the project by the officers. The discussions with Fr. Thomas Kocherry lead them to organize a union in the name of Anjengo Boat Workers Union. They declared a Fast unto death demanding the audited report of the project. Fr. Thomas Kocherry agreed to Fast. Many of the parish priests of Trivandrum coastal area came in support. This was the first time that the fisherpeople came out in political

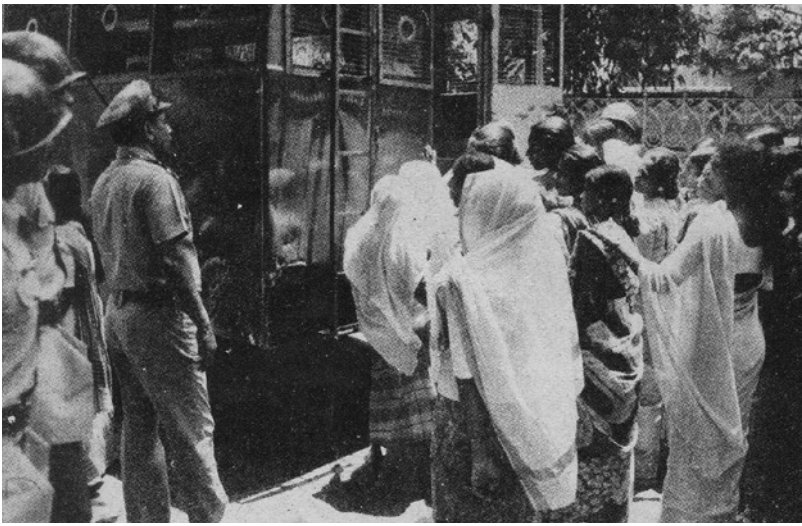
protest. This moved the government to agree to their demand even before starting the protest. This was a great boost for the fisher people. In their further discussions and reflections, they decided to form a District wise Secular Union as Trivandrum District Fishermen's Union. They elected Joychan Antony from Thumba as the First President, Abdul Karim as Vice President, Sheela Rosario as the Secretary. Fr. Cleetus Gomez, Fr. Thomas Kocherry, Sr. Theramma Prayikalam and L. Lawrence from Poothura were elected as committee members. The MMS were actively involved in the conscientization and organization of the Union. This involvement gave them the awareness of the need for empowering the people to fight for their rights. This helped them to bring new vision to the health field and education programme - Education and health being the basic rights of the people.

MMS Poothura - Mampally came together regularly for study and reflection with Fr. Thomas Kocherry. The sisters participated in the study and conscientization programs of P.C.O. (Programme for Community Organization). The happenings in the fisheries sector and among the traditional fishermen were studied in detail. The analysis done of the society and political field gave the sisters more clarity of the exploitation of oppression happening among the poor and marginalized in other sectors. The sisters also had chances to attend seminars and workshops organized by like-minded people in different parts of the State and Nationally.

In the beginning we took the coastal area of Cherayankil Taluk as our involvement area. Later when the local leaders were able to take responsibilities the two sisters moved to other coastal villages of the State as animators and facilitators. This time a sectarian union in the name of Latin Catholic Fishermen's Federation under the leadership of Fr. Paul Arakal was in existence in Alleppy and Kollam Districts. Some of the leaders of this Union were interested in the secular nature of the Trivandrum District Fishermen's Union. They gathered together, discussed it and put the matter to vote. With a majority vote the Secular Union won. Each districts (coastal) had its own unions which later got federated forming Kerala Independent Fishermen's Federation (K.S.M.T.F).

The involvement of Poothura-Mampally Sisters was taken as a pilot project of the District South India. The sisters were finding mission in their own country. Medical Mission Sisters accepted Poothura as the Novitiate - a training centre for the new comers. It was another Holy experiment - move from Institutional set up to people-oriented situation. In order





to prepare the sisters and to make other arrangements for the novices Sr. Deena Philip lived and participated in the activities in Poothura since 1978.

In the beginning of 1980 Sr. Mariam Kuruvinakunnel was assigned to Poothura to help the novices. At this point of time, sisters had seven nurseries, Balvedis and Mahila Samajams. The local young women

took responsibilities of the daily running of these. Every weekend they came together for evaluation and further planning of the classes. These women also participated in the 'Union' activities.

In the middle of 1980 two sisters started their Novitiate in Poothura. Prayer, study and involvements in the activities of the area were integrated in their life. The life realities of the people awakened the responsibility of each MMS, making the charism of the society relevant and evident. This "Holy Experiment" attracted many others.

1981-82 Sr. Annette came to the Trivandrum Area to join the education programme of the Jesuits for the fisher people. After two years' experience, she joined the organization of the 'Bamboo' workers. During 1981-83 Sr. Theramma Prayikalam went to North India for intercultural experience as part of her formation. Srs. Philo Varghese and Lilly Mookken came to Poothura as new members.

In 1982 as usual there was conflict between Anjengo and Poothura Village. The fight became so wild that police came and fired. Accidentally one fisherman from Poothura people died. The Parish Priest and the sisters were watching all these helplessly. Their attempt to peacemaking turned useless. In the midst of the confusions they recognized a child from Anjengo among the Poothura people. He might have run from Anjengo and did not know where to go or what is happening. Sr. Luke got hold of him and hid him in our house for the time being and later reached him to his parents secretly. If the Poothura people had seen him it would have been the end of the boy. In these situations, we recognized the presence of Jesus with us, giving us presence of mind and courage to stand with the people. Even after the arrival of police the fight was going on. We informed the authorities of the diocese and could get no response. Finally, the parish priest informed Fr. Thomas Kocherry who had just returned from Delhi and was saying Sunday Mass in one of the parishes in Muttada, Trivandrum. As soon as he heard he rushed to the place. He met people from both sides and tried to pacify them. But they continued to challenge each other.

Night and day, he travelled on cycle among them to prevent any untoward action. The second night he had supper with MMS Mampally and prayer together reflecting on the incident and recognized the role that the political parties played in this situation. He left Mampally at 10 pm and continued his 'Patrolling' between Poothura and Anjengo. In the middle of the night he was arrested by the police and taken to Anjengo police station. We came to know of it only the next day by 7.30 am. We were shocked and did not know what to do. Mampally - Poothura sisters came together and in our helplessness, we informed the Mampally parish priest. He didn't seem to be very helpful. Finally, we had contact with our friends and Union leaders in Trivandurm. They rushed to the place and asked us to organize the people for a protest rally. Two of the sisters went to the police station to find out what was happening. We saw Tom locked up behind the grill half naked. It was a shock. We could not communicate to him, there was no time to stand and brood. We had to act. We returned to the village organizing the people for protest rally. The union leaders were in action to release him from the police custody. In spite of all their efforts Tom was taken to the Varkala Court and they remanded him for few days and put him in Attingal Jail. The leaders were able to get bail and release him only after almost a week. The Marxist party helped us in the process. The congress people were against us. It was their siding with the Anjengo people that lead to Tom's arrest. Tom's passport was banned for years.

From 1981 onwards the struggle against monsoon trawling got started. The coastal area of Trivandrum was involved in the struggle later the other coastal areas of Kerala joined the struggle under the banner of Kerala Swathanthra Malayali Thozhilali Federation (KSMTF) Various modes of protest were staged like rallies, picketing, Dharna in front of Government offices and finally fast unto death. The government pacified the angry crowd with one or two welfare projects and constituting a commission to study the situation.

In 1984 Srs. Philomine Marrie, Patricia Kuruvanakunnel and Theramma Prayikalam along with ten fisher people were locked up in jail for picketing the Fisheries Director's office. Locking up religious sisters along with thieves and adulterous women caused protest in the Legislative Assembly and all of them were released from the jail. They came to the secretariat and all joined the fasting person.

The struggle was spread over all the coastal districts using various strategies. There was no response from the Govt. Sister Philomine Marie declared fast unto death if





the demands were not granted. This caused lot of discussions and oppositions. A case was filed against Philomine Marie for attempting suicide and she was arrested and taken to the hospital after 18 days of fast. In the hospital also she continued to fast. A 'Habeas Corpus' petition was filed and the court released her. She came back to the fasting shed and continued the fasting. During this time

Kadakavur Railway track was picketed by the fisher people. Sr. Mercy Koottiany along with others were beaten up by the police and Mercy was thrown into the platform. Later they were arrested and taken to the jail. There were 14 children below 10 years among them. They had just come to the station for witnessing the picketing. Sr. Mercy became responsible for these children. Later, when these children were presented at the court, though the judge commended, "which fool arrested these children?", the case was transferred to the juvenile court in Trivandrum. They had to appear there twice. After the first appearance, the judge met them at the railway station and saw the commotion these children were making and the trouble that Sr. Patricia and others who accompanied to manage them were having. He promised sister that he will close the case the next time and he did it.

The decision to fast unto death caused great commotion and differences of opinion even among the leaders of MMS Society. It had become a discussion in Church and among the MMS International Community. The joint circular of the Kerala Bishops asked us to stop the fast. To continue the fast in spite of the circular was considered disobedience and suicidal. The top leaders of MMS Society analyzed the situation objectively and expressed their solidarity to our stand. The greatest support and solidarity we experienced among the MMS Poothura-Mampally community affirmed us in our mission among the fisher people. But the District leadership was not so convinced and they transferred the Novitiate from Poothura to Errattupetta a Muslim colony in Kottayam District. Due to various reasons the struggle was withdrawn before the death. Whatever happened in the MMS Society, 'Fast unto death' got great attention from the people's movements. From coming together, reflection and discussions based on the 'Kingdom Values' affirmed our stand. The CRI of Kerala appointed a commission to study MMS involvement among the Fisher people. They also gave us a 'clean sheet'.

The chairman of the Catholic Bishops of India's Labour Commission called a special meeting

at Hyderabad. This was to make theological reflection on the positive and negative reactions on the fast unto death issue and on different people's movements. Theologians, leaders of fishermen and other people's movements, church leaders etc. were invited to this meeting. The Bishops were specially invited but only Bishop George Sopan from North India responded. The response of the theologians was very positive. In this situation 'fast unto death' was considered as giving our lives for others so that they can live. It was a response of the inner call of a person and it is not disobedience. This fact was affirmed by the theologians.

Because of the participation of the sisters in the struggle and fasting the sisters were ostracized from the parish activities in Poothura and Mampally. They were stamped as communist. The sisters moved on with other activities with the support of majority of the people. This also gave them time to network with likeminded people outside of the District and get involved in their struggles. This was an opportunity for them to get involved in the liberative perspective of the Gospel. In the light of this the sisters tried to understand the issues of the fisherpeople and the fisheries sector. To deepen our understanding and to create awareness in the people a Bible Convention was organized for a few days at Anjengo, with stories of liberation, exodus, crucifixion and death of Jesus to liberate people from all that enslaves them. Jesus was killed for taking a stand, in his time was the greater recognition.

THE KANYAKUMARI MARCH

In 1989 March from Maharashtra to Kanyakumari with the slogan "PROTECT WATERS PROTECT LIFE" was organized by National Fish workers Forum for the conscientization of the people, to high light the need to protect the environment for a healthy life of nature and of people. The sisters were active in the organization and in the actual process. The concluding part of Kanyakumari march was historical. The protest against Kudamkulam Atomic Plant was highlighted. This was against the Tamil Nadu Government and they wanted to disperse the crowd. There were police firing and lathy charge. One man lost his leg in the firing and many were wounded. The crowd got wild.

Many more police came and they started beating the people. Even the media people were attacked and their cameras were taken away. The sisters were in front of this and they also got beaten up. One parish priest was brutally bruised. This march was an occasion to prove the organizational power of the people.





The new perceptions derived from the healing charism of MMS were initiated in Anjengo. The experiences of the sisters in the hospital care and community health projects were directed to another direction. The sisters aim was to establish a 'healthy community' To achieve this, they worked on for environmental sanitation, safe drinking water and Nutritional food.

This information was imparted to the people through adult education programs and face to face discussions. Health as our right and responsibility the was emphasised. Our first attempt to highlight this was our protest for reestablishing the functioning of PHC at Anjengo. And there was a positive response from the authorities.

By Networking with other NGO's and Govt. we were able to build proper houses and toilets. Under the sister's supervision 500 toilets in Anjengo Panchayath and a common toilet with 10 rooms for those who had no space around their homes were built. Along with the process of building those toilets health education with exhibitions, street plays and 'Pavakali' were also done. After 25 years the common latrine is still functioning under the supervision of the sisters and Mahila Samajams.

Sr. Mercy Koottiani organized the "Alcoholic Anonymous" group with Dr. Suraj Moncy a psychologist who was very much interested in the anti-alcoholic movement. Later on, the diocese took over this movement. Mercy also organized an audio-visual rally from Poovar, the southern part of Trivandrum District to Mampally to the northern part, for the conscientization of the alcoholics.

In 1988-89 Srs. Valsa Paravarakath, Sherly Keeranchira and Alice Mylady Joined the Mampally Community. Sr. Alice worked as staff nurse in the Taluk Hospital Chiryakil and the others joined the activities of the community. Srs. Regina Neriamparambil and Mary Sebastian joined in youth Fish workers Forum. They worked for the conscientization of the people highlighting the need to protect the environment for a healthy life for nature and people.

After the 1991 election the Congress party came to power. There was constant fight between the Congress and Marxist parties. The ruling power was with the Congress and they could do any atrocities and escape with the help of the ruling party. The whole village lived in fear and anxiety. On October 1st 1991 there was a face to face attack between the two groups. In the

fight they used swords, stones and knives. During the fight the grandson of the rich man of the village was seriously wounded and taken to the hospital where he died. He belonged to the Congress party. This group become so wild and started attacking the women and children of the Marxist party. The men swam over the lake and escaped. These women came to the sister's house and we sheltered them. The men were furious saying the sisters are hiding the culprits. They went around and pulled down the houses and destroyed the furniture, pots and pans, nets and all. All this created a terrible scene. They came with stones to the sister's house. The sisters stood calm and posed and challenged them to stone. Surprisingly the men turned back. We experienced the hidden hand of the Lord with us at the moment and all that followed. Early morning the sisters from Mampally arrived for support and encouragement. Our first attempt was to save the women and children who were with us. Somehow, we found one or two country boats and when the funeral of the dead youth was in process and people were after it, the women escaped to the other side of the lake in the boats and went to their relations or friends' houses. Because of the violent situation the sisters had asked for police protection. Instead of protection the police dealt with the sisters as if they were the culprits. The parish priest took shelter in the next parish. The priests from the diocesan centre came for the funeral of the young man. All had sympathy and concern for the young man's party and the sisters were blamed for siding the killers (from whose beating the man died only God knows). The young man's party retaliated by destroying over 30 houses and valuable things were taken away. The young women who were left behind, some of them were raped. They were threatened to get out of the place before day break. The next day Arch Bishop Susai Pakiam came for peace making. Only one side of the people were present. They raised lot of complaints against the sisters. He asked them to give all these in writing and said that he will look into it. But nothing happened. After this few women came to the sister's house followed by the men. The sisters took a stand that they will only talk to the women. After some time, the men and later the women also left.

The parish was closed. None of the priests were ready to take charge. For funeral etc. someone came from outside and officiated and left. The sisters stayed back watching all the atrocities done at night to those who were left behind. The sisters wanted to be support to these people. The outside people were amazed at the





courage of the sisters. One of the parish priests remarked, “Though they are few, they are a legion.” The sisters were happy. They were able to stay back with the suffering people. A case was filed against many (40) including people who were not at the place during the incident. Some of our co-workers were also included. The case went on for years and finally seven people including people who

were not at the place were punished with lifelong imprisonment by the High Court. Fr. Thomas Kocherry helped them to appeal to the supreme court and they were left free after seven years of imprisonment.

After six months a reconciliation meeting was called by Bishop Susai Pakiam. In this meeting both took an oath that there will be no more violence. The people slowly returned to their empty houses with tears. The education of their children was at stake.

One positive aspect of this incident was that the illegal distillation of Arrack was stopped. Punishment was given by the church to those who continued. In spite of all the violence and conflict and threatening the sisters stayed back with the people. This really proved their solidarity with the suffering people.

Sr. Valsa Paravarakath took a leading role for the organization of the Basic Christian Community Program at the diocesan level. The sisters gave leadership in the supplementary education programme of the parish and other activities of the parish.

In 1997 the Government introduced the Panchayath Raj (Authority to the grass root). Everyone was not so sure of how to move forward. In Chirayinkeezhu and Anjengo Panchayaths MMS took the upper hand to introduce Fisher People’s projects in the plans. Srs. Valsa P, Marykutty Kudakochira, Saly Elipurath, Philo Vargese and Regina Neriamparambil attended all the planning meetings giving their opinions and suggestions in the planning. For this they had to work hard to educate themselves on each project.

The DPEP programs of the Government and the Alternate education under the leadership of Sr. Theramma Prayikalam in the coastal area gave new life in the coastal schools. Theramma was appointed as a resource person in the DPEP Project.

From 1993 Sr. Philomine Marie was responsible for the National Fish Workers Forum, National

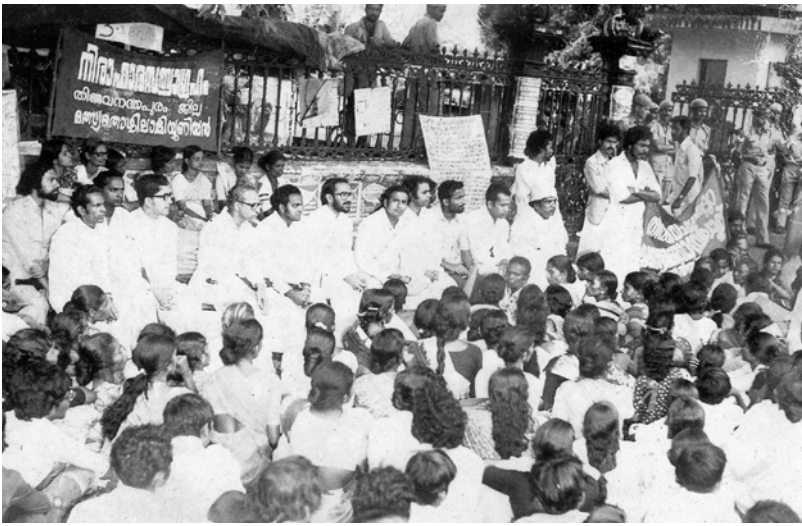
office at Valiathura. This time she also helped KSMF Secretary for the organization in that area and taking up local issues. Her base community was MMS Mampally. She stayed with Rosamma Velappan a widow, an ex-MMS and her son in Valiathura. From 1995-2007 she was appointed as the office secretary of the NFF. As secretary, she had to attend the executive and other official meetings of the NFF, which means going to other coastal states two or three times of the year. Also participate in the struggles organized by the NFF in other states and also in the struggles of National Alliance of People's movement (NAPM). For the participation outside the state we always took local leaders with us. This gave them a chance to know other people and their struggles like Dalits, Tribals, environmental protection groups, women's rights groups etc.

In 1999 Sr. Philomine Marie participated in the International Caravan against 'Globalization' of World Bank and The World Trade Organization in Rome along with the General Secretary R.K. Patel representing the Fisher folk of India. There were almost 500 people from the Agricultural section of India under the leadership of Najudna Swami from Karnataka. The caravan went through all the countries of Europe in two groups. In each, country the organizers of that country joint us in public meetings, Pressconferences, Picketing, Dharna and Protest Rallies. The travel in Europe was in buses. At night accommodation was arranged in old monasteries, Cathedrals, in tents in the open field. It was a great experience. It was an opportunity to recognize the generosity, selflessness and hard work of the Youth and women of other nations especially their team work. Sr. Philomine Marie had also an opportunity to attend the meeting on Women of other nations. Sr. Philomine Marie had also an opportunity to attend the meeting on 'Sustainable Development' in Rome in 2002 and in 2005. She attended the meeting on 'Women in Fisheries' in Indonesia, representing NFF.

To deepen our faith and study in depth, our involvement with the poor and oppressed and to fight for justice in the light of the Kingdom Values, Srs. Philo Varghese and Theramma Prayikalam attended a three months course in Thailand. It was an international gathering in 1989 (Asian). In 1998 Sr. Patricia attended the Asian Religious Forum for Justice and Peace meeting in Thailand. Networking with other likeminded people for various protest actions, workshops, seminars and short courses in relevant issues prepared us to involve in the struggles for a fuller life with conviction and alertness.

From 1991-2005 Sr. Vijaya Puthusseril was working at the Regional Cancer Institute Trivandrum as the chief nursing superintendent. It was a challenge to keep the human values,





to be committed to the poor and to see justice is done to the patients and to see that no bribing is happening in the wards for services done.

PRANA

Sr. Mercy Koottiani had to return to Kottayam from Mampally for treatment. While she was recuperating, she was able to learn about AIDS & AIDS Patients from some newspapers.

She with the collaboration of 'TRADA' Director, organized a seminar in Kottayam. The response was very much encouraging. This led her to start a centre in collaboration with TRADA in Trivandrum, 'Heal India'.

In 1992 on Dec. 1st AIDS day was organized by Heal India, which attracted many people through its presentation of the issues by charts, short plays and talks. Their presence in the field was recognized by the government authorities.

By 1994 Sr. Mercy was getting disabled by the rheumatic attack and was not able to work in an institutional set up. She resigned from TRADA and started PRANA (People's Response to Alcohol Narcotics and AIDS) as an MMS project. Sr. Sherly from Mampally agreed to work with her. A project was granted by Kerala Voluntary Health Association (KVHA) for the conscientization of AIDS. Sr. Sherly took an active role for the successful completion of the Project. Later Srs. Patricia Kuruvinakunnel and Mary kutty Kinttukara joined the community. They extended their Services to other fields like taking up Women's issues with other NGOs, also joining the Protest actions against local issues and Fisher People's Struggle.

PRANA was a home for everyone to come any time for rest, recuperation pouring out their problems, and seeking advice for their illness of body and mind. During this period a centre 'THRANI' was opened in Trivandrum by Sr. Elizabeth Vadakkekara for counselling.

Transfers, sickness and advancing age compelled us to close all the activities by 2016 except Mampally. The sisters in Mampally continue to share life with people through palliative care and responding to the needs of the people.

4. A FEW SCATTERED MEMORIES AND THOUGHTS IN CONNECTION TO POOTHURA MISSION.

The “fire and flame” I experienced with the document “The Common Purpose” that came out of our 1973 General Chapter and the desire to go out to people in real need was the seed for Poothura Mission, Anchuthengu coastal village, I think. Having heard of the coastal regions of Kerala and the lives of the fisher folk, I took the opportunity of attending the Annual Surgeons Conference in Thiruvananthapuram and skipping an afternoon session, went to visit the Bishop Bernard Pereira as a friend of mine. He took us around many of the missions in the fishermen’s villages the whole afternoon. The poverty I saw and the dozens of naked and/or half naked children who accompanied us around as soon as we got out of the Jeep reminding me of God’s promise to Abraham that ‘He will give descendants like the sands of the earth’ still remain fresh in my memory. It certainly was a pleasant and very informative afternoon that ended up in a tender coconut party in Vattakottaram, a property of the diocese and a warm welcome by the Bishop for any involvement that the MMS might want to take up in his diocese. The place the bishop thought was Veli but later it was moved to Poothura. The search I made was for me personally but somehow my future mission was elsewhere according to the original desire of Anna Dengel and 100 % in conformity with her intentions. I am immensely grateful for that privilege although my dream of the coastal regions did not come true.



SR. PIA POOVAN

I was very happy that Poothura mission came to be. There was no official opening, but a visit from the Bishop who sort of sat on the ledge of the window in the small middle room of the house, the presence of the 4 volunteers (Srs Luke Cherian, Sister Theramma Prayikalam, Sister Maria Kumblamthanam and Alice Vadassery) and me as the District Coordinator of the time and the Redemptorist fathers (Frs. Thomas Kocherry - Parish Priest, Mathew Oottukulam & James Chakkalaka) for support from the parish gave a sort of legitimacy for the Poothura mission.



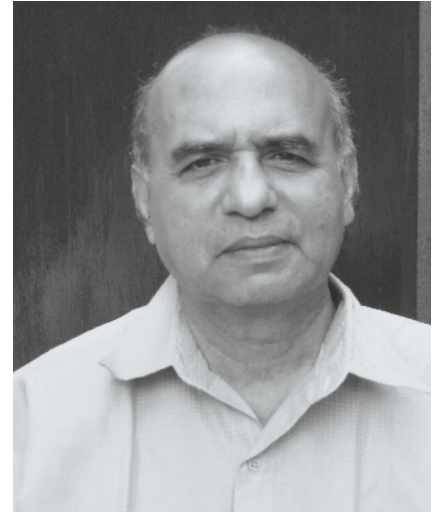
During my 4-year period in Kottayam, I made rather regular trips to Poothura often carrying tapioca, bananas etc, walking from Chirayinkeezh railway station, crossing the waters in 2 places in small vallam (country boat). Nothing was a problem and everything was very simple those days!

One event that remains in mind so vividly is the 1st Anniversary of the nursery school. How the small kids were transformed was a wonder to me. Well after midnight kids of 3,4 and 5 were performing like UnnyKrishnan, some reciting poems and singing songs touching their lives and struggles!

There were signs of possible political involvements and struggles, once I went to visit the sisters on hunger strike in Alappuzha but was not actively involved. Anyhow, I am happy and grateful for the mission in Poothura and to see that small house coming alive once again as a study center for women, it be a channel of God's s merciful, healing love.

5. FAITH LIFE HISTORY

I come from Changanacherry, Kottayam District, Kerala. I belong to a Syro Malabar Christian family. My father was a merchant and my mother belongs to a Syro Malankara family. I am the 5th of 11 children - 4 sisters and 6 brothers. I studied in a Convent School till 4th STD. Then I completed my SSLC at St. Berchman's High School after which I completed my B.Sc at St. Berchman's College. I was born on 10th May 1940. I joined the Redemptorists in 1962. Professed in 1963. Ordained a priest in 1971. Obtained LLB Degree from Law Academy, Trivandrum in 1983.



FR. THOMAS KOCHERRY

A CALL

I studied in a convent school and used to go to school together with my sisters. One day as we were going to school my mother gave us 4 annas to buy sweets. As we were getting out of the gate my mother shouted and said: "You need not buy sweets. If you want you can give the money to beggars." These words did not strike me since we wanted only to buy sweets. There was a small shop in front of the School and we asked the shop keeper to give sweets for 4 Annas. As we were about to get the sweets there came a hand lifted up asking for alms. I gave the money to the beggar and without sweets we went into the class room. There I felt a great feeling and satisfaction. I felt I did something great. This had a deep-rooted impression in my life. I wanted to work for the poor. I wanted to spend my life with the poor. That incident was a call. At that time the expression of working for the poor meant to be missionary for Christ to be away from home - to be far away - to be in the midst of the poor doing all kinds of services for them. I was in the 2nd STD.

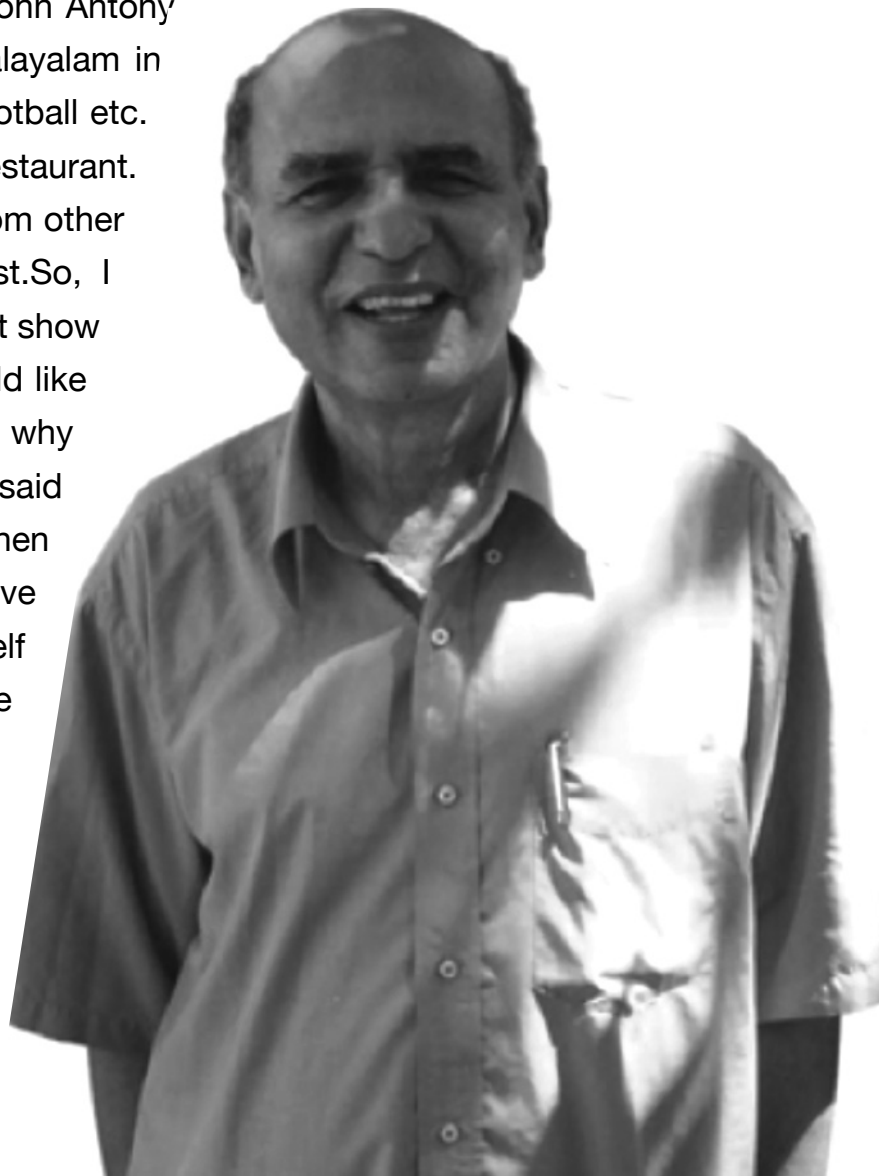
HIGH SCHOOL

I was always a monitor. I was considered to be a leader. But reflecting back I thought I must have been an "yes man" to the class teacher. I was not good in studies. I failed in 7th STD. I was very good in Maths but very weak in English and Hindi. Fr. Gregory Thycherry, Headmaster was my spiritual director. He was an asthmatic person and while he got asthmatic attack he used to go to Kanyakumari to take rest and got relieved and came back. He used to narrate the life, poverty and struggles of the fisherfolks. Then I used to dream of working with them. When I passed SSLC he asked me to join the Diocesan Seminary. I said I would like to continue my college studies. Then he said that I should not go to college studies since there would be a danger of losing vocation. Then I told him that if vocation was lost like that better that it went like that - then it was not vocation at all. If vocation was a genuine call from God no power, no situation could change it. This was my firm belief. Even today I believe in this dimension of vocation.

In college I took Chemistry as my main and Zoology as a subsidiary subject thinking that I would be able to be a Doctor and a Priest at the same time. I was very good in Chemistry and Zoology. During this time once I was admitted to St. Thomas Hospital, Changanassery. This was run by Medical Mission Sisters. After the operation I was in a general ward and I had sleepless nights because of pain. Sr. Agnes MMS used to come to the ward every night with a lantern in her hands. She used to come in front of me and used to give me a good smile. This selfless service inspired me. So, I dreamed I should be in a hospital like that to be a Doctor and a Priest and be available 24 hours both for spiritual and physical services.

I was a good friend of Archbishop Mathew Kavukatt. I told him that I would like to be a Doctor and a Priest. Since my family was in serious financial difficulties I did not want to do medicine in India. He could send me either to Germany or Italy to do the Medicine. He said he would get admission for me outside. It might not be difficult. But he said the problem was different. Canon Law would not allow a priest to be a Doctor. Either I had to be Doctor or a Priest. So, after much reflection I decided to be a priest only.

It was the final year in the college. Fr. John Antony CSSR from Bangalore was studying Malayalam in our college. He used to come to play football etc. and then he used to come with us to the restaurant. He was very human. He was different from other priests. I wanted to be a Redemptorist. So, I expressed my wish to him. But he did not show any interest. Again, I told him that I would like to be Redemptorist. Then he asked me why should I want to be a Redemptorist? I said I would like to work among the poor. Then he said that Redemptorist would not give you such opportunity. In fact, he himself wanted to work among the slum people in Bangalore. But the superiors asked him to go and do Malayalam to begin Malayalam mission in Kerala. Generally, Redemptorists were doing English work of preaching. There was no direct involvement among the poor. Alphonsus started this order to





work among the poor. So, he told me that I could join the Redemptorists provided I took it as a challenge and fight my way through to work among the poor. So, **I accepted this challenge of becoming a redemptorist to work among the poor.**

But there were there difficulties. My father expected me to stay at home to help him to solve the financial difficulties. Fortunately, my younger brothers were good in studies. So, my faith was that if the call was from God, he would look after the family. He would find a way out. This was my strong faith. So, I decided to join the Redemptorists. My father too was a man of faith. I had to go to the Eucharist every day all throughout my life. My father insisted upon that. Though it was a pain for him to accept this, he too saw the hand of God. My father was a man of faith, hardworking, simple. I had to work in the field every day. All these formed me. My mother left us in 1960. All these added more responsibility on to me. However, I left home on 20th May 1962 for Bangalore.

NOVITIATE AND SEMINARY

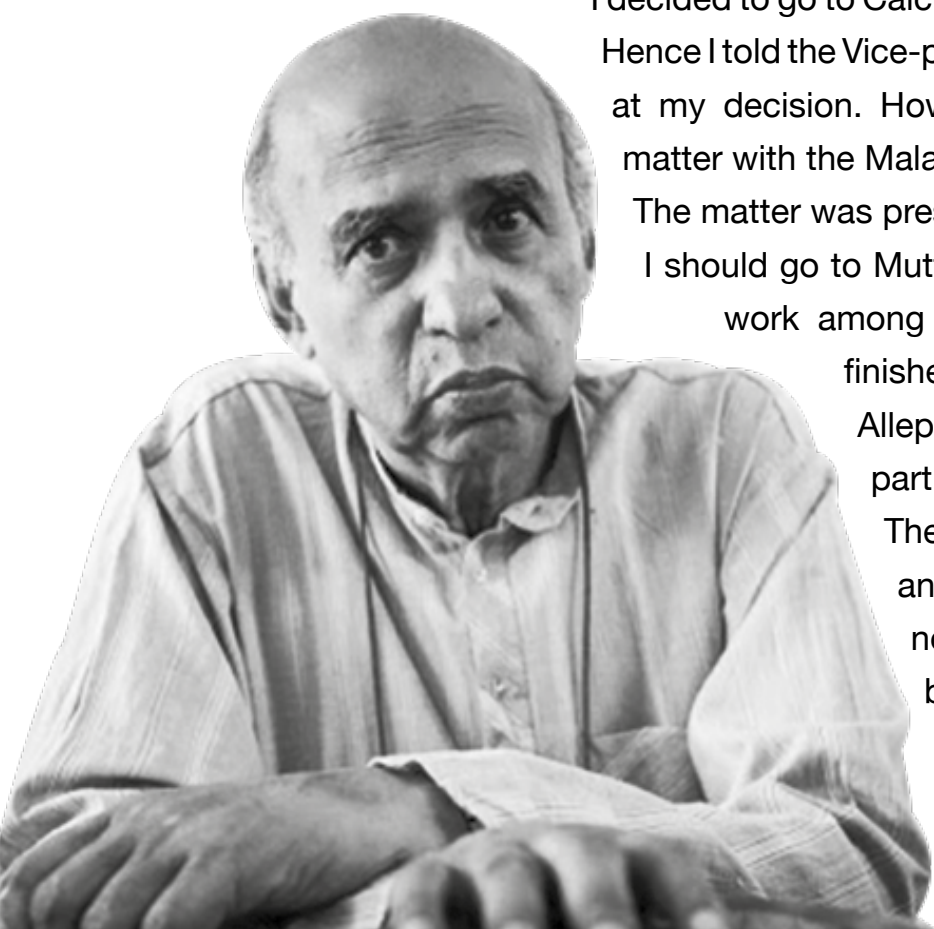
Novitiate was meaningless. I did not enjoy prayer life even. It was a kind of routine traditional prayer life. Negatively it was a challenge. I had to be faithful to the call no matter what difficulties I had. It was away from the world. It was a spirituality centered around a God, who was in heaven, nothing to do with this world. No challenge. Poverty of the people and the challenges of this world had nothing to do with that spirituality. No newspaper! No contact with people!

After profession I went to the seminary. Again, meaningless study like Latin. All old Theology. No challenge. No Newspaper! No contact with the poor around us.

But there was hope. New openings because of Vatican Council-II. We had a good fight in the Seminary to get newspapers. Finally, we got it.

Since we were not allowed to work among the poor the energy was spent in gardenwork, electrical work, cleaning and painting etc. So, I was a popular figure among the superiors. Then we started demanding to work among the poor. After much discussion we were allowed. We also started poultry. Our work among the slum people gave us new life. New theology and new spirituality. The speeches of Cardinal Suenens, Valerian Cardinal Graciously, Archbishop Eugene D'Souza at the Council hall all inspired us. New books were coming out. The book on Theology of Liberation by Gutierrez was the most inspiring one. The Bible classes by Kelleher were very meaningful. The classes by Finbarr, Alvino, Con Casey, were very meaningful. The retreat with Fr. Balager made me to pray. Shared prayer became very meaningful.

Our seminary became a place for the poor boys around. Now we thought that there was meaning for our existence. But at the same time opposition was mounting. This led to 9 of us getting canonical warning. I was ordained in 1971 April at CMI Monastery Church Chethipuzha. It was a simple ceremony. On my return I asked the provincial to go to Raigunj to work among the refugees - the victims of Bangladesh war. I was allowed to go provided I finish my exams early and with a companion. James Chackalackal agreed to come. And I finished my exams early. Dr. Teddy Fernandes also joined. It was a wonderful experience of living in the midst of sufferings and hardships. Eucharist became a living memory. On our return we were exposed to the slums in Calcutta. I was very much attracted to work there. Instead of Kotagiri Holiday I did one-month socio-political analysis at the ISI Bangalore. Also, I did one-month course on Liberation Theology at the ECC Bangalore. These experiences and courses were turning points in my life. Originally my idea of working with the poor meant to help them, service, charity, if possible give them some money. While I was working in the slum in Bangalore it meant development - help the poor to stand on their feet. Give them formal education so that they can get a job and secure their life. Now it meant social dimension. There were structural causes for poverty. Unless the poor become aware of these and root out the root causes, mass poverty cannot be wiped out. The study of socio-political analysis through Marxian tools helped me to understand our society better. Lk. 4/18 became very clear. Lev. 25, Magnificat, Beatiattitudes, Prophets, Exodus etc. became very dynamic and living realities. The sufferings of Jesus became very clear. The word of God became the source and sustenance.



I decided to go to Calcutta to work among the slum dwellers. Hence I told the Vice-provincial, Fr. Ward. He was very happy at my decision. However, he would like to discuss the matter with the Malayalee confreres. He called a meeting. The matter was presented. But all the confreres said that I should go to Muttada and there I would be allowed to work among the fisherfolks. They said they just finished a series of Mission Preaching in Alleppey, Quilon and Trivandrum dioceses particularly in the coastal area parishes. There they saw the magnitude of poverty and exploitation. Preaching alone is not sufficient. It should be supported by action for Justice. Action in favour of justice and preaching justice must be a **Constituent Element of Our**



Preaching and Evangelization. Now I had a feeling of great satisfaction. What I dreamed of when I was joining became a reality in our midst. **A great miracle. Word became flesh.**

MUTTADA

After one-month mission in KGF both in English and Tamil I decided to go to Muttada. The mission preaching in KGF

by 9 of us was another new experience. First survey of the place, sat together and decided the needs of the people and then worked out the topics of the mission sermons and then actual writing of the sermons. My topic was SOCIAL JUSTICE. We also staged a play called “Valley of Decision” - based on prophet Amos. After the mission preaching I left for Muttada. For the first six months I was very busy with Mission preaching in coastal areas. This helped me to understand the fisherpeople. During those six months the community had several meetings concerning our mission in Kerala. We had a study session on the history and culture of Kerala. Then we had a session in Liberation Theology. Finally, the community decided to work among the poor and in solidarity with them. We must work together with the poor for wholeness. I volunteered. Then the Community wrote to the Provincial Fr. Bernard. He gave me permission. Then I met the Bishop of Trivandrum, Bishop Pereira. He took me to different coastal parishes. I did not want to be a parish priest. I wanted to live in a hut, like the fisherpeople. But the Bishop was saying that as a priest it was impossible to live in their midst. First he asked me to work in a parish and after becoming friendly with them I could go into any experiment. Finally, he took me to Poothura. It was a small parish. About 200 families. 100% catholics and fisherpeople. The parish was vacant. The parish priest was chased away by people. I agreed to take over the parish.

POOTHURA 1973-1980

James Chackalackal and myself went to Poothura with a few things in our hands. James was in a cassock and I was in shirt and pants. We visited all the houses on the same day and James introduced me to the people as the new parish priest. For the first 6 months I was alone looking after ordinary parish duties. No changes. But active participation of the people in the mass was enlisted. Tuition programme for the children and catechism for all, including the youth began. When I was free I used to go and pull the “Kambavala” and I used to get a share for my work. I was cooking my own food.

After six months James and Mathew joined me. Mathew said that it was not a permanent commitment but only for 5 years, to try. Two of us were free to work and one was available for



cooking and looking after parish duties. Besides, we started tuition programme and beedi making for the boys. Medical Mission Sisters joined us. After that we planned together all the activities. We worked our joint activities like tuition, catechetics, survey in Thazhampally, credit union, Balawadies etc. We had Friday evaluation and planning and Eucharist together.

Dispensary was a good contact point. Preparation of classes were done together. Cultural programmes by the children was impressive. Children's saving scheme was very successful. Later another Community was started in Mampally. Many came and went. But Philomine Marie, Luke Cheriyan and Theramma remained till this day against all ups and downs. The 1977 flood isolated Anjengo area and Poothura from the main land. We stood together and did great work. Fr. Cletus was the convenor. All the helps were handled by the relief committees. Later on, the Political parties began to react. Then we closed down the activities.

Bishop Pereira died and Fr. Mark Netto became the administrator. His departure was a big loss. We lost a friend and supporter. Mathew wanted to move to Wayanad. He already started his work by 1978. James was prepared to go with him. So, we had an evaluation of the whole experiment and submitted it to the Provincial. Mathew and James decided to move to Wayanad and I decided to join Muttada and continue all the activities except being the Parish Priest. We also told the Administrator about handing over the parish. He requested us to continue till the new Bishop is appointed. James and myself agreed to this. Then the new Bishop was appointed - Jacob Acharuparampil. We were consulted and we supported him being the Bishop. As soon as he became Bishop we expressed our wish of handing over the parish. However, a strong signature campaign took place asking the Bishop to request us to remain. The Bishop asked us to reconsider our leaving in the light of peoples' request. So, we continued for some more time. During this time, we organized a massive General Mission in Mampally, Anjengo, Poothura, Aryathuruthy and Thazhampally parishes together. Jose Kaleekel, James Culas, Aloysius Fernandez, Nicholas, Joseph Thomas, Mathew Oottukulam, James Chackalackal and I preached the sermons, organized Bible classes, singing etc. On the final day we cancelled Sunday masses in all the churches and people gathered in Anjengo Maidan. Bishop was the main celebrant and all of us con-celebrated. Jose preached the homily. About 10000 people gathered. All sang together and prayed together. At the end Bishop expressed the wish that such a renewal would take place in all the Foranes. We did a similar mission in Poonthura also. In 1978 Anjengo Boat workers' Union was formed to protect the fishermen

against all sorts of corruption and exploitation in the Anjengo ARDC project. When all the boats were ceased the Union declared agitation. I decided to go on an indefinite fast in front of Secretariate. All the coastal parish Priests supported the decision. Then the Fisheries Minister called for a conference and worked out of settlement. Fr. Mark Netto was present at the conference. It was a victory for the fishermen. This coming together inspired us to form Trivandrum District Fisherpeople Union.

Finally, we handed over the parish to the diocese. James and Mathew went to Wayanad. I joined Muttada Community. All the activities in Poothura continued. Medical Mission Sisters took the responsibility in the follow up. But I continued to go for the Friday meetings, evaluation and planning. But my main responsibility was to organize the Union in Trivandrum District. By now Kerala Swathanthra Malsya Thozhilali Federation was formed. In 1979 Fr. Paul Arackal went on a fast in front of the Secretariate asking for compensation for Kattoor Babu who was killed by the trawlers. Also, there was another demand asking for Marine Fishing Regulation Act to be enacted by the Assembly. And I was the convenor of the Agitation Committee. The fast was ended and both the demands were conceded.

1981 AGITATION

In 1980 December Kerala Assembly passed “Kerala Marine Fishing Regulation Act”. Three purposes it had: 1. To conserve Fish Resources 2. To protect traditional Fisherpeople 3. To bring about law and order in the sea. Under the power of this act Kerala Govt. banned Trawling during June, July and August in Kerala Sea, in May 1981. Within a week the trawler owners met the Fisheries Minister and the ban was lifted in Neendakara. The Union immediately went into action. Entered the Fisheries Director’s office and sat there. The police arrested all of us. On the following day onwards, the Union started picketing Minister’s house. And then Joychen Antony and myself started an Indefinite Fast in front of the Secretariate. Fisher people went into action in support of the Fast - 100%. Air-port was blocked, Railways were blocked, National High ways were blocked. In Quilon also the union went into action. Later on, KSMTF joined the stir. Finally, the stir was ended with the appointment of Babu Paul Commission to suggest ways and means to conserve fish resources.

Fr. Varkey, the Provincial appointed Mathew as the Parish Priest in Muttada Parish. This created a lot of tension. James too came back to Muttada, as Wayanad activities did not progress.





Mathew tried to form a parish council in the Parish which met with opposition from the St. Vincent De Paul Society Group. This ended up with a clash. The Bishop was forced to appoint a commission, to look into the problems.

On 2nd May, 1982 the Angengo fishermen and Poothura fishermen had clashes which led to the police firing, killing Gilbert from

Poothura. While the firing took place, I was saying mass in Kunnumpuram in Trivandrum. After the mass I returned to Muttada. Then I got a Telephone call from J. Peter from Poothura informing me about the police firing. As soon as I left Poothura after informing the news to different newspapers. The Malayala Manorama news reporter Balachandran too accompanied me to Poothura. All women were in Arayathuruthy. Nobody was moving to Angengo from Poothura and from Anjengo to Poothura. Police was everywhere. I was travelling from Poothura to Anjengo and back. A lot of rumors were there that each side was getting ready to attack the other. I tried to remove the rumors. I did not sleep on 2nd May. On 3rd evening by 11 p.m. I was arrested at Thonnikadavu by SP Lakshmana, "Rajan Murder Case Fame." And I was locked up in Kadackavoor Police station. Only on the 5th day I, was released on bail. After arresting me only FIR was prepared and I could over-hear Lakshmana dictating the FIR. I was accused of conniving with the people to murder the police, before the police firing took place. 86 priests in Trivandrum diocese protested against police implicating me into a false case. The Bishop of Trivandrum did not lift a finger over it.

By this time Fr. A. George submitted his Muttada Report. He said St. Vincent De Paul Group was responsible for all problems. It should be banned. However, in order to bring about peace in the Muttada Parish it would be better to appoint another as Parish Priest.

Using the report, the Bishop of Trivandrum wrote to the Provincial asking him to remove me from Trivandrum diocese and appoint a new Parish Priest. This created a lot of protest. Finally, the provincial and consultors came down to enquire and they found no reason for a transfer. But the Bishop insisted upon the transfer. Finally, the Provincial sent me the order asking me to take up my residence in Bangalore. After much consultation, prayer and reflection I obeyed the order.

REFLECTION

During fasting I experienced the presence of the Spirit. The words of Isaiah became mine. The clarity of purpose and willingness to continue fasting was evident. In the lock up I experienced the divine suffering and Isolation. Wrongly accused and jailed like Christ himself.

Transfer again another injustice inflicted upon by the powers that be. Political as well as religious powers were acting in similar patterns.

MY PRESENT INVOLVEMENT WITH THE NFF: 1983-90

After much discussion and dialogue finally, I did go to Bangalore. The Provincial allowed me to continue my work among the fisherfolks and I was elected Chairman of the NFF and finished my LLB and started practicing in Kerala High Court. A series of meetings were organized in different parts of the Country on "FISHERIES DEVELOPMENT AND FISH WORKERS as a preparation for the International Conference on the same theme as a counter conference organized by the FAO in Rome. The NFF sent 10 persons to attend the Rome Conference. I could not go because my passport was impounded by the Passport Officer because of the police firing case in Poothura.

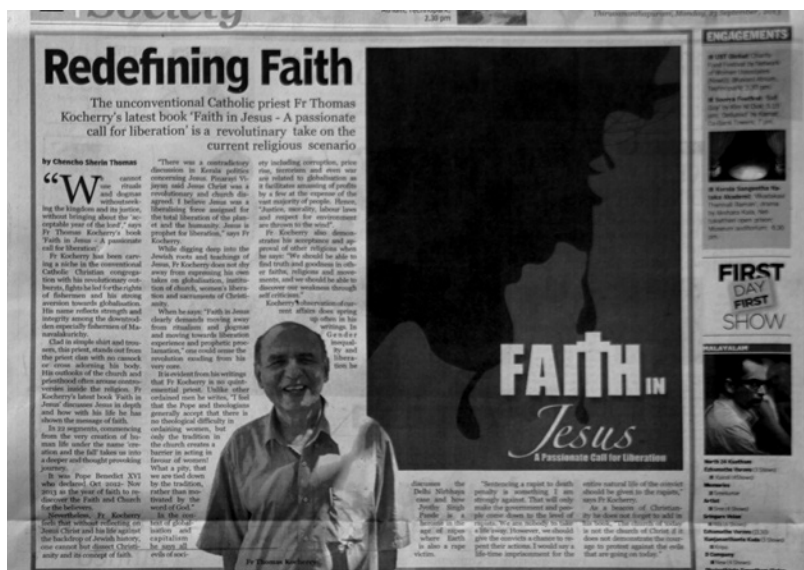
SPLIT IN KSMTF AND 1984 AGITATION

KSMTF organized a massive agitation in 1983 to ban monsoon trawling etc. But Fr. Albert Parisavila on his own cancelled the agitation because he did not want to have anything to do with me. We were campaigning against the transfer. In short he did not like the Trivandrum group. This situation forced us to polarize and split. The vast majority of fisheworkers came under the banner of KSMTF and Jose Kaleekel became the President. And Fr. Parisavila formed an organization called All Kerala Independent Fishermen's Federation. It is not yet registered as a Trade Union. Whereas KSMTF was registered as trade union in 1984.

In 1984 we organized a massive agitation, which was historic in all aspects. Srs. Philomine Marie, Alice Lukose and Mr. Velayudhan became symbols of sacrifice and secularity. Calicut became the center of agitation. Alleppey became part of the agitation. Left Front came in support of the agitation.

REFLECTION

Split was amust. From communal to secularity. From Authoritarianism to Democratic process. From Caste dimension to worker's dimension. KSMTF became dynamic and Powerful. The Agitation became known on the National and the International level. The discussion on Liberation Theology started in all the leading secular papers in India. The Church as an Institution stood with the Rich and the Ruling class. Ours was prophetic witness of Priests, Nuns and Lay people. They worked together:





Christians, Hindus, Muslims and Non-believers stood together and worked together for the good of the poor.

THE LEGAL STRUGGLE

Since 1984 KSMTF got impleaded in all the Fishing cases in the Kerala High Court. I was arguing the cases with the help of Advocate M.M. Cherian.

MILITANT TRADE UNION

NFF took the initiative in forging solidarity with other Trade Unions. I contacted all the National Trade Unions. But they did not want to have a collaboration. However, HMKP led by George Fernandes, Kamkar Agadi Led by Dr. Datta Samant, and some other unions came together to chalk out a joint struggle.

1987 AS CSSR CONSULTOR

I was elected as a consultant by the whole province. I had to be involved more in the CSSR. I was appointed Secretary of Formation. Also, I was appointed Superior of St. Gerard's Community in Bangalore. All these meant more time needs be spent in Bangalore and less time for the organization of NFF. It was a new experience to work in the EPC. We tried to work in consensus. The joint secretaries and the secretariate worked very well and we were able to achieve many things. 400 pages of Resource materials, Ratios for all stages of formation and the Three Thrusts were worked out for all stages of Formation, etc.

REFLECTION

Physically I did not stay for very long periods. in Bangalore. But it was a new experience to belong to such a community like St. Gerard's. Everybody loved to belong to St. Gerard's. Though we were all involved in many different activities and we were very strong characters, we were able to appreciate one another and support one another.

KANYAKUMARI MARCH, 1987-1989

The general body of the NFF met in Bangalore in Dec. 1987 and had a sharing of many case studies. The main focus was pollution of waters in different parts of the country. Mangroves & Tourism. The natural conclusion was that NFF should do something in this line. It was proposed that we should take up a campaign with a slogan - "Protect Waters/ Protect Life". It was decided we should organize a series of consultations with other environmental groups, trade unions etc. in Goa, Orissa, and Kanyakumari. After these consultations the Executive Committee met in Nagercoil in July 1988 and decided to go ahead with the Campaign.

We formed different committees like Publicity, Finance, Cultural, Food and Reception etc. Many groups and individuals collaborated. A series of seminars were organized in Delhi, Calcutta, Madras, Trivandrum, Goa etc., Souvenir, Journalists survey, on Drinking water, break through, Despite Breakup were published. Five posters were printed and distributed; two different stickers were printed. Many schools participated. CAPART, Ministry of Environment and Forest helped the campaign financially. Actual march started from Calcutta and Bombay from 2nd of April, 1989 and ended on May 1st, 1989.

REFLECTION

It was a great experience. Two years of preparation, many groups and individuals participated. From the struggles of people for survival people coined the slogan - **“Protect Waters/ Protect Life”**. People from all walks of life, Hindus, Muslims and Christians all came together. This coming together called a new **Secular Sprituality**. A sense of the **Absolute-Justice, Struggles Brotehrhood And Sisterhood, Equality, Freedom, Selfelssness, Generocity of The Unorganised Working Class** kept us together.

FAITH HISTORY

Turning Points and Experience of the Lord.

- The money from my mother and experience with the beggar. Experience of the Lord and the Call.
- Fr. Gregory Thycheril's talks on fisherfolks was a challenge to go to them. It was a call to be evangelized by the crucified people of the Lord.
- Hospital experience with Sr. Agnes-humanness and the Divine.
- Choice had to be made whether to be a Doctor or a Priest, helped by the Archbishop Mathew Kavukkattu.
- The responsibility at home gave me growth and character formation. It was a struggle.
- Meeting John Antony was an Experience of the LORD and Call.
- Leaving home was very painful. My father felt it. Painful separation to do something greater.
- Inhuman less and negative experiences at the novitiate challenged me to remain in the call. The divine works in the most unexpected and in the negative.
- Continuous struggle, fighting and singleness of purpose kept me alive and





realized my call. E.g. Getting newspapers working in the slums near the seminary, working with the refugees in Raigunj etc.

- Opposition and canonical warning as cross and suffering of Jesus.
- The course at the ISI, ECC gave me new insight into faith and liberation theology.
- The retreat with Fr. Balaguer S.J. Taught me how to pray.

- Experience of slums in Calcutta was another call. This led to the meeting of the vice-provincial with Malayalee confreres and the decision of working with the fisherfolks in Kerala.
- Non-directive method and decision through consensus taught me a new experience of the lord-he is in every person. Majority and minority democracy is faulty. Creative spirit in everyone.
- 6 months explicit proclamation gave me the experience of the power of the word.
- Poothura – my cradle – my commitment to the crucified people. Poothura taught me, developed me, evangelized me. It was the experience of the lord.
- Working in collaboration with the MMS, CSSR and Lay People. Communion and constant celebration of Eucharist.
- Unionization taught me political content of my faith.
- Being locked up in the kadackavoor lockup gave me the experience of the lord in the gethsemane.
- Support of 86 priests and the people gave me the power to go ahead. Transfer from Muttada to Bangalore was another experience of the sufferings of the Lord. Split of the Federation gave me a new insight into our dynamics - struggle-division-struggle-unity.
- Muttada Community and Poothura Community was experience of communion: a continuous eucharist.
- Practice in the court. St. Alphonsus left the Court looking for true justice. I went to the court looking for justice even there. it is part of our struggle.
- As Chairman of the NFF experienced secular leadership as the experience of the kingdom, one of service and dialogue, persuasion, decentralization and federal character of structure as vital.
- As CSSR Consultor worked on consensus.



- St. Gerard's community life was rich. Experience of Communion and solidarity in Jesus.
- My Appachan's departure brought home his greatness and his influence in my life. His love for the poor, his simplicity were divine expressions and sacramental presence of the lord.
- Kanyakumari march was the experience of Brahman:- God is everywhere.

Conclusion: I can write many pages on each point. Now that I have no time I'm not developing each point. I'll be developing each of the above point. My support system is in that. My life goal is found in those points. My spirituality is very clearly depicted in each of those point.

Life Goals: To bring about greater justice, freedom, equality which leads to communion with one another and with the lord. The process is structure, division, struggle, unity. To pray and live the prayer - "our father".

Frustrations: The contradictions that exist in Class, Caste, Gender and in Environmental destructions. The imperfections and limitations in me when I use people for my own ends and tasks. I'm frustrated when people don't keep their words, then things don't happen as we have planned. The constant shifting around and transfers. When I cannot operate because all what I need e.g. books, notes, clothes, etc. are in different places. More task oriented than person oriented.

Support System: The ongoing struggles of the crucified people of the Lord. The struggles of the fish workers and communion with them. The word of God, Prayer and Eucharist when these are celebrated among friends and with deep sharing and communion. MMS communities in Poothura and Mampally. CSSR communities in the Seminary, Muttada, Poothura, St. Gerard's, EPC, Periyavillali, My Appachan and Ammachy and their presence through their simplicity and their love for us and the poor. My own brothers and sisters. PCO Team. Chunkandai meetings and friendships, Thirumalai Ashrams Mithranikethan Hospital., Priest friends like James Culas, Jose Kaleekel, Aloysius Fernandez, Solomon, Joseph Thomas and Dominic George SJ etc. Sister friends like Mercy Kootiyani and Elsa etc. Friends like Mercy Alexander, J. Peter, T. Peter, Joychen, etc. God that is alive in all creation. The Cross and sufferings that we experience. The SPIRIT, that is alive in persons and Creations. The PSA, Dynamic Action, Delhi Form, NFF Net Works and their solidarity. There are no priorities in what I said above. They are interlinked.

FULFILMENT IN MY LIFE

I'm very much contented, fully satisfied. I feel it is a great privilege that I got this opportunity to be with the fishworkers. I feel it a great privilege to have all these friends. I feel proud of myself. I continuously thank God for giving me all these opportunities and friends. I'm what I'm today because of others. I have nothing to claim as my own. I belong to others.

THE DIFFICULTIES I EXPERIENCE

Long travels and constant travels I hate. I really cannot make it. I'm really fed up with eating in hotels. I am really angry with myself when I cannot have a community to celebrate Eucharist and Prayer. I really prefer to stay in a fishing village and be part of them in all their affairs. The Ruling Class and the Governments are useless and they cannot deliver the goods to anybody. The lack of responses sometimes from the fishworkers. The personality clashes among friends and in the Mission context.

MY GOALS FOR THE NEXT FIVE YEARS

To build up the Union in K.K.Dt., A.P., W.B, Ernakulam Dt., Strengthen the network of the NFF all over India. Set up the office of the NFF in Trivandrum. To develop and facilitate the transfer of Chairperson's office to a new person. To Develop cultural and faith context in Trivandrum, Ernakulam and Periyavillai.

MY GOAL FOR THE NEXT 6 MONTHS

To finish the work of the Task Force and the National Convention on Fisheries Policy and submit the report to the Planning Commission by October 1990.

What I learned from my writing of this paper. I've been reflecting all these. But I never put down these in writing. I did not have the patience to do it. Now I'm happy that at least I've written this much. But I'm not satisfied. I've to develop all the turning points with lot of reflections. I was asked to share my experiences many time by the friends and journalists. I got fed up with sharing my life. Now I can give a copy to anybody so that one may get an idea about my life. After reading this paper if anybody asks me further questions I'm prepared to answer. Now I can look at my life as one WHOLE. I can be questioned and supported when I reveal myself to others. This paper can be one of the ways of revealing myself to others.



6. MY LIFE AS A RIPPLE

I see my life as a ripple or 'a few drops of water' together in the beginning of my life, and it flows down in a natural rhythm; changes happened at varied phases to reach the ocean.

I was born in a catholic family. My father was a merchant, we were five children, 3 boys and 2 girls. My father died when I was 4 years old. So, I have only a vague memory of him. It was the time of post second world war. So there were difficulties of all sorts, especially in finance. I can remember now certain difficulties, that I experienced during my school life. There was no free education in those days as we have now and we five children were attending the school. But my mother was very able and efficient and she managed well. So enjoyed my childhood days as I was the youngest of the family. Everybody loved me, gave me much attention and care.



LUKE CHERIAN

I was studying in the Fifth Form when I went to see a relative of mine very sick, admitted in a nearby Govt, Hospital. There were no other hospital or clinic as we have now. He had Pneumonia and the drug 'Penicillin' was not available in India. He was suffering a lot. I could not do anything for him and nobody was helping him also. I found myself helpless. He died after some time in front of me. His death touched me deeply. After that I thought I would become a nurse and take care of the suffering people. I finished my matriculation in 1945.

SECOND PHASE OF THE FLOW OF THE TINY POOL

After writing the exam for matric I happened to see an 'Ad' in one of the papers as well as in some leaflets, a beautifully pictured nurse in uniform, and above it the details of training, salary, accommodation, when and how to apply etc. It was the advertisement of W.A.C. (I) with the rank of British Officers. I applied for it without mentioning anything at home. In no time I got a reply with a second-class Railway ticket to Bangalore inviting me for an interview. When I told the news at home, everybody stood against me and opposed me. But I slowly some way or other managed to get the silent permission. One of our neighbours who was a family friend working In the Air force in Bangalore was returning on the same day as I was supposed to go. So, I went with him and attended my interview. There were so many young women from Kerala for this interview, and we started to talk and came to know that most of them were joining the clerical post as they were afraid to take up nursing which needed to work during the night and seemed to be dangerous as far as women were concerned. The contract was for the minimum period of 2 years. From then on, I started to think about myself, my future, my vocation etc., I did not like the local sisters because of their dress and attitudes, I thought they were not kind and loving, they treated others with partiality. So, I had no attraction to be one of them. Yet I wanted to be a nurse. So, I started to pray to show me the path.



I had a cousin who was a seminarian in Kottayam and we were friends. I used to write him and tell him all my difficulties and anxieties. In response, he wrote to me about the Medical Mission Sisters in Kottayam who look different from the others and that there were European Sisters as well among them.

By 1947 after finishing my contract I returned home. I collected more news

about the MMS and after reflection and prayer, I decided to join the sisters and go to the mission countries. So, after some days I told my mother and a brother that I wanted to join the sisters in Kottayam. They could not believe me and they teased me about it. But when they knew that I was serious, they strongly opposed me; and they arranged a few marriage proposals and some people came to see me. But I told them that I have decided to go to a convent. So, that stopped. But there were some reactions about that. The more they objected, and reacted, the more I became firm and determined. From my behavior and attitude they knew that I was convinced and determined, They did not know what to do; so I explained again nicely to my mother and brother that I wanted to be a nursing sister, these sisters are kind and broadminded, and there are hospitals of their own where patients are well cared for and I also will be doing the same after becoming a sister. I presumed permission and wrote to MMS in charge at Kottayam. I was called for an interview. First thing I told them was that I had been working in W.A.C. (1) fearing that it may stand against my joining them. I was accepted, and asked to return with necessary articles within two weeks in June 1947. Here the stream which was flowing without proper direction started to flow with determination and purpose.

FOURTH PHASE OF THE STREAM

My life began as an aspirant of MMS in Kottayam, in June 1947. Since I had no previous experience with the life of the sisters, convent life was a strange phenomena to me in the very beginning. I found the rule of silence very queer and difficult. Life style itself was different. But as I was determined, I had no difficulty to adjust to anything. But prayer life I found difficult as I didn't know what is meditation. Since I was willing and trying to meditate or pray, I was told that was enough and not to worry.

There were special days for home people to come and visit us. Everybody except me had visitors and I felt bad, but I knew that they were testing me. Since I had been away from home previously, for two years my difficulty became less and less. My eldest brother visited me after ten years only.

After two months in August, I was accepted as a postulant. We were 3 in the group. But after some days one was sent home and the other was sent to Patna for nursing. After a month two more joined me after finishing nursing In Rawalpindi. In Feb. 1948 we entered the

Novitiate in Kottayam. The novitiate was pleasant though there was not much work other than washing, gardening and other domestic works besides, study of spiritual life, church history and constitution of our Society. I was happy and peaceful and I could pray. Looking back, the understanding of God and spirituality is quite different. My life was flowing well and I was quite satisfied. The novitiate got over. I made my first vows.

FIFTH PHASE OF THE STREAM

I made my first commitment in Feb. 1950, after reflecting and preparing myself I knew that I was making it for my whole life. The explanation and understanding of vows were very superficial according to the present experience and meaning of life with the oppressed people. For example, vow of poverty means not only dependence but sharing; not only loving the poor by distributing something to them but to be in solidarity with the poor which demands our cooperation in their struggles of life and help to build a community of people of God and also not having institutions catering the rich which is a mockery and injustice done to the poor.

Some months after my first commitment I was sent to study Pharmacy in Patna because there was a need of a pharmacist in our hospital. I had no choice. We four sister were sent to Patna-two for nursing and two for pharmacy. Patna is a place conducive for T.B. So, sisters who seemed strong and healthy only were sent for nursing in Patna. Life in Patna was very hard in many aspects. The climate, food, language and the attitudes of MMS in authority and in charge found to be difficult to adjust and the study was not of my liking. Any way God gave me strength and will to stay there until the study was over. One of the four of us died there, after a year with T.B. Meningitis and a second one was sent back to Kottayam when she became sick. After my study was over, I was assigned to work in Bharananganam. I was happy there and worked for ten years.

The stream wanted to flow in an unknown land to face challenges. While I was working in Bharananganam, my longing to go to mission countries came upper most in my mind. (Mission was interpreted in a different perspective at that time) I told our Mother General when she came to Kerala for visitation about it, and she kept this in her mind. When opportunity came, I was given an assignment to go to Kenya – Africa.

Mission in Africa was a challenge to me. In 1966 March I went to Kenya alone. That was the first time I went alone that too to an unknown continent by Plane. Though I was afraid a bit, I did not show any sign of it; I fully trusted in the providence of God. Without any difficulty I reached my destination in Kenya. Kenya got her independence from the British in Jan. 1966. There were so many Indians (They call them Asians) as settlers. Though the Indians are friendly with Africans, they kept the Africans at a distance. So, in general the Africans





did not like the Indians too, but as a missionary sister I was accepted and we mutually loved.

In Kenya there were no proper buildings for schools or churches as we have here. And our hospital was in a rural area and a restructured house to serve for a hospital. With very little facilities. As there were only few hospitals and the distance between the hospitals were great and transportation facilities were very minimum, the ordinary sick

people found it difficult to reach any hospital.

Climate, People, language, customs and even sickness were different from what I was used to. But I picked up the language and started a good relationship with people and often people took me for a Kenyan because of my colour and the language I spoke. In Kenya women have to work both in the house and in the farm. Polygamy was practiced by all irrespective of religion and women in general were happy because the work-load will be shared and each one will have a separate house or hut.

Working in Africa was enjoyable. The place is beautiful with different kinds of animals, birds, plants, flowers, fruit trees and a very good climate. The Kenyans are a happy go lucky people. They are very hospitable and courteous; they would not pass anybody without greeting in few sentences.

During and after 2nd Vatican council I was in Kenya and we used to discuss and reflect a lot about the church, people of God, liturgy and mission. In our community itself we were preparing for the coming chapter in 1967 which also helped me a lot in the vision of mission. We collaborated in parish activities with Dutch Mill Hill fathers who were very radical. I also worked in Kenyan Govt. Hospital for three years when one hospital was built by the Austrian govt for Kenya in honour of Mother Dengal who was an Austrian by birth and the Foundress of our Congregation. The Kenyan Govt. asked 3 M.M.S. to work in that hospital and I was one of them. When I finished 9 years in Kenya, I returned to India for a furlough programme in 1974.

THE STREAM WAS NOT CONTENTED YET

I wanted to give more of myself to the mission; I was in a search; I came back with an open mind and heart. The changes what I saw after 9 years were fascinating and encouraging. The church and the people of God seemed on the process of renewal and the work of the spirit of God was very much alive.

After the chapter in 1973 a document called 'The Common Purpose' was sent to each sister and explanation of it was given in each house. The Common Purpose was a challenge and an answer to my search. The main thrust of it was to focus our mission to the oppressed, exploited and the marginalized people where nobody like to go.

During my furlough I attended a seminar on socio-political and economic analysis by Peter D'Mellow which actually was the preparation to face the challenges. I volunteered to go with a group to any place in Kerala. Someone suggested Trivandrum District. But it needed time to find out the details and other personnel. As it took more than six months, I returned to Kenya in 1974 itself, and told the authorities in Kenya of my intention of returning soon.

A TURNING POINT IN MY LIFE

My experience during my furlough in Kerala was so strong and convincing specially with the life experiences of two persons - Peter D'Melloe and Thomas Kocherry who stayed with us during the course. They were living examples of Christ the Prophet. When Thomas Kocherry took 'Sacraments' during the programme he explained that many of the events in our life are real sacraments. In July 1975 I came back from Kenya to join the group to go to Poothura. Everything was ready to start the mission in Poothura.

THE RISK

Though the land and language are known to me, I was entirely in an unknown field of work. I have only experience of working in an institution where every thing was set and in order. Even though I was ready to face the challenge and willing to change my way of life, from my attitudes, habits and standards of life. I experienced a lot of frustration and tension and difficulties. At the same time, I experienced hope come alive within me because of our togetherness and support with the group of Redemptorist Priests who were in Poothura. Every week we came together to reflect evaluate and plan etc. I found light and strength through reflection of scripture together in our group which often touched my inner being from our own experience. Then worship and prayer became meaningful and easier.

Experience of life together in the midst of struggles, human limitations, brokenness and death helped me to enter into relationship with people more deeply and thus in solidarity with the oppressed and exploited. We were able to respond to the needs by sharing our talents, skills, knowledge and values in the health and educational field. The awareness of injustice and exploitation suffered by the working class made us ready to stand with and to support them in their struggles.

For an entry point, our main focus in mission was children and women through health & education. As a sign of their acceptance of us they asked us to teach their children and built two Balavadies in Poothra and Thazhampally.

We have adapted the simple life style of the people. One of the houses of the fishermen was rented for us to live and people were welcomed to our house at any time. We have no walls around the house for security; we consider our people as our security and support.





Balavadies started and some local girls were taken and given training. Every week we assembled together with those girls to prepare classes for Balavady children and they practiced how to conduct the Balavady classes. We made stories and songs and put action into it so that the children would be able to dance while singing the children enjoyed dancing and singing. After few months the girls were able

to compose action songs and stories for

children with our help. As remuneration for the teachers, the little amount collected from the parents of the children was given in the beginning. Later on, we approached the Social Welfare Board for aid and some money was given as salary of the teachers. From the Bishop's house, C.R.S. Food was supplied for the noon-meal of the children. Monthly meetings were held for the parents and during the meetings the children displayed before their parents what they studied in the class in the form of action songs. stories, etc. They were very happy to see their children dancing and singing. Talks on health and personal hygiene were given through posters and charts during these meetings. Anniversaries of the Balavadies were conducted and it was a day of great joy for the whole village. They were very proud of their children and the Balavadies.

Fisher-women were helped to form a credit union and rotated the money every week for marketing. When they needed large amount of money, we approached the State Bank for loan. The loan was given to each one of them in her own name and we in turn saw that they paid them back by instalments. Now they were able to go to any bank and get a loan for themselves without recommendation or guarantee. This was a great help for them financially.

In 1977 when the women were abused and treated brutally at the market gate for unreasonable tax, they came to us for help. At that time It was the custom of the Panchayath to auction the market to the public. When the public get the license to collect the tax and fix the rate, they collect them as they like to fill their pocket. But if the Panchayath employs somebody to collect the tax and fix the rate and exhibit to the people, nobody can cheat or abuse. So, we organized the people specially the fisherfolks for a picketing at the gate of the Panchayath. It was the time of the leftist government's rule and it was a great success. For women were able to go to the market without bending themselves to any insolent might. Similarly, they got special buses for taking fishes to distant market after picketing in front of KSRTC bus station in Trivandurm and other places. It was indeed a heartrending sight to see women carrying baskets heavily loaded with fishes and running along the tarred road in the hot sun. They were

not allowed to take fish in the ordinary buses. Drinking water also is still an important issue. In short, we are participating in all the struggles of the fisherfolks. When we are successful in securing our demands like special buses etc. the women are proud of themselves. In fact, it was an experience of resurrection for us.

In 1980 there was an opportunity to apply for a post of branch post master in Poothura. We liked to have the post office near the cooperative society of the church. At that time there was a boy working in the society. He applied for it. In case he didn't get, the location of the post office may be changed to some other place in Poothura. So, I also was asked to apply for it, and I did. As the boy was not of age and I being a sister the authority found me more suitable for the job. And so, I was appointed as the Branch Post Mistress of Poothura. The duration of work was only 4 hours a day. So, I could involve in the other activities after the work. Now I have completed little more than 10 years and I'm retiring in this year. Work in the post office has advantages as well as disadvantages in the following respects:

(1) I could keep contact and good relationship with people even when I am in the P.O. by helping them in their need.

(2) It is a means of self-support

(3) It spared me from physical exertion in the hot sun; but the responsibility is great.

The disadvantages: I felt I was tied up specially when I wanted to go for a meeting or so and when I became sick suddenly. If I wanted to take leave, I had to find a substitute for me. We do not get any leave. It is not easy to find somebody suitable whenever I needed.

THE SUPPORTIVE SYSTEM I HAVE

My living community, Different Groups like PCO, MJM, Dynamic Action Thiruvalla, friends and meetings in Thirumala; society's documents and superiors; coming together for reflection and prayer with friends like Tom, James Kulas, Jose. Kaleekel, Mampally community etc.

FRUSTRATIONS

My limitations, asthma, non-cooperation of our people, some of our parish Priests' attitudes and impressions.

I am grateful for my call to this mission to god and to others whose life and examples were inspiration and strength to me. My community is very considerate about my limitations like sickness and age.



7 SEARCH FOR A MEANINGFUL RELIGIOUS LIFE

I was born and brought up in a traditional family. My early days were spent with my grandparents and uncles who played a major part in my early formation. I have experienced my grandmother's care and concern for the neglected and outcast individuals helping them when others refused. When my uncle and his companion got burned while watching fireworks in the parish church, both of them were brought home and my uncle insisted that his companion stay with him in the same room and get the same treatment and food that he was getting. These events had created a lasting impression in my mind. The same attitude I also experienced from my mother who always had a soft heart for the poor and neglected ones.



SR. PHILOMINE MARIE

My family was not a churchy people, going for Holy mass everyday etc. But ordinary Christians who attended Sunday Mass and said evening prayers daily. I believed in the God who rewards the good people and punished the bad. Every action of mine was motivated by fear of punishment and an effort to enter in to the good book of God to enter heaven. Anything that was done to serve the body was earthly. Prayers and sacrifices (denial of good things) were to please God and go to heaven. I never thought of becoming a saint - saint was someone who is without fault and I recognized lot of bad qualities in me especially anger, stubbornness etc.

RELIGIOUS VOCATION

Religious life was understood as a better way of life to please God and to go to heaven. Services to others were also consider a means for my sanctification rather than love for them, though I had a concern for them and was always ready to help them. By caring for them I am serving God was a conviction in me.

During religious formation and afterwards there were certain changes in my understandings, to respect and love human beings as they are created in the image of God and we are all children of God. The study of Bible and following the teachings of Jesus gave me enlightenment in the meaning of service to others and motivation to love them as sisters and brothers.

During this period of my life I tried to find God in the doctrines and dogmas of the church. God was very impersonal and therefore strict observance of the laws of the church and religious Congregation was my spirituality. Time spent in prayer and meditation were the measurement of my holiness. During these years my studies, renewals, and retreats created some conflict in my mind regarding my perception of God, spirituality etc. I recognized God as Loving and compassionate Being, who loved the good and the bad alike. This made me to serve others as Children of the loving God, not for getting any reward.

After the Vatican II and the 1967 chapter of MMS, there was a call for a change in our way of life and services. The society's new direction and constitution was spelt out in the document of 1967. The freedom given and the responses made by a few of the sisters were not acceptable to me. I expressed strong resistance to them. Being in leadership position this created some conflict in the community too.

The reflection made in the community before 73 chapter and my own search for the authenticity of these changes in discussions, reflections and readings in liberation theology especially from Latin American context helped me very much to change my perceptions. I am a person who commit whole heartedly in orientation, through workshops, seminars, self-duty etc. The contact with friends and likeminded people were a great support to affirm my convictions. The injustices in the system, the cause of poverty - our inability to provide basic necessities of life, the exploitation and marginalization in the society were of great concern to me.

At this time, I was administrator of St. Thomas Hospital Chethipuzha and also the mission co-coordinator of the district. I tried all my expertise in administration to reorient the hospital to the new direction taken by the society-to serve the poor and the marginalized. Since the health system is within unjust structure any changes in the system was almost impossible. Two incidents at this time challenged me to leave the hospital services. I had to ask a person who was poor and needed a complicated operation to go to the Government Hospital (Medical College) for operation, as the cost of the operation with us was high. And he was asked to go. He left crying. Another occasion was when the driver of the ambulance asked for a raise in the salary – I told him that he should live with what he gets Rs. 500/-. But when I calculated Rs. 500/- for 5 persons-food, clothing, education of three children etc., even in the seventies it was too little. How to serve the poor in an institutional set up was a big question before me and finally I decided to leave the hospital and joined the Voluntary Health Association, Kerala Unit.

With the awareness gained through the socio-political analysis and my experiences in the health field for 22 years, I thought I could make some changes in the health care delivery system. I had the support of the Voluntary Health Association of India personnel in organizing the voluntary organizations in Kerala. Our aim was to initiate a community-based health care with a view to create a healthy community with the participation of the people. They are made responsible for their health. Health care is the basic right of the people. The people have to be organized to promote justice in health care delivery. Also, there was an attempt to bring an alternate and traditional system of medicines in the present allopathic-system. There was some progress made in this direction,





but the resistance experienced from the institutional structure and the inexperience of those in the field were discouraging and my search was to be with the poor and exploited experiencing their life struggle.

In my search for a suitable place to situate myself to fulfill my desires, I visited Poothura, a few times. The discussions with Fr. Thomas Kocherry and experiencing the life and involvements of MMS, I decided to be

in the coastal area, but wanted to be in a different community. In one of my visits to Poothura I met Fr. Cletus Gomes, parish priest of Mampally Parish and he invited me to his Parish. Earlier three of us Philo Mylady, Christine Aerathyl and myself had planned to go to Quilon Diocese where the Bishop refused us because we were Syrians. Later only he realized that we belong to an International community and we are the same society as Holy Family Hospital Delhi MMS. By the time the invitation came from Fr. Cletus, the other two companions were already assigned to Northeast and they had left. So, I had to search for other companions to join me. Srs. Leonie, Elise Kurisummootil and Bridget were happy to join me. Both Leonie and Bridget really took it as a challenge to experiment.

On May 1st 1978 we came to Mampally and our request to the Parish Priest was for a simple house to live and Rs. 300/- per month for our maintenance. He found a rented house for us. After we were there, he insisted that we take two acres of the Parish land and make a house there. This was in an isolated place. We wanted to be among the people. After discussions and dialogue, he made a simple house as per our instruction among the people. Within 15 months, before this house was ready, we lived in 3 houses moving from one to the other. This was our first experience of the poor having no house of their own. When we came to Mampally, for the blessing of the house the sisters from Poothura and Redemptorists Priests joined us. Fr. Cletus had high expectations from us as from regular sisters and convents. With the discussions and reflections, we were able to convince him of our directions. To start a Nursery was his first demand for which we agreed and Elise got some preparation at Poothura and started under a tree in the Church Yard. After a few months with the help of Misericordia Germany a multipurpose hall was built and we moved there. A small dispensary in our house was the first entry point for us. There was such a need for curative, and preventive, care. Since there people were not over medicated with allopathic medicines, any simple treatment given by us was very effective. This gave us a boost. Our routine way in a busy dispensary was replaced by human relationship talking about the cause of illnesses and instructing the patient about various possibilities of keeping a healthy environment and other tips. There were two children of three years old not able to walk. With the administration of A+D capsules for ten months both of them started walking normally. This was our first miracle experience.

We came with no plan for involvement and within a few days we were involved in the Nursery, dispensary (24 hours), teaching catechism, preparing for first communion and marriage, house visiting. And we were happy and contented.

We had to initiate ourselves into cooking, cleaning, gathering fire wood, washing etc. and all with the least facilities. It was a great challenge. We were not considered as proper sisters because our house and style of life had no comparison to the life of other sisters in the convents. With some of the leaders we shared our purpose of being there and what we are searching for and our desire to do everything with their participation. We had a neighbour. We used to protect his wife from getting beaten, when he was drunk. Later on he used to ask her find out if we cooked every day and had food. So concerned were they that many supplied us with fish. Once one lady even asked me why the daughters were not getting married. If it was because of financial problem.

In the beginning we had no intention of any economic developmental programmes. But realizing the exploitation of money lenders we started small savings programme and loaning from this. Our house was open for anyone to come at any time. Children came to play, youth came for discussions and older people came with various problems. Sometimes the youth stayed for Bible discussions and reflections. We had no regular hours for anything. By night we were exhausted but contented.

1976 FLOOD EXPERIENCE

Water rose up to any one's surprise on the eastern side from the back water within half an hour time. People were not prepared at all for such a catastrophe. Those who had higher houses sheltered in their house, but to their surprise some of the weaker foundation houses broke down. Pots, pans and furniture were floating great crisis. There was an emergency call and under the leadership of Fr. Cletus, fishermen went to rescue them in their Kattamaram. People on that side were Hindus and those who went to rescue were Christians. Though they lived on the other side of the road, prior to the flood there were no communications between them. By evening everyone was brought to the school and some went to their friends and relatives. These people including children were without food whole day and there were no hotels nearby. I was stuck for some time. How to get rice for these people? Who will cook for them and who will serve? In an Institution we had men and women employed who could be called for help any time. Since the fisherpeople also had nothing to serve them and as they were Hindus they were hesitant with all these confusion in our mind the sisters and few others got together, collected some rice and coconut cooked and served hot meals to everyone in the school, before the men the leaders came to the scene. It was a surprise for them – women taking such leadership. Since then we were called for discussions and planning to any activities in the area. We felt like





Jesus feeding the 5000 and people wanting to make him king. The feeling of acceptance was a great affirmation for us. Also, I recognize our own potential to take leadership. I experienced the power of God within me prompting me to act appropriately in the situation. From that time I tried to develop this recognition within me.

Life with the people, the sharing's with them were very enriching. Their values of sharing from their poverty, their hope

in the midst of misery and helplessness, their simplicity and the hard work, their love for celebrations etc. affected my life and I recognized a growth process within me. When Elise Kurisummoottil left I had to take charge of the nursery. I had no inclination to be with children - theoretically I learned how to behave with children. But it was the greatest challenge for me to take care of them. Because of my inexperience I had to get corrections from other teachers and it was a big humiliation for me. In 1980 sisters from Poothura started a nursery in Anjengo and after few months they got transferred and I had to take charge of that also. Then Theramma left for intercultural experience and somehow finally I had to be responsible for the whole nursery programme for some time. During this time Mahilasamajams were also started and the nurseries were under their care. But in reality, we had to be behind them.

CRS FOOD

To introduce this program through the parish was one of the desires of Fr. Cletus. Some of us were not for this charity food. But to compromise with Fr. Cletus we agreed to do this. We were very particular that the beneficiaries were identified from the poorest without any discrimination whether they were Christians or not. Also, we had our own method of giving health education. One of the advantages of this program was that every month at least hundred families were visited, checking the sanitation and food habits of the members.

FORMATION OF THE BOAT WORKERS UNION

In the initial stages we were not included in the planning and the decision-making process. When it came to the grassroot organization in Mampally sisters were called. We were asked to follow instructions from Poothura. It was very painful for us and though we resisted initially but because of our relationship with people and our determination to be part of the movement we followed "orders". With this organization process, we extended our involvement from Mampally to Agnengo. When Tom decided to fast unto death, asking for the audited account of the ARC project we conducted corner meetings, conscientizing people in the issue. It was the first experience of such struggle. Because the Government agreed to our demands, the fast did not take place. But the success of this struggle was a boost for fisherpeople and they realized the need for forming a trade union. The process for the same started with Tom taking the lead. Many struggles were organized by taking up various demands of the people.

There were conflicts in the sea with the trawler owners and traditional fishermen. Earlier it was considered law and order problem. Later it was recognized as the violation of the rights of the traditional fishermen. Understanding the situation, the fisheries Director issued an order to ban trawling during the spawning season. Because of the pressure from the trawler lobby the ban was lifted after six days. This was discussed in one of our committee meetings in Trivandrum and decided to picket the Director's office. All who were at the meeting went straight to the office, shouted slogans and demanded the director to withdraw the order lifting the ban. It was my first experience of picketing and police intervention. Though the pressure continued, no action was taken by the Govt. Joychen Antony, the president of the union and Tom decided an indefinite fast. Tom was writing his LLB exam and didn't want to go on a fast at that time. But Joychan insisted that Tom too join and Tom agreed. This action of Tom made me to reflect on the value of letting go of our preferences and aspirations for the people. Fasting giving their body inch by inch for the people - is celebrating Mass. I was challenged to support their struggle using all my energy and skills. I came back to Mampally and organized the people to participate in the supportive actions - Dharnas, Picketing, Pushing into the concerned office etc. Everyday a group was prepared to go to TVM to participate in the protest actions. Evenings I listened to them and learned all the courageous actions they had done. It was difficult for me not to be with them, but my presence at the grassroot was a necessity and I did it. Many local leaders emerged from Anjengo and Mampally at that time. We worked together. The whole struggle was an experience of letting go of yourself, giving yourself through hard work, finding finance with the people. It was an experience of struggling together for livelihood.

After the struggle many other struggles were organized. We got into the issues of the people got between fights and got wounded. Our collaboration with the Marxist Party was occasion for rejection by one group, threatening us with isolation. Criticism and questioning from the community and the Church were occasions for us to reflect and take a stand with the poor and the unjustly treated. The reflections together and the solidarity we experienced with MMS group and the like-minded people affirmed our efforts to liberate people from all that dehumanize them, we felt the healing presence of each one reflecting on Lk 4.18 affirmed that we are following the mission of Jesus.

One of my challenging experience was the capture of the Trawlers by the fishermen of Anjengo and Mampally. First everybody was supporting the action. But when the boat which was anchored close to the shore started dismantling and the boat owners came and told all their woes and losses, all turned against us including the parish priest. The leaders who captured the boat were in hiding from arrest and





I was the only one out in the open to answer all their queries till the leaders from TVM arrived. It was hours of agony as I didn't know how to handle the situation. The Congress people came to our house and threatened Sister Jean Alexander saying that they would burn the house. Parish Priest blamed me for instructing the people to do violence etc. Except for Jean there were no sisters in Mampally at that time. Tom was also away. I felt

completely lost. But I was sure it was not violence; it was an action of a people for survival and I stood with them. This affirmed my solidarity with them.

After this event the question of violence in our movement was raised several times. When one boat which was breaking the law was destroyed it was violence. But nobody raised the question of violence when these boats killed people and destroyed the traditional craft and gear causing starvation and death for the people. Each day violations occur in front of us. No one is arrested and put to jail.

Later five trawlers were captured and sunk in the sea. By this time the people were more aware of what was happening when trawlers fish uncontrolled in the inshore waters. The capture happened in Mampally. But as soon as we heard Mercy Koottiyani took out a jatha with children announcing what happened and the need for all of us to come together. So, a crowd came. We asked the men to go away and the women took charge of the situation. When the police and officials came, they questioned them and insisted that action be taken against the trawler who violated the limits and by evening the action was taken in favour of us. When the police asked for water, they gave water and plantain and told them that they were not as cruel as the police who refused even to give water to drink when these women were arrested and kept under custody.

The arrest and jailing of Thomas Kocherry were an event which really affected our life. Kocherry was arrested in the middle of the night while he was in a peace-making situation with two groups fighting with each other. When we stand for Truth, Justice & Peace, we are judged for violating it. The fisher folk was afraid even to react to this unjust action. When we came to know about it in the morning, we rushed to the police station and found him locked up like a criminal. All that followed was real suffering. We had to protest and act. The whole event was like the Stations of the Cross.

1984 FASTING EXPERIENCE

It was the unique moment in my life, giving my life for the survival of others. "I die that they may have life and life in abundance". The whole process was a death and resurrection experience. There were conflicts, objections, question of loyalty to the society, obedience, suicide etc. The peace I experienced at that time was the greatest gift of my life. The reflection on Isaiah 58: in

the fasting group deepened our conviction of giving life for others. The various modes used in the struggle, the suffering endured by those who picketed the railway station when arrested and put to jail. Everything was an experience of God with us. Many things happened beyond human calculations. The active part taken by Sr. Mercy Koottiyani (handicapped) is a miracle experience. The Padayathra from Quilon in the pouring rain and camping at Mampally, yet another.

The whole village came forward with helping hand. I always feel that if KSMTF has a name today it is because of the pains and sorrows experienced by the people in early days. Each moment was experiencing the God who is with us, among us and within us. The solidarity among us (MMS) kept us strong and we supported each other. In 1985 the fast continued. I had the opportunity to be with the fasting people which was an occasion for reliving my fast and giving support from my own experience. Other events that were meaningful in my life and affirmed my call to be with the oppressed and exploited and the unjustly treated.

POOTHURA EVENTS

I experienced the hard heartedness, envy, hatred and cruelty of the people on one side and the courage, cleverness and the suffering of them on the other side. The value of life and how hard people try to save it. The healing presence of MMS in the midst of this was very much experienced.

45 DAYS STRUGGLE OF ANTILQUOR MOVEMENT

The continuous struggle in Chellanam, EKM, every day, sitting in front of the Arrack shops, holding public meeting, protest march etc. was again struggling with suffering people especially the women - even on Christmas day making crib in front of Arrack Shop and spent the night there. Prayer and celebrations had different face.

Participation in the jeep rally before the formation of NAPM (National Alliance of People's Movement) My contributions at this meeting Participation in the Satyagraha and NBA (Naramad Bachavo Andolan) in Bombay for 7 days, the arrest and jail - Medha Patkar calling me to take the lead with the women to go to jail.

CONSTRUCTION OF 500 LATRINE IN ANJENGO PANCHAYATH

Though we were not able to contribute much for an alternate system of health care, effort was made to create awareness in people of the basic components of health and their responsibility to demand for their right. Struggles were organized for safe drinking water, improvement of facilities in the PHC, participating in the housing programme etc. Sanitation was a problem in the crowded living situation. With the help of SEU (Socio





Economic Unit) 500 latrines were made in Anjengo Panchayath using new technology to save space. The whole responsibility of the implementation of the project was taken up. Mercy really persuaded me. From the selection of the beneficiary to the completion of the latrine. The ward committee was included in the decision making. Every penny was spent responsibly and the Panchayath and the people recognized it. More than building latrine, what I

experienced was the relationship that I was able to create in 9 wards of Anjengo Panchayath, going through every nook and corner of the wards.

This was followed by the community latrine, the Mahila Sangam taking responsibilities. Philo Varghese played the leading role. Being with the KSMTF (Keral Swathanthra Matsya Thozilali Federation) in the struggle, I was able to give my contribution to Alleppey, Ernakulam, Quilon and TVM districts. And the relationship created in these places. I treasure it, Taluk Secretary in 80-86. Then supportive roles. The padayathra, jeep rallies, the street plays that were made along the coast of Kerala and my contribution to it was enriching to me.

OTHER INVOLVEMENTS

Though I was not directly involved with education and cultural program - my contribution in creating an infra structure gave me satisfaction. The first tuition program organized in Anjengo and the cultural programme, preparation of the Band troop, building the Deepthi nursery, purchase of the land and house for the Trust in spite of objections were achievements. The house of our own in Mampally was searched and found by me.

INVOLVEMENT WITH NFF (NATIONAL FISH WORKERS FORM) 1992-2007

I had a feeling that my contribution in Anjengo is not needed as there were more sisters to continue there and for other personal reasons, I wanted to move to TVM. In my search to live with a fisher people, finally ended in living with Jerome Fernandes. During this time, Velappan died and Rossamma needed a companion and I moved to her place. In the beginning I used to help with the accounts of NFF. Other times I was helping The Union and organizing the struggles etc. The NFF office secretary left and the new one needed to be oriented. She left and another came, so I got stuck in the office. I was actually involved with the preparation of the formation of WFF (World Forum of Fisher people) and the WFF office being established. There my responsibilities increased. In 1997 I was elected to be in the District Team of MMS society. It cut short my time for NFF and KSMTF. It was really a struggle to do justice to both. I had to cut down lot of my leisure to be present to both. In the District my contribution in handing over of Mundakayam Medical Trust Hospital smoothly was appreciated. It was my child. I brought it up till it could walk and school itself (5 yrs.). Letting go of this because it became a monster

was a relief rather than pain. As a team member visiting old places and starting new ones was joy and challenge for me. Old relationships were renewed and new ones were created.

As NFF Senior Person I participated in the people's Global Action March in Europe visiting four countries. It was an experience of solidarity among 1st world and 3rd world. This was my first chance to be out of the country. In 2002 I attended Food Security Meeting in Rome and in 2004 attended a workshop on Women in Fisheries (WFF-World Forum of Fisher people)

Personally, I have great satisfaction that I was able to give myself fully to the struggles of the people contributing my mite. Being in the WFF and NFF - I am informed of the world realities regularly, the struggles for survival around the globe and people's movement's contribution. In the age of nuclear weapon nonviolent actions of the people's movement is our call to build the kingdom of God.

In the midst of all these achievements and satisfaction, I recognize the woundedness in me especially in relationships. I have difficulty in accepting certain personalities. Also, my outright remarks hurt others. I need to be healed of this. I accept it as my limitation and weakness.

SPIRITUALITY

Today my spirituality, is recognizing God in midst of today's realities. I recognize a God deep within me, with us and among us. Therefore, whether I eat or rest or work I am praying because I recognize God here. God is more present with the poor, oppressed and exploited. And I experience this presence in my life. It is a life journey with its ups and downs to reach the end. May the God of love and compassion be with me guiding and directing me.

I am grateful to God and all others who helped me to follow Jesus - I thank God for the opportunities above all His grace to follow Him in spite of my weakness and unworthiness.

REFLECTION ON MY LIFE EXPERIENCES

From 1978 living with the fisher people experiencing the starvation, homelessness, the unhealthy environment they live all made us aware of the inhuman way these people live. Almost 93% live under poverty line, only 30% literacy. Their only income was from fishing. Since the arrival of the trawlers, the fish resources are on the decrease year by year. The trawlers plough the bottom of the sea destroying the eggs and also disturb the eco-system. Since 1955 there was conflict between the traditional fishermen and the trawlers. It was only taken as law and order problem. Only from 1981 this was brought to the notice of the Govt. and the public as destruction and exploitation of the sea resources. The fisher people started to struggle to protect their livelihood. Also the unlawful fishing near the shore destroyed their unmotorised fishing vessels and sometimes killed the workers.

As we continued our life with them and experienced their life we were





also affected by their condition which touched the core of our hearts. We started to question ourselves. In these situations the reading of the Bible had different meaning. We reflected on our Mission - the mission of Jesus to liberate human being from everything that enslaves them, and dehumanizes them ("The spirit of the Lord is upon me, for He has anointed me to preach the Gospel to the poor. He has sent me to announce the release of the

captives and restoration of light to the

blind, to set free the downtrodden, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour" LK. 4-18). We were convinced that our mission should be the same - to struggle with these people for life in fullness. (John 10.10: I have come that they may have life and have it abundantly.)

To discern and fight the forces that are enslaving them, we had to equip ourselves with a scientific study of the socio-economic political and religious forces at work. This had to be communicated to the people. We attended seminars, workshops, and discussions with knowledgeable people, by ourselves and also along with the local leaders. Realizing the reality we were forced to move into action.

In the process, we had to change many of our behavioural attitudes to people, especially the attitude of superiority. Considering ourselves as people who have something to give to them. We became aware of the depth of our selfishness. We learned from them the value of sharing, their concern for others in need, their attitude of forgiveness, and acceptance of those who are socially outcasts etc. In the midst of frustration, anger and sudden outbursts, they were deeply religious and had great confidence in God in most insecure situations. In them we saw Jesus at work. There was mutual sharing among us. In these sharing we experienced a feeling of equality and our attitude of superiority slowly came down.

In the process of our Struggle we experienced the presence of Jesus. We had occasions of failures and successes, rejection and acceptances. There were also moments of celebrations and enjoyments. The rallies, Dharna, Picketing, being arrested and jailed. Long fasting's etc. We found courage and self-confidence. Some of our answers at the police stations and other places were a surprise to ourselves. It reminded us of Jesus' words "I am with you" and "I will put words into your mouth". These acts of protests which were considered to be political and secular became spiritual for us.

In the beginning there was a pulling back in ourselves with the reasoning that these are against religious decorum, it is so political that we should not go into it. But reflections among us and with theologians like Samuel Rayan, Kappen, M.M. Thomas and others convinced us that these are spiritual actions to liberate people from oppressive structures and give life to people. Also to empower them. When Jesus cured, made the lame to walk, deaf to hearing, gave sight to the blind, his enemies rose against him. Such support and encouragement were a great boost for us. With the reflections after each event among our core team (Fr. Thomas Kocherry,

Jose Kaleekel, James Culas and MMMs), we were able to pick out the positive and negative aspects of our actions and responses and we were able to work on it.

FAST UNTO DEATH

The questions that were raised by the church authorities and religious superiors the aspects of suicide and disobedience- The Bishops made statements to this effect. This caused confusion among many of the priests and religious who supported us. But this was an occasion for giving our life and being obedient to our inner call rather than being obedient to dogmas and doctrines. It was giving our lives to give life for others. It was to force the authorities to respond to our demand for the livelihood of the poor fisher people, also to prevent destruction of natural resources. We could cite many instances where people have given their life to save others. Jesus did this. He did not die. He was killed by his opponents - the Pharisees and high priests - As for me (PM) the time of fasting was the most challenging time in my life. In spite of the oppositions and contradictory reports I was convinced that I was fully obedient to my call as a religious to live or die for the oppressed. I experienced the inner strength - the presence of Jesus with me. I was peaceful.

The presence of my mother with me at the fasting shed supporting me was very much encouraging. First she raised some objections about dying for people. But when I told her that now she had no right to question since she had given me to Jesus for the people and I am dying for them to live. After that whenever people asked her about the fast she gave the above answer. She was present when the police took me by force from the hospital ward to custody.

At the same time I had a different experience from my dear uncle. He was so worried that I would go to hell in spite all the suffering since I was disobedient to the Bishop and superiors. This really shook me. How people are misguided. How we are led to keep up the status quo - just to follow doctrines and dogmas forgetting to follow Jesus's teachings.

The reflections with the fasting group and other leaders at the close of each day sharing the experiences of the day with different modes of protest action like picketing the railway lines, blocking the roads, protest rally of the children, protest walk from Quilon to Trivandrum in the pouring rain with no cloth to change and staying at Mampally, the warm reception and sharing what they have in the village, arrest and lathy charge of the protesters etc. were heart breaking at the same time encouraging and enriching. Our reflection usually ended with reflection from Isaiah 58: 6-12 which was most enlightening.

I am grateful to God and all others who helped me to follow Jesus. I thank God for the opportunities. Above all His grace to follow Him in spite of my weakness and unworthiness.



8. THE GREATEST U-TURN IN MY LIFE

I am a member of the Catholic Medical Missionaries (Medical Mission Sisters). I joined the society in 1973 after my B.Sc. and Bachelor of Education degree. In my family we are eleven children, 8 girls and three boys; everyone alive and settled in life. My father died two years ago and my mother stays with my youngest brother at home. Of the 8 girls, three are religious women; one in the Assumption Congregation, one in the Daughters of Mary Congregation and myself, a Medical Mission Sister. When I reflect back on my whole life, I can divide it into different stages like: -



SR. THERAMMA PRAYIKALAM

- 1. Childhood and School life**
- 2. College Life**
- 3. Formation to religious life**
- 4. My Mission Life (life among the fisherpeople)**

1. CHILDHOOD AND SCHOOL LIFE

It was a happy and contented life and I received a lot of love and affection from everybody at home. My parents were the most significant people in that period and I was much attached to my home and my parents, especially to my father. Since we were eleven and enjoyed ourselves so much at home, the companions at school did not strike me much. I liked home more than school and there was some reason for that. I was a little naughty during that time. I can still remember one incident when I was caught in the school by the sisters: when I was seven years old, one evening while we were coming out of chapel after prayer, I asked my companions to clap their hands and run. We just wanted to enjoy the echoes. Next morning when all the teachers and students gathered for the assembly, the headmistress called out in a loud voice: “those who ran along the road last evening clapping their hands, come to the stage at once.” We were so frightened and as soon as she saw us she began to scold us, saying all sorts of things and beating us in front of everyday. Since I was the leader, I got an extra one.

Even at that time it was a question in my tender mind and heart: “WHY” she beat us and what was wrong in clapping hands in the road for small girls like us. The headmistress treated us so cruelly and unjustly, but we couldn’t utter a word and we were voiceless in front of her because we were helpless. It was a peak experience of shame, hatred and anger.

It seemed to be the tradition that girls should be polite, calm, quiet and pious. The sisters expected all that from me in school, but at home I was so free and did not have any restrictions like that. Since we were eleven, we were clapping hands, shouting, running, jumping, swimming and my father used to encourage his girls to climb trees, even coconut trees. So the restrictions at school did not affect



my free and spontaneous growth in childhood, but I developed some hatred towards school life. It didn't affect my studies since my father took much care and interest in that. I had faith in people and a great value for freedom and love from my childhood onwards. When we experience restrictions, we realize the importance of certain values in our lives. I experienced the love of God through my loving parents and that was my faith experience for me my childhood.

2. COLLEGE LIFE

When I finished my S.S.L.C. (10th class) I joined college. Since we didn't have a college in our village, I had to go away from home and stay in hostel. It was very difficult for me and I was looking forward to the holidays to be with my dear ones. At that time, I did not have any special intention regarding my life's career. For the two-year Pre-Degree and the three-year degree course, my only aim was to study well and finish the studies as soon as possible. My father was so particular that all his children should complete the degree course.

After the degree course I was sent for the B.Ed. course and I must say that it was the biggest turning point in my life. There, I lived with the Sisters as hostel mates and got a chance to know many of them more closely on a human level. There was much tension and confusion among the sisters at that time and two of them even left the congregation, which was rather shocking. I had become the target of some misunderstanding during this time. I was the B.Ed. hostel prefect and got the chance to associate more closely with our Warden Sister. Sr. Christopher and we became friends. Some of the student sisters started some gossip, the reasons for which were beyond my comprehension. The effect of this was visible in the warden sister, in her reticence and cold behavior, which became a source of pain for me. This was the first experience of pain in my life and opened my eyes to the other realities of life. It was a hard time for me, questioning many things. I began to question what humanness is, and what, the meaning of religious life. After two months, things were cleared. Sr. Christopher felt bad and began to relate to me more deeply. I was not frustrated or disappointed or shocked

by that experience. It helped me to grow and enabled me to face the challenges in my life. At that stage I began to look at my life seriously and wanted to take my life decision. I decided to join one of the religious congregations as a challenge to the life I experienced among the sisters there.

A turning point can be noticed in my faith life at this stage. From the child's simple faith in God mediated through the love and concern of my loving parents, now a new dimension had grown in me. I was guided to see the hand of God in pains, misunderstanding and frustrations and it enabled me to accept new challenges. It was the hostel warden herself who was my helping hand. Later, when I communicated to her my desire to join a religious congregation, instead of asking me to join her Congregation (Carmelite), she guided me to the medical mission sisters, saying: "For your spontaneous, free and enthusiastic personality that would be better." That struck me so much. Her selfless unconditional love was a real faith experience for me.

3. FORMATION TO RELIGIOUS LIFE

My decision to join Medical Mission Sisters grew firm in my mind. But to obtain permission from my father was quite difficult. Medical Mission sisters were not familiar to him and I was the first daughter who wanted to become a religious. I even had to resort to a hunger strike of four days before he gave me permission to join. This was in 1973. I joined Medical Mission Sisters, District South India, with Kottayam as its headquarters. After 40 years of pioneering medical apostolate through well run mission hospitals, the society then was in the process of restructuring the medical mission apostolate according to the needs of the time. A general chapter of renewal held in 1967 had made drastic changes in the Medical Mission Sisters' constitution and Directives with regard to the apostolate, community living structures, government, formation and so on. There was a strong move from institution centered medical care towards the possibility of small groups of sisters going to remote and neglected villages and slums. Another general chapter was in preparation when I joined and meetings were going on at various levels. There was a lot of creative thinking and searching among the sisters and



even we candidates were able to attend many of the renewal classes. The 1973 general chapter clarified and elaborated the 1967 documents, for e.g. – our mission is to those in need of healing mission as we enter the lives of other people. Open to being affected by them and simple enough to give of ourselves. As an international society we involve ourselves in the transformation of the world, as we join with others who struggle for freedom, justice and love. This aspect of our constitution kept burning in me from the beginning itself.



Even in novitiate I enjoyed so much of love and freedom. Sr. Sophie was my Novice Mistress and she was the helping hand of God for me during that time. She encouraged, and supported all my initiatives, potentialities and new ideas and ways of thinking. During that period Fr. Thomas Kocherry C.Ss.R. (Redemptorist) used to come there to take classes for the sisters and novices. He was working among the fisherpeople and his way of life and ideas inspired me from the novitiate itself. That was

another turning point for me in the religious life.

I was motivated by Gospel values, like justice, love, equality and freedom. I realized that I can live out these values only by being with the poor, especially in their struggles to live as human beings. The poor and oppressed inspired me to a greater faith and loyalty to gospel values, a deeper commitment, and challenged me to re-examine my values and ways of life. From the novitiate itself I was preparing myself for my future mission - to integrate my life and work.

I was respected as a person and the 'responsible freedom' which I experienced enabled me to bear the responsibilities. I had the freedom and the chance to develop my uniqueness, taking decisions for myself. During this period some of our sisters had opted to work among the traditional fisherpeople in Poothura, a fishing village in Trivandrum district, Kerala. Soon after my Novitiate in 1975 we (Four Medial Mission Sisters Luke Cherian, Maria Kumblanthanam, Theramma Prayikalam and Alice Vadaserry) formed a community and started our life and work among the fisher-folk.

4. LIFE AMONG THE FISH WORKERS

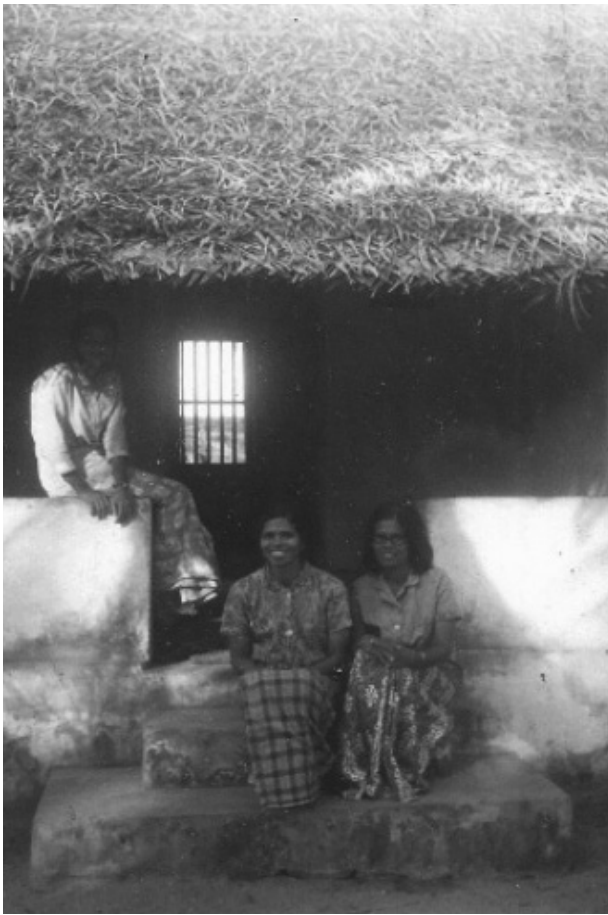
The fishermen are a group of marginalized workers who are below the poverty line. They are poor but they are not lazy. Actually, they work very hard, but they are exploited by middlemen, moneylenders and mechanized boat owners. Even though the literacy rate of Kerala is way higher than that of other states, the majority of fisherpeople are illiterate. The children are neglected as their parents are involved in fishing and marketing. The people are very submissive to the authority of the Church.

For the last fourteen years we have been working with the fisher people and our own presence as dedicated religious' touching the realities of people's life struggle, being simple and ordinary in appearance and attitude, has helped our Catholic population to question their own values. Some of them doubt if we are like any other religious of the church, having no fence around, dressing and eating ordinarily, and living like other ordinary people. Our presence has developed a different attitude in them towards the church. The ordinary people are free to

come to us at any time of the day and night, to talk, to get medicine, to share what we have. Our work is geared to the total development of the fisherfolk in this area, a marginalized group, even separated by the caste system from the neighbouring communities.

This involvement being the first of its kind, we had to go through a painful process. It took nearly a couple of years for us to feel our way through. Socio-economic survey was done in an informal way and many problems and issues surfaced. The main area to be tackled was found to be the field of education. Tuition programmes and adult education programmes had been started informally. The means taken was to start nursery schools (pre-school), where the children who are scattered here and there are taken together and motivated to develop in skills and thinking. Our assumption is that early years of formation do affect the whole life of the individual. Conscientization to socialist values was intended. This we did by way of preparing classes, songs, dances and stories. Children in turn created a lot of awakening in adults through these means. Through children, our work in conscientization reached out too many families. By that method about 7 nurseries along the coastal belt in our area were initiated and coordinated. Since my specialization is in the educational field, I took a special interest in initiating a new system of education, at least at the nursery level. I trained the local girls in methods of teaching and other skills. Our pre-school education helps the small kids to develop self-confidence and other potentialities they have – in a more creative and useful way for society. Once in a week all the teachers come together, evaluate and prepare the classes for the next week. They compose their own songs and short stories according to the themes they have taken for the children, from their own life situation and realities. It is a new experiment in the educational field and we have developed a syllabus for two years and our





own methods of teaching for pre-school children, in accordance with the life of the fisherfolk.

Nursery education involves giving special preparation to young women (teachers) who are made to develop themselves as efficient women leaders in the local area. They are working under women's organizations called Mahilasamajams. There are regular meetings and programmes for women and a conscious effort is given to women's issues and oppression. Seminars, discussions and even marches and dharnas were conducted responding to the oppression of women taking place in different parts of India.

Between 8 and 14 years our children are organized under the 'BALAVEDI' (children's group). It functions as a follow up programme for our school-going children. Cultural programmes and other programmes like guided studies, story writing,

drawing etc. help them to develop their potentialities and inculcate in them new values. Every year during the two-month summer holidays different kinds of camps, intensive and massive tuition programmes are organized for children. For that almost 25 groups from different villages come together and enjoy the togetherness and solidarity. For this group, value education and conscientization continues mainly through cultural programmes which poor fisherfolk enjoy and welcome very much.

As medical mission sisters, taking care of the health aspect is also part of our daily living. Indigenous approaches to health are communicated to the people. The majority of sickness in the coastal area is due to malnutrition, contaminated water and an unhygienic environment. In the health field we could create a new awareness among the people for a just distribution of health care and basic health facilities. And it can be achieved only through a change in the socio-economic and political system.

Although this is very difficult to do, we are trying to implement it by promoting community health and collaborating with government agencies. We have trained a group of local girls to handle immediate health problems, especially in the field of environmental sanitation and drinking water. The work is done through non-formal education in small groups. The concept of 'health as a right' is imparted through the classes. We have started mobilization of the people in the health field also. The unhygienic environment and lack of good drinking water

is the cause of most of the sickness. The people became conscious of this and began to demand change through memorandums, marches, Dharnas and picketing. In many places it was a success and their request were granted. Now they have the confidence to question and demand their rights.

More than 80% of the population of our country live in rural and coastal areas. But their living and socio-economic conditions are miserable, problems of sanitation, housing etc. are very severe in many parts of the country. As part of the international year of 'shelter for the homeless', we also took an active interest in housing programmes. The technique of low-cost building was introduced and people were educated in that line. It helped to change the concept of 'house' among the people, and a lot of value education happened through that.

Now we have reached a stage where the sea has less scope for the traditional fishermen in India. Most of the fish is caught by mechanized boats using purse-seine net and trawling which destroys the very ecological system of the sea. These have been operating close to the coast, thereby rendering the traditional fishermen's work unremunerative. The export of prawns to other countries has benefitted the rich. Ordinary fishermen can no longer cope with the demands of today's fast changing economy. The value of money has gone down, and the hard work does not pay much. People's rice bowls get less and less filled due to the price rise in commodities. This terrifying reality makes the traditional fisherpeople fight actively for their survival. I feel that in the case of the voiceless and unjustly treated, unless there is an organized move by the masses, nothing can be achieved concretely. Those who are awake to such a crisis have got together to voice their opinions. Fisherpeople's unions and attempts to organize





themselves to protest against the government are a must today. Many priests, religious (both men and women) and lay people who were working for the betterment of fishermen joined together to organize the 'Swatanthra Malsya Thozhilali Union'. The leaders came from the rank and file of the fishermen themselves.

We have opted to be a part of the people's struggle and work towards a just society. This option has prompted us also, to agitate and picket, shouting slogans in front of the secretariat, bus stations, railway stations etc. Organizing women and making them take an active part in such attempts was also one of our objectives. As we

get closer to our people, we are made more aware of the problems they face in getting justice. Their struggles deepen our commitment to enter the struggle for justice and truth.

For two years, between 1981 and 1982, I went to live among tribal people in Madhya Pradesh (North India) as a part of my intercultural experiences. There also we formed a team of four sisters and lived in a very simple set up in a poor tribal village among the people. There I realized the actual life situation, the struggles and oppression the Tribals are facing. The Tribals are so passive, submissive, uneducated and unaware of their own life situation. The rate of infant mortality is very very high.

The two years with them gave me a chance to appreciate and respect tribal culture and customs. Our presence among them in a simple set up was also appreciated by the people and created a kind of solidarity with them. The church as a whole has a western look there. Since we were working in close collaboration with the church, we also became part of all the programmes in the diocese. I could not agree with those in many ways. In that context there was no chance to enter into the actual struggles of the working class and find out its root cause. I could only raise many questions about our work there. I came down to Kerala again in 1983 after attending the three months Social Analysis Course in ISI (Indian Social Institute) in Bangalore and began to participate in the struggles of the fisherfolk with new vigour and enthusiasm, after two years' experience in M.P.

From 1981 onwards the 'Kerala Swatantra Malsya Thozhilali Federation' has organized many agitations on a state level. The 1984 agitations gained momentum in almost all fishing villages in Kerala, big processions and rallies turned into massive Dharnas (demonstrations) in front of government offices and series of picketing started in several parts of the state, stopping

vehicular movement through national highways and railway lines. Thirteen members of the union, including myself and two other medical mission sisters who picketed the fishermen's directorate were arrested and imprisoned for 7 days in the central jail, as religious sisters with prostitutes and criminals. Many ladies shared with us their sad stories and terrible helplessness and the hard realities of their own life which brought them to jail.

Soon after we were released from jail, we all went on hunger strike before the secretariat. I fasted for ten days. The involvement of priests and nuns in the struggle has raised some serious issues in the church. The Bishop's conference of Kerala has taken some steps to control the activities of the clergymen and religious. The struggle, the imprisonment, the fasting and everything was the real faith experience for me and strengthened and deepened my commitment to truth and justice. In 1985 also, as part of our struggle, I went on hunger strike in front of Alleppey Collectorate and continued to fast for 12 days. Responses to the cry of the poor for justice have always been very little. But the poor fisherpeople became more conscious of their united stand against the government which cheats the poor working class and they could identify very clearly who all stood with them for their rights, to get them justice, including the church.

We experienced strength as well as frustration when the Government authorities treated the agitation unjustly. At the same time the hierarchy also sided with the boat owners and were deaf and dumb to the cause of the poor fisherpeople. All these experiences enabled more and more people to commit themselves to solidarity with these people, who are deprived of the right to live as human beings. This solidarity brought home real hope for the group and the words of Christ (gospel values) became a living reality for us.

For those who participated in the fasting it was a sacrifice, but for those who looked at it from outside it was suicide. Our life is the most valuable thing not only for ourselves but also for others.





We must be ready to sacrifice our lives for the lives of many. Martyrs were ready to give their life, opting for other people and other places, Martyrdom is chosen deliberately. God gave us life to serve and not to keep (Mk 8:34-77). The son of God came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for man. (Mk 10:45). Preservation of one's own life is a commonly accepted law, and is logical; but to give one's own life is a sacrifice. It is the Christian attitude of responsibility for our brethren.

The rich in the area oppose our approaches, since they are threatened and afraid of our stand. Through their influence some poor workers also oppose us at times. The parish committee and the parish priest have a greater influence in the coastal area among the people. So, the transfers and changes of parish priests affects our involvement depending upon the attitudes and values of the parish priest. We have experienced certain parish priests who not only opposed us but even worked against us.

As long as we remain submissive to the authorities of the church it will support us. When attempts are made to bring about social and structural change by conscientizing and organizing people the elite group which may be affected as a result will rise against such a move. The consequence is rejection and suppression. Sad to say that our official church also is in the elite and powerful group. Our experience with the poor working class during the last 14 years has made it very clear that it is very difficult to compromise on those issues with the institutional church. It is an area of real concern for us in our mission here as we are always ready to be one with the poor. This type of stand causes certain ideological differences and divisions among the people also. Though it is a hard reality to face we see it as the cost of the stand we have taken in favour of the poor and oppressed. Faith and theology have come to acquire more roots in the soil of people's experience, an experience that is integrated into the social political, economic and religious reality. Liberation theology has come of age in India and has given birth to many critical questions about the role of the church in society, the meaning and function of priest-hood and of religious life. The agitation by fisherpeople in Kerala and the involvement of priests and nuns in it has been a point of controversy both within the church and outside it.

If a total liberation is to be achieved humans need to be free from all the bonds which make them inhuman. Power and wealth are concentrated in the hands of a few who use them for their selfish purposes, leaving millions of people unfed and unclothed. This state of affairs has to be brought to an end through the power and strength of the poor and oppressed.

Conscientization, mass education, action on issues connected with justice and oppression, ideological orientation etc. are means through which the people can be organized for this purpose. So, if we have to participate in the total liberation of human beings, we have to go into the root cause of the problems. We have to enter into a structural analysis of society. So, we have to participate in class struggle, an inevitable feature of the healing ministry. We are fully involved in social justice issues and that is why we are involved with trade union activities.

When I began to involve myself in the trade union movement, my faith history had also grown to new dimensions. The value of total healing, liberation and brotherhood had brought greater meaning to me. Healing implies an absolute demand for justice - viz. a recognition of the dignity and rights of one's neighbour, because every human being is truly a visible image of the invisible God. Christ makes men and women free and enables them to live in communion with him and that is the basis of all human brotherhood.

Now the movement has state level as well as national level organizations. This year the National Fishworkers Forum (a national confederation of fish workers trade unions) took the initiative in organizing a national march from April 2nd to May 1st. The police didn't relish the enthusiasm and spirit of the organizers who had collected a good number of people for the final day functions in Kanyakumari. A minor commotion in the procession was enough for them to start a lathi charge, followed by firing in which at least half a dozen people were injured and 28 people were arrested, beaten up badly and put in jail for ten days. The authorities probably planned to end the beginning of that struggle. This was executed by the police.

Despite all this, the Kanyakumari March was the greatest and biggest expression of fishworkers' unity in India "This is not the end nor even the beginning of the end. It is the end of the beginning of the people's struggle for their right to a healthy ecology and environment." The people who gathered at K.K. left the place determined to continue the struggle and to face all challenges. Now it is no longer an isolated struggle but a national struggle to take control of our waters and protect them.



In Poothura, from the beginning itself, I got a chance to work in a team, taking responsibilities and leadership at various levels. In the team we used to have reflections and sharing of Gospel values as the basis of our involvement. We had classes and short seminars on topics like social awareness socio-economic analysis of the working class, scripture classes etc. All this helped me to integrate my values, aspirations and ideals with Gospel values and social situations in the world around us today and see it as a growth in my faith history.



In between, we met together (people from different involvements) to discuss issues of justice. There are certain groups like, 'Christians for Socialism', 'Christians for Radical Action', where we can talk freely on justice issues, question and clarify things with each other. It helps us to deepen our faith and conviction. Even though we live in a very simple style among the people we realize that we are far from the daily realities of hunger and other realities that the ordinary people face. With our work and life here we are making a conscious effort to be with the people, taking part in all their joys and struggles.

I am a person who likes to reflect deeply on my actions and the values and aspirations behind them. Very often I do it in order to get more clarity about my option for the poor. I used to write it down, but one of my limitations is that I don't share it with others unless I am forced to do so.

For me, contemplation is to concentrate fully on what I am doing, whether I am studying, talking, writing, praying or reflecting. When I am involved in prayer and reflection. I am fully involved in that, but at the same time I cannot separate my faith experience and prayer from my mission. When the word of God is reflected in our daily experience it becomes the most meaningful prayer and faith experience for me. That type of faith experience gives me more inspirations and pushes me more deeply into involvements among the people. And deeper involvements call for deeper prayer-reflections - one leads to the other. I cannot find a single instance where I couldn't strike a balance between my intense involvement and my call to be deeply contemplative. Certain words of Christ have become so powerful in me. I find much meaning in them and they have become part of me (Lk.4.18. The spirit of the Lord is up on me, he has anointed... LK 21:12-16 Good news to the poor... Jn. 10:10 I have come to give you life in fullness... Lk. 12:11 You will be brought before Kings and Rulers... Don't worry I will give you wisdom and words...)

I too have my own limitations in facing certain realities. It is difficult for me to take negative criticisms, and I get very easily upset over them I need the help of others to overcome such



situations. In order to commit myself to certain things I must be fully convinced of them. Since I look for perfections, I can be disappointed by small things. But exposing to the lived realities of marginalized people has deepened my faith and commitment.

As a whole I am happy about my religious vocation and committed life, and above all my life and struggle with

the fisherfolk. I have an optimistic vision for the future and with my strong convictions I am working towards it with new hope and meaning, facing challenges, to play my own role for the realization of the Kingdom of God.

THE DIFFICULTIES I EXPERIENCE IN MY WORK

- The poor who are exploited and oppressed are not taking the causes of the exploitation and oppression seriously. In the case of fishworkers they are not passive but they do not want to commit and spend their energy and time for the common good.
- The political parties divide and diminish the strength and power of the poor people and use them for their power politics. Even though we took a clear stand with leftist ideology we are looked upon as a threat, to the Marxist party because of our independent union's freedom to question and criticize social issues.
- Since the party is having power and authority many of our leaders in the independent union want to become party members and party wants them under their power and control.
- The struggles of the poor and oppressed had made a greater impact on me So the constant demands of my commitment to give myself fully – my talents, my energy, my time, my abilities – clashes with the demands of the religious community in which I live. The value and the meaning of community itself differ to some extent. For me community is a 'means' and 'support' to reach out to the people and to be with them in their struggles. In that process the community becomes more meaningful and deeper relationship can be achieved.
- We are part of the institutional church. So, it is a constant struggles and tension to work for social and structural changes. This creates a polarization in the church. The new steps are seen as false, improper and communism.

FULFILLMENT IN MY LIFE AND WORK

- There is a strong feeling of contentment and satisfaction in me that I got the 'chance' to be in the

right but difficult and challenging situation. I got the chance to live and work among the fishworkers.

- I feel great fulfillment when I am in the midst of our organized struggles, protesting against the unjust social system.
- I feel fully contented and satisfied when I could be myself physically as a sacrifice - my experience in the central jail as well my experience in hunger strike.
- Today in our movement there are many committed leaders from the fisherpeople community itself. It gives me a deeper sense of satisfaction and fulfillment.
- There is great joy and fulfillment in me when I am able to celebrate my life with the people on the occasions of feasts and cultural programs.
- I have a sense of fulfillment in the fact that our movement has become a challenge to the institutional church.

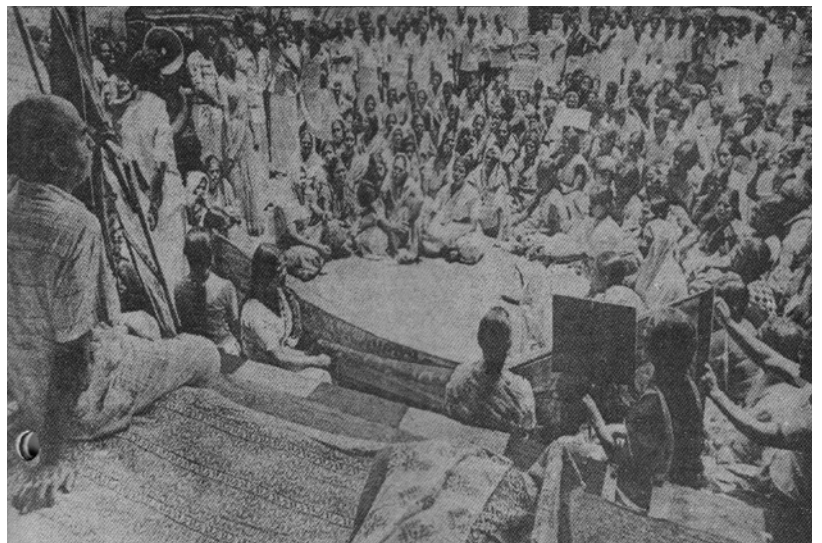
SUPPORT SYSTEMS

My community and my friends are the most important support system for me, we support, challenge, and grow together in our vision and commitment. The strength and power of the poor (their militancy), our trade union movement (independent fishermen's Federation) is a great support and strength for me to go forwards, to stand for the rights, to demand justice, and to protest against injustice. The wider contacts and relationships with those who are involved in people's movements and struggles on the national level.

- The periodical evaluation and reflection of our own group (community) with those who are involved in the same work (team) and with those who are involved in similar groups (other groups)
- The meetings and discussions with the people from different involvements and organizations.
- Current books and periodicals, classes seminars and workshops.

LEARNING FROM WRITING THIS PAPER

- The realization that I am a product of my own history and my history is made up of the events that I passed through and experienced.
- I have learned and grew through the people, events, and situations. Now I can see the richness in me and I am grateful to the events and people who shaped me.
- I could realize the power within me



and in others. Now I have become more sensitive to the events and the people with whom I came in contact with.

- I could see the hand of God throughout my life guiding me, directing me, and preparing me to stand with the poor and oppressed.

LIFE GOALS

My life-long goal is to stand for justice, looking at life as a challenge. My specific goal is to participate in the inherent struggles of the working class to bring about fullness of life, love, justice and equality.

I have to participate in it with Christian spirit, with Christian values like love, unity sacrifice, service, creativity, selflessness, humanness, justice, freedom, etc. This is a lifelong process in which I have to play my unique role. This means facing opposition from power structures, failures and the readiness to take any risk.

- To be in touch with the people deeply and constantly, and to struggle and fight with them for their rights to live as human beings.
- To deepen my own faith and commitment and develop a spirituality and theology that will lead me to be with the people in their struggles.

MY GOALS FOR THE NEXT FIVE YEARS

- To form cultural groups among the fishworkers.
- I have already introduced some new methods of teaching, next few years I like to work on it and build up a new creative way of teaching - I intent to collect literature for that and work out something new in the educational field - according to the specific life situation of the people.
- I want to write the history of our (M.M.S) involvement among the fishworkers during the last 15 years.
- Continue my work to strengthen the fishworkers' movement on the state level.

SHORT TERM GOAL - FOR THE NEXT 6 MONTHS

- For the last 14 years I have been working among the fishworkers participating in their struggles for human dignity. At present we are facing a standstill or we have reached a point where we need a strong 'break through'. So, my aim of coming here as well as my short-term goal for the coming 6 months is to get to know the pe'ples' movements and the experiences of those who are involved in the struggles of people for justice.
- Evaluate our own involvement and get new insights and new ways and means to work out a 'break through' in our own involvement among the fishworkers.

9. CALLED TO TRANSFORM

I am Patricia a Medical Mission Sister. I was born as the 4th Child of Mr. K.G Kuruvila (Kuriachen) and Mariakutty on 22nd August 1945 into the family, Kuruvinakunnel. I have 14 siblings, 7 sisters and 7 brothers. We were all brought up in great faith and piety. Both my parents were involved in the church activities and encouraged us also in the same line. They had great concern and empathy towards the poor and suffering and took effort to help them without much publicity. Our association with the OFM Capuchin Priests had great influence on our spirituality. Involvement with social service in the school and my parents' attitude towards the poor and the suffering laid the base for my interest and concern for the poor. Our parents allowed us to do sacrifices like forgoing a meal, taking coffee without sugar etc. and collect the money from that to give personal contribution for mission Sunday. My mother was always ready to pack an extra lunch to be given to poorer students.



SR. PATRICIA KURUVINAKUNNEL

Up to SSLC, I studied in the schools run by FCC sisters. I did my Pre-Degree Course at St. Agnes College Mangalore. Both the group of Sisters invited me to join them but I had no desire to be with them. I was attracted to Medical Mission Sisters who had a small hospital near our home which we frequently visited for our health needs. Their joyfulness and committed service to the sick and needy and the readiness to do any work and their interest in poor patients even giving home services attracted me to be part of them. So, in 1963 I joined the MMS convent at Kottayam. We had a strict formation period. In 1966 I made my First Profession. Then I was sent to Holy Family Hospital Delhi to equip myself to be a radiographer. It was a two-year course. Soon after that I joined to work in the X- ray department of St. Thomas Hospital Chethipuzha, Changanacherry.

While I was studying in New Delhi the MMS 1967 Chapter took place and the effect of Vatican II was very obvious in the Chapter decisions. We took an option for the poor. We started to think about reorienting our hospitals to suit the needs of the poor and focused our attention on the expansion of public health department. We did a social analysis of our institutions. St. Thomas hospital was the one most catering to the poor. But as the diocese wanted to make it a prestigious hospital of the Diocese, we could not keep it. The same hospital was only 12 bed hospital when it was entrusted to us “to develop and administer”. It was handed over to the diocese as a 150-bed hospital with its cash balance and equipments. We decided to keep only the hospitals that catered to the poor.

The changes in the Congregation, in the Church and changes in our communities in Latin America and the Sisters moving out of the sophisticated hospitals of the rich gold miners to



serve the poor and the marginalized and the reflection of the liberation theology groups etc had a strong influence on south district sisters' thinking also.

What inspired me to join the fisher people sprouted from a deep desire to be with the down trodden. I have visited the fishing community and had spent some time there after the socio-political analysis and community organization and development course

at ISI (Indian Social Institute) Bangalore. That helped me to see and experience the situation of the fisher people and the kind of exploitation and bonded labour that existed there. In the context of changes happening within the MMS Congregation, our option for the poor, the society coordinator (Superior General) met with the sisters who were ready to move in to the villages to live among the poor. That gave more impetus to the fire and flame within me. MMS took up the mission among the fisher people in Poothura village next to Anjengo, Trivandrum in 1975 and later in Mampally, a nearby parish, where the priest seeing our involvement in Poothura invited us. In Poothura the parish priest was a Redemptorist.

Till I moved to the fisher people area (Anjengo/Mampally), I worked in three hospitals of ours in South District (Province) and in between for two years I worked in Northeast. Though I saw the exploited situation of the Tribals I was not happy with the approach of the Church. I came back to South district and was sent to IHM Hospital (Immaculate Heart of Mary Hospital) Bharananganam as they had no radiographer. But I did not work there long. I was not well and they could not diagnose it, so I was referred to CMC Vellore where they diagnosed it as Hodges skin disease and I had to take radiation treatment. I always called it a happy fault because after that I was not supposed to work in the X-ray department. After recuperating in Kottayam till the end of 1981 I was given permission to go to Mampally, a coastal village, where all were fishing families. There we had a small dispensary in our house; people could come at any time for help. The next day of my arrival - according to me a negative experience; an elderly man came and he started telling me what I should do to take care of his health needs. My attitude was 'you tell me your problem and I will decide what to do' (my paternal approach). He sounded a bit hot. After he left, I started to think ***whether I will be able to live among these people?*** But when he came the next day, he was very calm and smiling. So that day I realized that they are like the sea which roars up and returns calm.

We lived a very simple life, lived in a small house given by the parish Church. We had a hall where all of us slept on mats; we had one wall cupboard where all of us kept our clothes. Cooked very simple meals with ration rice, some vegetables and fish if we got it. There was no

wall around the house and no curtains. We did not have ceiling for the house and no fans. So, during the hot season all of us slept on the sea shore where all the people slept. Our house was an open house where people were always welcome to approach us for any need or to share etc. Their spirit inspired me a lot. Although there were fights between persons or families no child would go hungry because the neighbours' who see a starving child (may be because their mothers who are fish vendors have gone to the market with head load on foot) they will share from their nothingness. If there is an unwed mother (though it is a big taboo when it is made known) when the child is born everybody accepts the child and mother. When we have a meal with only some salads, they feel bad that we can't afford fish and even men who sees it tell their wives to bring fish curry for us. There are so many examples like this showing their generosity in the midst of poverty. Seeing this attitude of theirs; I have thought my so-called calculated generosity is far from a virtue. Another thing that has challenged my sense of justice was the way the fisher men shared the money or income from the shore scene (Karamadi). There are people who work in it from the start to the end and there are people who help at the end when the net is almost on the shore. In the evening all of them sit together to divide the income. That meeting may sound like a big fight especially the first time one sees it. But at the end all depart with satisfaction about what they received. Our daily prayer is based on the gospel especially the life of Christ and our daily experiences, action – reflection – action, was the pattern of our life. My spirituality of just saying the daily prayers and keeping the rules was challenged.

If we are really close to God, we cannot but enter the lives of other people especially their suffering. My consciousness deepened within me that I am also responsible for the suffering and exploitation of these people, as long as I do not challenge the structures which consciously exploit these people and make them believe it is God given and so accept it. By this, making them submissive and so-called peaceful life. Any effort on their part to question the exploitative system was interpreted as violence and disturbing the peace.

All these reflections and perceptions and many other experiences, enthused me to join the fisher peoples struggle to ban trolling (which destroys the livelihood of the poor fisher folk by disturbing the growth of fish resources, making it impossible to make ends meet) together with other MMS and likeminded groups. In connection with this we were arrested and put in central jail together with other women, and men in sub jail. The experience in the jail was also reveling. Ninety or more percent of the inmates were women picked up as prostitutes. In the evening when we prayed the police would not even allow the other women to sit with us for prayer. I asked the women police “you have kept so many women with





the charge of prostitution, so their counterparts (men) may be in the men's jail?" She laughed and said if such thing were done the whole question of prostitution would have stopped. What a discrimination against women! What a contradiction to the attitude of Jesus towards the woman caught in adultery (Jn: 8. 3-11)

On the 6th day, as the struggle was catching momentum the chief minister

released us from jail freeing us from all the charges against us. So, the next day all those who were released from the jail went on a fast in front of the secretariat till the demands were granted. I, who was afraid to quit even a meal, got the strength within me to fast, with the cause of the poor in front of me. The evenings we spent in prayer and reflection which strengthened us further. During the twelve days of fast only with water, I got the opportunity to experience the pangs of hunger which was a daily reality of the poor fisher folk. During the days of fast we stayed day and night with a plastic sheet above our head and it was monsoon season. That too was allowed only during the night and during the day when it rained. This really exposed us to the suffering of people who had no shelter; being exposed to the heat of the day and cold of the night. All these were deep spiritual experiences that deepened my closeness to God and to people. The awareness about the need to join or be part of the peoples' struggles and to be in their midst was not only for their advantage but for my own transformation also.

There is a deep spirituality in the struggles of the people for their own freedom as the children of God. So, the denial of justice and the right to live is the biggest sin. Unless we become part of peoples struggle to live as human beings, we are also part of this social sin and oppression. When we see God in the Center of people's struggle; our call to live Lk. 4: 18-19. and Jn: 10:10 becomes clearer and more meaningful.

Ten years of my life and work among fisher folk also brought me closer to the life of women in that community. In those days most of them were illiterate according to our yardstick, but they knew to manage their life. They are mostly fish venders (head load, on foot to markets or house to house selling fish). Since they did not know to write, they did all their calculations mentally. They had such good memory about the transactions and the money they have to get or had to pay. Ordinarily we say women have double burden. But the fisher women according to me had to bare triple burden i.e. financial burden also. All the borrowing and paying back had to be done by women whether it was for buying fishing equipments, building a house, or marriage expenses etc. They also suffer because of the drunkenness of the men. Besides this they were exploited by the 'gundas' (men who have control of the market because of their mussel power) in the markets.

We had to jump many hurdles to stick to our option for the poor. The ruling party was against us because our interventions disturbed the peace of the fishing community which was their vote bank or whatever it may be. Though many priests and religious supported us, the official Church was opposing us. I suppose it was the first experience of nuns and priests joining the public protest, fasting etc. So we had to even face an inquiry commission set up by the Church to find out what our intentions are or if we are influenced by the left thinking etc. The enquiry commission was satisfied with our explanations. Still we were asked not to participate in such struggles without the permission of the Church authorities. We, women religious, had to get the permission also of the religious superiors; whereas men religious had to get only the permission of their superiors. Discrimination against women! The next time we had to participate in the people's struggle, we wrote to the bishop, as we are part of the people for many years, we cannot but participate in their struggle and we did it. A long time after the struggle we got a reply telling us that asking permission is not informing. That was the end of it and we continued as usual to live and work among them.

One consolation was that our Major superiors supported us. But they also had to face hardships in relation to this matter. The superior general and her assistant and our regional superior met us and told us they are fully with us but if Rome takes some direct action against us they will be helpless. So, we told them if something like that happens our choice will be to be with the people. But nothing happened. One positive outcome was, at a later stage the Church, including bishop started to participate in peoples struggle related to different issues.

After I left Poothura, for one year I was involved in the District (Province) administration. After a year I went back to Trivandrum city and joined our sisters in HIV/AIDS work. In the beginning we tried to build public awareness about HIV/AIDS. Then we moved into giving instructions to different groups about HIV/AIDS trying to remove the fear by telling the real facts i.e. how it spreads and how it does not spread. Therefore, there is no need to socially isolate the people with HIV/AIDS. We gave HIV/AIDS awareness classes in all the coastal villages of Trivandrum. While in Trivandrum we were involved with fisher- peoples' struggle also.

When I look back at the fisher peoples struggle, its success is not only in what we achieved but what happened to the people in the process. People become more aware of the strength of getting organised and how their bargaining power increased. They became more and more conscious about their rights and what blocks them from achieving it. Also, they are more exposed to the stand of the society and the government i.e. they are not interested in the betterment





of the poor people but they are hand in gloves with the upper strata of the society. They use all the machinery under their power to squash the people's struggles. The people also learn new methods of struggles to pressurize the government. Another outcome of the struggle is that issues of the fisher people are made known nationally and internationally and

collaboration developed between the fish workers across the state, country and at the global level.

I left Trivandrum in 2005 for good due to my health condition. I still wanted to go back to Trivandrum and manage with facilities there. But the superiors decided that it is better that I come away from there because sometimes my condition becomes very serious needing ICU care and people to attend to me etc. From then on, I am here in Kottayam; on and off in hospitals for treatment and care. I had been to Amrita Institute of Medical Sciences Ernakulam, CMC Vellore, Caritas Hospital Kottayam etc. In 2012 I developed breast cancer, had surgery and was treated with Chemo Therapy. Before 2012 whenever I was well, I participated in the activities of Kerala Streevedi, Kottayam. Now I am feeling generally OK and keeping fit to live in the house and help out in the needs as much as possible.

I feel if only we follow the instructions of Pope Francis for Religious, we can be sure that we are moving in the right direction. He is exhorting us to take an option for the poor, the exploited who are victims of socio-economic, political, and judicial systems which exist only for the welfare of the higher ups. But even now Religious involved with the peoples' struggles are very few compared to those involved in the institutional work. This places a challenge to the present generation of Religious to respond to the needs of the poor to bring justice and freedom and give them a human face. Let the religious training also be oriented in this direction closer to the life reality of the majority of people in the country.

I am grateful to God and the poor for the deep experiences of spirituality and the transformation that happened to me. It has helped me to change my world view and the need to look deeply at our conventional concepts of God, spirituality, holiness, religious practices and the goal of religious life and many other such concepts.

10. MY TRANSFORMATIVE JOURNEY - RIPPLES OF CHANGE!

I lived for 26 years among the people of Poothura and Mampally. It was a time of adjustment, learning and unlearning as it was my first involvement in the field of health care at the grassroots levels. I realized that my professional learning is an asset that can be well utilized. It gave me the chance to reach out to the wider community of people who were at the margins of the society. We offered first aid and simple treatment for people coming with common ailments. Those in need of further treatment were directed either to the Primary Health Centre (PHC) at Anchuthengu or Taluk hospital at Chirayinkeezhu or Thiruvananthapuram Medical College Hospital. Few People Living with HIV/AIDS were helped to get treatment from the Taluk hospital. The PHC at Anchuthengu did not have adequate staff and facilities like medicine, bed and drinking water. Therefore, in May 1980 Kerala Swatantra Matsya Thozhilali Federation (KSMTF), in which we were involved, organized the people making them aware 'health is their basic right and government has a duty to provide the required facilities and infrastructure.' People from Thazhampally to Mampally under the leadership of KSMTF staged 'dharnas' (sit in) in front of the PHC and State Health Directorate. The director of health services consented to activate the PHC within two months. Nurseries were started for children with prepared curriculum illustrating the realities of their life situation. Gradually standard of education improved. MMS were part of the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) in the government school. Through adult education and other programs among women, children and youth, the people realized that lack of safe drinking water, sanitation, unhygienic environment and alcoholism are the root causes of their ill health. Classes cum exhibition on 'protect water, protect life' were conducted for the students of St. Joseph High School, Anchuthengu. Thereafter people were organized through various modes of struggles to pressurize the government for providing safe drinking water. This was responded favorably. Since the water taps were used in common, committees of three were formed to maintain them. In order to ensure healthy living conditions, we supervised the construction of a few low-cost Baker model houses for the deserving families and helped many to obtain government loan/ grant for renovation of their burned/damaged houses and to purchase fishing accessories, with the cooperation and collaboration of people.



SR. PHILOMENA VARGHESE

I supervised the construction of nearly 2000 latrines in Anchuthengu panchayat for those who owned land and availed water connection pipes with the financial aid of panchayat and other NGOs. A common comfort station with ten toilets was built with the help of the local people and the panchayat. Almost 400 persons daily used this facility on payment of a nominal fee. For many years this was managed by the women's group. I was able to influence some people to shift their attitudes towards keeping them clean. In collaboration with the PHC we arranged seminars on health and sanitation, which was attended by more than 150 people. The women's group collaborated with the Block in conducting awareness program on balanced diet, hygiene and environmental sanitation. Thereafter one Doctor from PHC conducted health checkup for the children in our nurseries. After a number of awareness programmes we, together with the people prepared a detailed action plan for improvement of sanitation. The Agricultural Refundable Finance Corporation scheme pond was the breeding place for mosquitoes. This was closed with the participation of youth, children, women and nursery/adult education teachers.

We, Medical Mission Sisters, as a team lived among the fisher people experiencing their life struggles to effect change in their life situation. It was a rare opportunity to collaborate with other groups to protect nature - the sea and its resources and bring a comprehensive approach in health care. It improved the quality of life, communal harmony, understanding and cooperation among the people, and developed people's leadership. The children who studied in our nurseries later got into leadership positions in panchayat and block levels.

I experience joy and contentment for the opportunity to participate in the redemptive mission of Jesus. For me healing 'charism' means being humble, communicative, supportive and understanding by responding to the wider society as a whole. Freedom with responsibility, option for the poor, I could share Jesus through my life with the downtrodden. It was an experience of suffering, death and resurrection. I am so grateful for my Religious vocation-to be an MMS and become the voice for the voiceless. FOR ME LIFE IS a BLESSING, a CELEBRATION, a CHALLENGE, a TRIAL above all A HEALING EXPERIENCE. A transformative journey indeed! "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full." (Jn10:10)



11. LIFE IS A CHALLENGE. FACE IT.

This is what I felt about life. May I start with some of my pre-occupations in the childhood days. I always wanted to be different from others. I wanted to get the attention of others. Still it is not very clear for me the factors that led to this attitude. Maybe it was because I was the last but one child among the seven and sufficient attention was not given to me. I always felt to keep out of the family. Once my uncle priest asked me whether I would like to join the seminary. I thought this the best occasion to keep myself out of the family and I joined the seminary with all enthusiasm. Thus, my first aspiration in life to be different, to be honoured and to be away from the family was achieved due to this decision. I thought by becoming a priest I will be in a honourable position. My uncle as priest was well honoured by the family members.



MSGR. JAMES CULAS

MINOR SEMINARY

My minor seminary life was not so bright. First of all, the rules in the seminary were very hard. Among all the rules there was a rule called rule of communication by which a seminarian was not supposed to talk with his classmates other than the seminarians in the school. It so happened that I was a student in the same school in the town where I had to continue my studies as a seminarian. And my companions were with me in the same class, and I found it very hard to keep away from them. This was painful experience for me not to speak with my friends. I found that I was in a jail. I took interest only in studies and the game we played. But I was not diffident. After my school studies my father died. It was a shock for me. My studies in the minor seminary suffered a lot because of this event. There was no one in the seminary to console me. I felt I was all alone in this world. Those days were the dark days in my life. Actually, I didn't know what is happening with in me. But I felt my major seminary life will be different. Some of my senior friends wrote to me their experiences in the major seminary. That gave me lot of encouragement about the future.

MAJOR SEMINARY

I felt free from the bondage once I came to the major seminary. The seminary is situated near a beautiful river and the whole atmosphere of the seminary was very positive for me. The study of philosophy and languages were an enriching experience. The presence of good professors

for each subjects made the study easy and meaningful lot of extracurricular activities were there for developing the artistic qualities of students. A very good library was there for students who wanted to make use of it. The whole atmosphere was conducive for study and reflection. This was a period immediately after Vatican Council. A lot of new thinking was coming in to the church. Our Rector of the seminary was a man of vision. He was ready to make any meaningful change in the seminary, on seminary formation, in the light of the documents of Vatican Council. In fact, he initiated a Seminar on seminary formation, and the students were given the freedom to express their criticism views and aspirations. This seminar became a land mark in the history of the seminary, suggesting lot of new activities and stopping many of the traditional practices.

This was a period when I really started thinking about life. The study of different philosophies especially existential philosophy gave me a new vision of life and learning of the Indian philosophy gave a new orientation towards religion. The author who influenced me most at this phase was the Indian Poet philosopher Rabindranath Tagore. \His basic philosophy on Man and Religion influenced me much.

The study of Theology was not that interesting, mostly we were taught the traditional theology. There were few exceptions with regard to this. Those professors were also not very much interested in liberation theology. I took my leisure time to study liberation theology. There were not many books in the library and I had to get books from outside the seminary. But one of my professors helped me to get those books and gave me sufficient guidance. The study of scripture was given much importance in the syllabus and we had very efficient professors to handle the subject. But somehow I felt there is a lot of free time in this period and a search for new involvement was necessary. I got slowly involved with Christian students' movements and workers organizations.

Meanwhile I got an opportunity to attend a training programme for seminarians on workers apostolate. It was for the first time I am hearing about the exploitation workers are undergoing in India. On the following year during summer holidays I attended a seminar on Indian situations. This was a socio-political analysis of Indian society explaining the causes of poverty in India. These two studies were made on





holidays and it was out of my own individual initiative this became possible. These two sessions were a turning point in my life. This became an occasion for me to think about the role of priest in the society. Though seminary training

gave me a new outlook on life. It really failed to give an orientation which a new society needs.

NEW PRIEST

After my orientation I was posted in a village parish. Actually, I didn't know what to do. There were no parish councils nor any people's associations in the parish. I felt I was left alone. Slowly I thought of doing something for the primary school. A parent-teacher association was formed and some activities were planned to improve the facilities in the school. After six months I was transferred to a new parish and was appointed as the Director of Youth for the diocese. I started with seminars and camps for youth. The camps were planned to improve the leadership skills of youth as well as to deepen their faith communities. But I was dissatisfied thinking that this was not the approach needed today. Slowly I got in touch with other groups working in the district who are more in a socio-political dimension. I felt rather confused about my own involvement and felt the need to a detailed study about society and my own involvements. Some of my friends suggested to attend a three months' course offered by a Social Institute and I joined the course after three year of my parish, Diocese involvement.

INDIAN SOCIAL INSTITUTE

This institute offers a training programme for Activists and other social workers, a course on community development and community organization. The main thrust of the course is on socio political analysis of society and a detailed study of the working-class movement. This was an intense study and I felt the need of rethinking about my whole approach in my involvement. Slowly I started involving with different secular groups with socio-political perspective. This period really was a search for me. It was a period where I had to decide my priorities. I found my time very much limited to do the work as a diocesan priest as well as to involve in the secular movements. My primary concern at this stage was to get more involved in secular movements rather than in the parish and Diocesan activities. At this stage I concentrated more on youth and young workers. Lot of training programmes were conducted with the help of a centre which gives at most importance for training. As a result of which we were able to

bring out young local leaders in most of the fishing villages in the district. They in turn started working in the fishermen trade union, co-operatives, nursery schools (teachers) non-formal education centres.

My second priority went to the diocesan renewal programmes. We prepared the Sunday school teachers, nearly thousands of them for a renewal programme in the diocese. A new orientation was given to them. This created a lot of enthusiasm in the diocese, though it was met with some opposition from the elderly priests of the diocese.

REEDWORKERS AND FISHWORKERS

Slowly I got involved with reed workers and fish workers. I already had some initial contacts with reed workers before my training session. The reed workers are one of the most exploited section of workers in the State. We made a socio-economic study of this sector. We started with some economic programme and got in touch with most of the villages in the district. Slowly we started an independent (not affiliated to any political party) trade union for reed workers. By our constant struggle we could pressurize the Government to supply reeds directly to the workers and take the finished products through Government depots. Thus, avoided middle men's exploitation and to make sure of regular income to the workers. Though the economic condition of the reed workers has not developed much, their social status has come to a stage where they can assert themselves politically and they are free from the economic clutches of the middlemen and the merchants.

Fishworkers union was on its shaping stage and I found much interest in joining the movement from its very beginning. Most of the young local leaders were known to me and it was an interesting experience to be with them in organizing the union activities.

FISHERMEN STRUGGLE (1981)

In the trade union history of our State 1981 fishermen struggle was a unique event. Traditional fishermen all over the state supported this struggle. The issue was to ban trawling in the monsoon (June-August) season. Monsoon is considered to be the breeding season for most of the fishers and trawling is a destructive method of fishing which trawls the bottom of sea destructing the sea beds killing eggs and small fishes. The struggle was against the then ruling





communist ministry. The newspapers and other media highlighted this demand. It also enjoyed a popular support, the issue being an ecological. The struggle took shape by picketing Government offices and paralyzing transport services in the state.

Though our demand was not fully achieved, the ministry constituted a commission asking for the scientific base of this demand. Though the

struggle ended in this way, it has aroused a new consciousness among fishermen regarding the limited resources of the sea and the destructive character of trawling. It became the first study report from the part of the Government with regard to marine resources.

TOWARDS LEFT

Though the struggle in 1981 was against the leftist ministry, (In 1981, towards the end of the year the ministry resigned due to political pressure), the leftist trade unions also joined in our struggle in the following year. This was a turning point in the history of our trade union movements. The stand of the organization was to join hands with those who accept the demands of struggle. Though the stand created a lot of criticism from certain sections of the workers. It has created an ideological base and a new perspective for the union. And this was strongly expressed in the struggle launched in 1984-85.

SECOND PHASE OF FISHERMEN STRUGGLE (1984-85)

Though the study report of the commission did not suggest to ban trawling during monsoon season, it came out with a lot of suggestions for the conservation of fish resources including the ban of night trawling. The trade union took a very strong stand asking for the ban in monsoon season. Most of the trade unions in this sector supported this issue. The opposition party in the assembly boycotted the sessions demanding for settling the issue. Many of our leaders went on fast. The fasting lasted for 23 days even. Here again the Government came out with constituting an expert team of scientists from other states.

The report came in 85, the major proposal of the report was to limit the number of trawlers in each part and avoid the pressure of intense fishing. In 85 we came out with this demand before the Government. This was supported by many other environment groups also. But we couldn't achieve our demand.

My association with Christian groups with a socio-political perspective was an enriching experience at this period. These groups were informal groups trying to explore the faith dimension in our secular involvements. This Christians for socialism groups meets occasionally, where the participants share their experiences of their involvement. Then we will have a Bible study session. Also, a study of a current topic, relevant to the group. This group asked me to attend the international meeting of Christians for Socialism held in Spain.

For me this meeting was a unique experience. The sharing of experiences of participants from different countries regarding the socio-political situation of their country and the people's movements for liberation was a rich experience. Specially to hear from participants from Latin American countries and South Africa. I felt the need of an in-depth study of the liberation theology and the situation of each country.

I had the chance of attending another meeting organized by the Asian Regional Fellowship in Philippines. Participants came from Indonesia, India Philippines, S. Korea and Thailand. The topic for the meeting was women's participation in peoples struggle for liberation. Each group presented the Socio-political situation of the country with special emphasis on women's issues, this was a good exchange programme. The participants were also given the opportunity to study the situation in Philippines visiting interested sector in the country.

These two exposures helped me a lot to understand the international situation. To understand the socio-political situation of many countries in the world as well as the emerging people's movements in these countries for the freedom of countries as well as for human rights. This helped me a lot, also to think in a broader perspective and to understand the global issues present mankind is faced with. This was part of my search with Christian groups. I always find meaning reflecting with these groups in relation to our socio-political involvements.

CULTURAL FORUMS (86-87)

We had lot of cultural expressions all through our involvements. In 1985 we started the fishermen struggle staging a street drama focusing the issue of trawling in most of the fishing villages of the State. This gave a impetus for us to popularize our issue in a wider context and to take this issue out of the





fishing sector. This was envisaged by staging a drama in a popular theatrical style. A theater group was formed and a drama was acted by this group in different parts of the State. Along with this we had children's cultural festivals which also became serious cultural involvements, made our movement popular and our issue, alive.

LIVE IN EXPERIENCE (1987)

In 1987 our diocese was supposed to celebrate the golden jubilee. In a meeting of priests called by the Bishop, everybody felt that one should celebrate the jubilee in a meaningful way. Most of the priests felt the priests in the diocese are divided on various issues of the diocese, including the question of the Bifurcation of the diocese. A suggestion came from one of the senior priests that we will have a live in programme where we will sort out all our problems. A team of priests were elected to organize this programme. (I was one among them).

We took nearly six months to prepare for the meeting. Lot of criticism was on the administration of the diocese. Especially, about those who were in offices. Some are criticized for their practically others for their long stay in the offices. We prepared a position paper on behalf of the criticism we had from the priests. We got the service of Fr. D.S. Amalorpavadas to moderate the meeting. The meeting was well attended and a number of decisions were taken and most of them were unanimous decisions. We came to a consensus with regard to the question of bifurcation of the diocese. It was also decided all the ministries in the diocese has to be administered by a team including religious and lay people; every office will have a term of three years or maximum for one more term i.e. six years. These decisions and similar ones created a new enthusiasm among the clergy. This has now initiated a new life in the diocese.

A PARISH EXPERIMENT 1988

In January 1988 I got transferred to a new parish. Somehow I felt to initiate few activities in the parish. This being a new parish I was also enthusiastic to introduce a modern approach. The parish responded positively dividing the parish in to small communities called family units gave a new enthusiasm to the people. The convenor of units were called leaders of the parish who were responsible for their own communities. This created a new enthusiasm in the communities. We had prayer meetings in every community according to the season.

For the parish feast we had a good discussion in the community regarding their expectation from the parish, as well as how to celebrate the parish feast. Advent was spent as a period for the preparation of Christmas. During X'mas holiday A Bible festival was celebrated. This was mainly to introduce the Bible themes to the people as well as to improve the artistic qualities of the children and youth of the parish. Holy week was celebrated in a meaningful way. The liturgy was reformulated with people's participation. A camp was organized for children to introduce Bible themes for them. It was well appreciated. In short, my experience in the parish gave me new awareness to build up a parish community with the participation of lay leaders.

PROTECT WATERS, PROTECT LIFE (1989)

This is a slogan framed by the National Fishermen Forum. Our trade union is one of the affiliated union in the National Fishermen Forum. The Forum has a history of taking the issues of fisherworkers for the last ten years. It had pressurized the central Government to enact marine laws in favour of traditional fishworkers. It has taken steps to convince the Government, the need of conserving fish resources and to ban destructive fishing methods.

This year it came with a new slogan, "Protect Waters, Protect Life". It was a campaign to conscientize the people against water pollution taking place all over the country by human interventions, against putting waste to the rivers, factory wastes to the rivers and sea, against Atomic power stations which dump the waste in to the sea which causes the ecological disaster in fish life and the deforestation happening in the country. The campaign was supported by the environmental groups throughout the country. A country wide march was organized which lasted for a month. Public meetings, marches were organized in local level, explain the need to protect water in order to protect life. It ended up in the southern most district of the country with a huge Rally, Exhibition, Cultural festival and a public meeting. Nearly fifteen thousand people took part in the concluding function. This was a rare event in the country where so many people took interest in an Ecological issue of this sort.

MY WORK

My work over the past five years were mainly to give leadership to different committees. This ranges from Parish council to a committee of a trade union. I got involved with different levels of leadership in the context of church from parish to feroana and then to Diocese, from parish council to the





senate of priests of the Diocese. In the trade union field, from the village committee to the State committee.

There are people who inspired me to involve in new areas of social life, they are the people who are my co-workers and friends who keep me in the work. These are people who give me great hope for the future. It is in a team work that I always find meaning

in my involvement. Most of the team in which I am involved are small communities. There is a good interaction between the members. The friendship is very strong and mutual support and encouragement keeps us together. We have informal groups that keep the formal groups alive and active. This could be a priests' group of similar interests or secular group of friends who are also members of the team.

IDEAS AND TEACHING

All through, I felt I am called to participate in the creation of a better society. And I found many people as individuals, groups, movements are committed to this cause. It is important to identify those people and also to see how we would collaborate with them, seems to me very important. I always felt a people-oriented approach is necessary for this. Our convictions regarding a new society is important at all levels of our life. Only with this conviction we can approach people. It is very important that we don't compromise disregarding the values.

I always felt happy with people who are trying to achieve a better life, a better society. It is a future reality one which we may not enjoy. It may be for the coming generation. There is also a short term programme where we work together to make our life meaningful.

I believe all my activities has to be people oriented. Anything that they don't feel their need, should not be initiated unless primarily they feel that it is their work. Any work has to be done with a participatory approach. Each one has to do something in the activity. People should take part in the decision-making process. In short in team work. And now I am involved with lot of groups.

DIFFICULTIES

The main problem I am facing now is the problem of too much involvements. As I am involved in different types of groups, I won't get sufficient time to concentrate on my work. Too much travel weakens my mind and body. When it comes to organizational work, I often feel I am not

performing my role, because I am framed to do the work which others are supposed to do. I find the action reflection process is not happening with me in the proportion I need. Also, I felt the inner resources are depleting as years pass on. I find often people who are directly responsible for the office giving more priority to the laws than to persons. By this, they dominate the group decisions, I feel myself very much limited to carry out the work assigned by the diocese and the work I am doing in the workers' sector. The work becomes too much. The time factor is the important limitation. The perfection of the work suffers because of the busy schedules. Over-lapping of the programmes puts me in difficulty in the choice and deciding the priority.

LIMITS

One of my limitations I always felt that I am not 'specialized' in anything in my life. Neither in art nor in science or on any subject. This always put me down in most phases in my life. I was an average student in school, average in play, in cultural performance, etc. Though I had a wide range of experience in life, I always felt I had to be supported by somebody in all my initiatives. This is partly due to the seminary training I underwent. The main block I faced was that my studies in the seminary was not very much helpful for my ministry. The degree I took from the seminary was not recognized by any of the universities in India. I realized my limitation to face the secular world, with my orientation I received from the seminary. My role as a parish priest kept me away from participating in the struggles of the poor.

FULFILLMENT

I have a deep sense of fulfillment and satisfaction from my life and work. I always feel my approach has to be correct and if not, it has to be corrected. The deep friendship I experienced in the team work has given me joy and hope in my work. The values that it uphold in all our activities gives me the boost to go ahead in this work. Our work is done in a team and with a team spirit. This supports each member by mutual backing in the process. the deep friendship made over the years is a real support we feel in our work. This support is given in all levels of our involvement and in life.

SUPPORT SYSTEM

In my involvements, I felt supported mainly by the people, i.e., the poor. They always owned me in all situations of my life. This really sustained me in my struggles with the poor.





I felt very much supported also by my friend priests. We have a priests' group, not constituted by the diocese but by our own initiative. This group gives me a lot of emotional support. Though they may not actively get involved in the struggles of people, they understand and support me in my involvements. There are core groups at different levels of my involvement who really support me to go ahead with my work.

These small groups were very concerned about me all through my life. They always helped me in my growth. As I mentioned in this paper these groups helped me to understand society, to improve my skills, to update my knowledge and support me whatever way possible for them.

Looking back over my whole life, I find the world is moving into a new direction, a change is possible in this world. The people are basically good and there are a lot of committed people in this world. Team work is the best way of doing things. Each team becomes a community. And community living is the best form of living experience. There is no much differences with socially committed groups. If they come together we can do wonders in this world. I feel the preparation of this paper helped me to situate myself in the context of my life and work. I feel this is a soul searching homework and I am happy to do it.

FAITH HISTORY

My life was a search for the meaning of life. At every stage of my life, I felt, I am called to something greater. The thirst for growth was very strong in me. My father was one who influenced me first in this regard. He encouraged me in my studies. He talked with me interesting things about life. He wanted me to be honest. He was a model for me. He gave us the freedom to do what we wanted to do, to choose according to our priority giving the responsibility to us by supporting us fully. This created a healthy interaction among the family members. There was a mutual trust and faith between us. I feel my primary faith experience starts from home. Life was very pleasant at home. But I felt something more has to be achieved. The minor seminary was not at all good for me. The atmosphere was quite artificial and I felt my school days in the seminary a horrible life. I felt I am jailed, but still I had the feeling that this is only a passing stage and this is a part of my life. Except getting disciplined by the seminary training, which helped me a lot to systematize my life, it was not a pleasant life.

The major seminary was a place I really confronted with different schools of thought. This really gave me a new awakening. I felt this is a new phase in my life. I was exposed to a new faith experience. Each year I felt I am passing through a change of life. I felt I am called to be more human. There was a strong feeling in me at this period. By becoming more human we become divine. I was very conscious about my identity and development of personality. The consciousness of my own talents, provoked me to choose a life of deep commitment. I had the strong feeling that my understanding of God, Man and society has to be reworked at this phase. I was much influenced by other religions and philosophies. Existential philosophy from west and Indian philosophy from East had much influence on me. The religion of man envisaged by Tagore really made a unique influence in me.

In theology, I found my spirituality get more with Biblical studies rather than the dogmatic theology, taught in the seminary. I felt little influenced by the traditional theology and got much influenced by liberation theology. As I completed my theology I could somehow synthesize my philosophical studies with my Biblical insights and liberation theology. This gave me great satisfaction in my studies. All through my seminary days I found professors who influenced me, who helped me a lot by directing me to new thoughts who shaped my spirituality. I call this stage a stage of freedom and openness. This stage is not a stage of achievement. It is a stage I felt I have a theoretical frame helping to understand me and my life in a very broad perspective.

INVOLVEMENT STAGE (75-78)

This stage was a time I slowly got involved in activities. Parish, School, Youth I tried to do everything with a new perspective, which really was very much attractive and they really appreciated my work. My liturgy, sermons etc. created very positive response. I spend much time for preparation for these and wanted to make life meaningful. It was a search for relevant priesthood. Education was another field I concentrated at this period children who were backward in studies were supported by giving them more attention to improve their standard. I was appointed on the director of Youth apostolate and I spent considerable amount of time organizing youth to improve their leadership skills and helping them to acquire a new vision about life. It was a pleasant work; but I felt this is only renewal approach. The deeper issues of life can't be tackled with this approach.





TRANSITION PERIOD (78-81)

This period was a challenging period. I found my seminary training is more academic and not practical. It is more supporting the status quo, not for social change. I decided for an in-depth study of society by attending a course primarily on socio-political analysis. This was a new experience for me. This helped me to see Bible in a new perspective. The focus of my

faith really changed. The focus of my faith changed from church to society. I was thrown to a stage to search for a secular spirituality.

OPTION FOR THE POOR (81-84)

This period was a stage I felt I have to be deeply committed to the cause of the poor, to take part in the struggles of workers to be with them to fight for their rights. This was a new experience, to be with the people, to experience their hopes and anxieties, fear and dreams. I was fully changed at this period. I felt I have to work out a new frame to create a new thinking, a new spirituality supporting my involvement. It was a deep search. At this phase I gained strength to go on for fast for twelve days supporting the struggle of the fishermen for conserving fish resources.

COLLABORATION WITH OTHER GROUPS (84)

The necessity to collaborate with other groups who are committed to the poor, led me to the decision that any commitment of this sort has to be a political commitment. This decision created new challenges lot of misunderstanding and opposition came from different corners. This was sharpening my commitment. But I had to give much sacrifice for this. It was a struggle and life became a challenge at this period. The challenge to be with the minority.

EXPERIENCE OF ENCOUNTER

My experience of encounter can be traced from childhood days. It was sometimes persons, other times situations, events, study, philosophies, experiences. All the time I felt it is an invitation for a higher life. I consider this different phases of growth in my spirituality. It is my growth in humanness. It is a growth into Divinity. In a way I consider these as Experience of Encounter. I find there were always persons whose presence shaped my life - My father, some of my professors

in the seminary, friends, People who impressed me, persons involved in people's movement. It was a constant feeling in my life – these are the people who paved my way to growth. They were guides for me in my confusions. They inspired me in my down feelings. They taught me about higher life. They challenged me when I was wrong. They supported me when I was weak. They helped me to take serious decisions in life. Above all they loved me than themselves.

At each stage I felt I am invited for a call, to do something meaningful in life. And I have to respond to these situations by a constant search, study, reflection, making decisions. Finding out persons or groups with whom I have to work, Sometimes I make my mind to join the groups other times I am invited to join groups. For me, thus life has become a constant search - A search for truth, A search for meaningful life. This is hard, but I felt I can't escape. It is often a painful experience. But at the end of every experience, I felt deep joy and peace. A high sense of fulfillment.

Sometimes I am challenged by my own decisions. I am questioned, why did you choose this way what prompted you to take this decision, is it your own interest or is it for a good cause? Or it could sometimes be a question like, do you undertake this programme for your fame or are you convinced of what you are doing? With regard to political decisions, often, I am confronted with this question. How do you justify your joining with certain groups? Is it for 'popularity' or because of the people's interests you take this position? There are few of the questions in my encounter.

Some aspects of the various encounters continued through all the stages of my life faith history. I felt most the value-consciousness I encountered were a constant reality in my life. The sense of humanness I felt in my encounter were present all through my life. The sense of humanness I felt in my encounter were present all through my life. Some of the challenges posed by persons or situations had a long standing in my life and by which I had to take serious decisions regarding my life. Few of my professors who gave me a theological vision on life created a breakthrough in my life. The poet-philosopher Tagore, the man who showed me God in man through his books stands live in me.

PERSONAL EXPERIENCE OF THE LORD

For me Bible has two basic traditions, one that is prophetic and the other we may call it cultic or legal. The prophetic tradition though it was the tradition of minority was a very strong tradition. The cultic, priestly tradition was followed by the majority. I find a





strong cultic tradition in the spirituality of the official Church. This had a strong influence in me from my childhood. Apart from the Bible stories I learned from my catechism class it did not help me much for a God experience. It was not related to life or experience of people. But this kept me in good spirit. But later in my major seminary life I was exposed to other religions and philosophy. This helped me to

understand Christianity much more. At this phase I started seeing God beyond religion. This is a period when I got over many of the traditional understanding of religion. I felt deeply that cult by itself will not reveal the divinity. Cult has to express the life of the people. By becoming more human one becomes divine. This was the type of spirituality I had during my theological studies. I found much meaning in it. The Incarnation - God becoming man in Christ became more meaningful to me in this context. Jesus became a model. How one should live his (her) life. As a priest I was trying to explain this spirituality of Humanism. I was going around, preaching this. And I became an accepted preacher in my diocese.

There are also aspects of various encounters that changed from stage to stage. There are people who contributed at a particular stage in my life later I found them that they don't influence me. As time passes, situation changes I had to opt for higher values, sacrificing lower values. This happens once we make decision which will have a political content. Choosing of lesser evils is also an inevitable reality as life is confronted with options. Some of the aspects of encounters which gave emotional satisfaction later I found them not so important or inevitable. This may be a part of growth or it could be otherwise. Still each aspect has its value in its here and now situation.

COMMITMENT TO THE POOR

At the third year of my priesthood I was challenged by a team who are primarily working among the fish workers. They told my ministry does not in any way help the poor. Though I did not understand them fully, I felt there is some truth in what they said. I was recommended to attend a course on socio-political analysis of society. The structural analysis I had in the course helped me to understand well that I am not really helping the poor.

I slowly started understanding the meaning of option for the poor. I could understand Jesus'

commitment in a new context. I slowly got involved with the fishworkers' struggle against destructive fishing methods that causes the depletion of fish resources in the sea. It was a confrontation against the power structures in the society. At another phase I went for fasting for twelve days. It was experiencing a spirituality of non-violence. A new presence of God in the midst of the people – a personal experience of the Lord – in the struggles of the people. Fasting days were days of deep experience of the Lord... understanding the meaning of “giving one's life for others”. In short, God is experienced in a community in the history of people. For me my life is a constant search for a new life... new society.

PEOPLE AND STRUCTURES

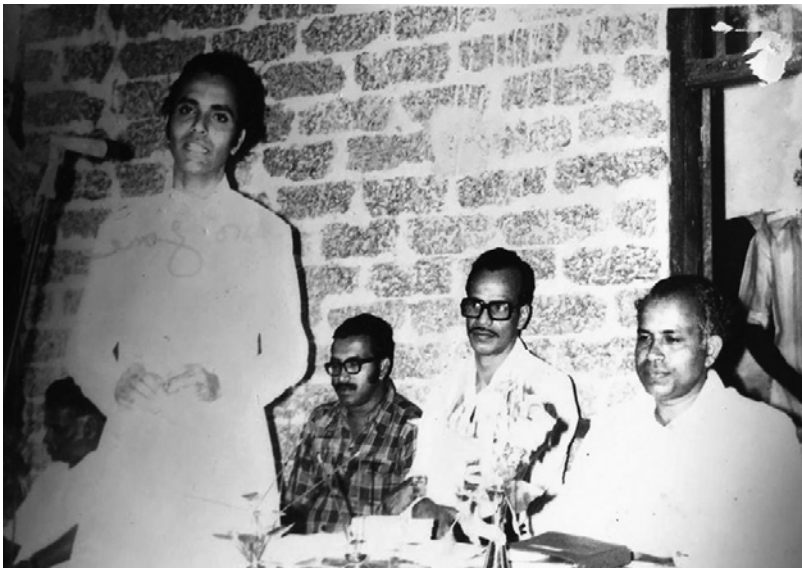
There are few structures and people, I remember with joy, have done good to me and influenced me in my life. My family, major seminary, parish, Diocese, Trade Union, etc. are the structures that have done good to me and I in turn have done good to them.

The fishermen's trade union is one organization for which have spent my time and energy splendidly. It was a unique experience. This organization, I always felt was my own. We have contributed everything we had for the growth of this organization and the organization in turn helped us to grow in our own style. It is a joyful experience to be a part in creating a movement and committing oneself in every phase of its growth. As the movement grows, we become a part of it and we grow as the movement grows.

It is also a reality in our involvements, we face with a situation where we meet people and structures that have hurt me and whom I may have hurt. This happens once you take positions against the decision of authorities, for example with my diocesan authorities. It happened time and again, In political involvements with the groups ideologically different in the time of elections etc. I had to take stand which might have hurt others. Failures often arises when there is not sufficient preparation made with people before taking decisions that are going to affect them. Failures can also happen even though my stand is correct, the pain to convince people about my stand becomes a hard job and if we don't listen to that, it can emotionally upset people and in the long run our endeavour may not find fruit as we expected.

Sufficient patience to listen to others and hear their views giving them chance to correct their position is a necessity, the absence of which have led to failure many a time in my life.





Inspiration of Christian life, often, for me came from committed individuals. Few of them attracted me by the option they have taken for the poor. Others by their vision of life and respect for values. Other sources are the different teams with whom I am working. They are my friends, co-workers we plan together, work together, supporting each other—that becomes an inspiration for all of us.

My experience of reflection prayer and contemplation – I can't deal this separately. I can think about it only in relation with the people with whom I am working. The beautiful reflections I make is together with my friends or team mates. The beautiful prayer experience I had was always in a group, disposed for it. And my life of contemplation is an extension of my reflection and prayer which lives in me even in the absence of my fellow beings. That becomes a unique experience. An experience of joy and peace. Where we are in a position being united with the divine.

There has been no move away from personal reflection prayer and reflection and contemplation in my life. There may be occasions when I have not given sufficient importance for reflection, prayer and contemplation. These were either for short periods or in a transitory stage, or in a state of confusion regarding taking a decision. But it was never a pre-dominant feeling or determined attitude. Spiritual growth, for me was a feeling of growth in being human. This often happens in facing a new situation either relating with a person or an experience. Certain events and people are significant for me because the people and events shape my life into a meaningful level. The main surprises was to remember people whom I have forgotten. To see some events, I considered less important became more important now.

The basic insights I had from this reflection is to make my life more systematic. A systematic study called for a systematic life. Secondly the need to discern my priorities in life becomes an important thing sufficient care has to be given to many people whom during the course of life I have forgotten or cared less. The need to reflect more on the past experiences and situated the present in the contexts of past, making a history of events. The most beautiful thing in life is still waiting for me in the future. That is a hopeful dream or reality. My whole thrust in the workshop will be to plan out my future. For that I need sufficient time for reflection, study and guidance. To systematize my life, assigning priorities, finding out my strong and weak points, My aspirations and limitations. To examine, how I proceed with life and to dream about future.

12. FULLFILMENT IN LIFE AND WORK

I was born in 1952 in Bharanganam (I.H.M. Hospital) Kottayam District. I did my studies in a rural government school which was three kilometers away from our home. At home we were given responsibilities to share the house hold works like collecting pepper, cashew and other farm products. One of the duties which I used to enjoy was grazing the calves and sheep together with neighbouring children. We used to go for mountaineering on Saturdays and holidays and enjoy fishing and swimming in the stream. We, half a dozen children were very close friends and there were Harijans and Hindus in the group. Once in a while we used to go for a picnic to the nearby forests and mountains and enjoyed cooking and eating there with all our cousins and neighbours of our peer group.



VALSA PARAVARAKATH

We used to have lots of fun and laughter in the school and I was good in studies except English. When I was studying in class V I received First Holy Communion and that was one of the memorable events in my life. I had a special affection for the Fransiscan Nuns who helped me to prepare myself for my First Holy Communion. I was impressed by their behavior and I also wanted to devote and dedicate my life as a sister to do good to all. I was an active member of Cherupuzhpa Mission League and Sodality.

My mother is a simple woman of deep faith in God and His Providence. She used to narrate to us many stories about saints and the heroism of leading a holy life. We were encouraged to participate in daily mass and she was particular that one of us from our house should participate in the daily mass. My father was a quick-tempered man but he was very affectionate to us. His sense of justice was remarkable and he was a humorous person as well. He was very human. He used to enjoy life with cultural programmes like dramas, dance and others. Occasionally he loved to have meal together with the workers and family members. He never showed any discrimination to the workers men or women and all of them even now say - “we were one family.”

HIGH SCHOOL & COLLEGE:

English was very tough in the school and I used to get only very low marks. In the college I struggled a lot with my poor English and worked hard to learn. I preferred English literature for my B.A. and many discouraged and persuaded me not to take. But I took it as a challenge and wanted to join MMS I knew early that MMS is an international group and there I have to learn



English. Though I wanted to go for nursing and join MMS soon after my S.S.L.C. my father was very particular that I should not be a religious, if at all, only after post-graduation. So I completed B.A. in 1973.

VOCATION & FORMATION (1974-1977)

The whole aim of choosing this way of life is due to my attraction to lead a holy and

adventurous life in Assam or Africa - very undeveloped areas according to those days information. I wanted to help many who are suffering and sick. Secondly, I wanted to lead a prayerful life, free from the control of husband and children. Thirdly I thought this is a greater call - to dedicate my life for the glory of God and for the service of humanity. This idea of becoming a missionary I received from Mission League and some of my friends who were going to missions in North India. When I informed this desire, my parents discouraged me telling that I will not have that call - especially a person who is hot tempered like me. I used to get angry easily and throw things here and there. Within a short time, I used to become aware and reconcile with it. My father didn't like the idea of religious life and it was very painful for both of us to say goodbye.

About the choice of a group of sisters with whom to join, my father and I had preferences of choice - which allows freedom to respond to the needs of the poor. I joined in a time when MMS changed their constitution and trying different ways and means to participate in the struggle of the poor. I came to Ithithanam soon after 1973 chapter and then Superior General Sr. Godlive Stroobe visited the members and we used to have good discussions on our preferential option for the poor. There was lots of thrill and challenge to respond to God's call in a society which read the signs of the times. I was very happy to dedicate my life with a group of sisters who are happy and strong in their committed life. Socio-political analysis of our institutions was done and there were lots of discussions on the why of all our involvements. What I liked then, was the spirit of our congregation - the freedom to commit ourselves with all our intensity to search together the root causes of all the evils; it was not just doing some work, but prioritising and fulfilling a mission.

I felt at home and there was a strong sense of belongingness to MMS and its new direction. I really enjoyed my novitiate, and I got plenty of opportunity to interact with many of our sisters who were living there and visiting the place. Towards the end of the novitiate I got an exposure of three

months and life experience with our sisters in Poothura and it was altogether an experience of all what I was dreaming. It helped me to form certain convictions and affirm my option – for the poor.

CHETHIPUZHA (1977-78):

I made my first commitment in 1977 and I was assigned to Chethipuzha St. Thomas Hospital to assist in the accounts. I worked there for one year, it was an opportunity for me to get in touch with our mission in an institutional set up, and also it helped me to have interaction with many of our sisters who were there.

NORTHEAST (1978-81):

In 1978 I asked for a transfer to Mendipather and I was very much involved with the 'tribal' life I was exposed to the different expressions of our mission in Meghalaya and Nagaland. Living in Lakhkutty, a pioneering community of three MMS gave me ample opportunity to see the different faces of life. I really enjoyed my life there in the community as well as with people. It is a very remote area where the health facilities were minimum. To assist in their health needs and go deeper in their struggle of existence was another experience. I learned a lot of things about life: simplicity, openness, forgiveness give and take in day to day living. We could train few girls who will take care of health needs of their community by using preventive, curative and (alternate systems) of health care.

Two major tragic incidents in my life are the sickness of my brother Jose and my father's sudden death. Both these events affected me a lot. After these incidents I had to adjust a lot to the situations at home and it was very hard for me. I am so grateful for what I am today, it is only because of God's Grace loving care of the sisters in community and all my friends who supported me and gave me courage and healing to go on.

I requested for a transform from Northeast, soon after my father's death and I was assigned to Erattupetta Community. I made my final vows in 1983 and went for the post graduate studies in Social Work (MSW) to Mangalore. It helped me to deepen my knowledge, love and commitment to the society, and also to have an integrated approach to life. The 1st year I was in the college hostel and was not at all happy there because of the artificial





situation there. By the end of the year, I could find out a rented building where few students could stay and lead the life of the ordinary people there. There we could form a community of our own - where we did everything by ourselves and I really enjoyed their company. The hostelers and my professors used to ask me, why I had to leave the hostel and live there. Living so closely with the

girls from very poor families was a real experience for me, to see their dire needs, the time I spend with them caring, listening and sharing life and love so closely was a real witness to live a life of equality, fraternity and justice.

ERATTUPETTA (1985-88):

Soon after my studies, I got the assignment as the leader of the participating community in formation. The house was shifted to the new place and the community members also changed except Victoria. But Victoria had already started to work in I.H.M. Hospital I was very enthusiastic, and excited about all the involvements. The presence of formation people in the group was a very dynamic thing, and I really enjoyed my life there. For me, it was a genuine search for what we can do with the community there, especially with the Muslim women and children. They were living in a highly male dominated society, very much oppressed by the socio-religious factors. Many were exploited even to the point that they have no soul and they don't have a life after death. Women were used to meet the emotional needs of men and they were considered as a kind of machinery to produce children and that also male children only. Close contacts and deeper associations helped me to understand the depth of women's issues like dowry, bride burning and suicides. Birth of a female child in the family is a curse and the discrimination start from there and continues till the end of her life. There were so many norms like that women were not allowed to walk through the main roads, not allowed to look at any men, and have to cover their heads all the time, not allowed to travel alone. In the name of Islam, they are exploiting the women and we have made some efforts to organize them. The system was so unjust and I could not do much to liberate them from it.

Ecology was another issue on which I had participated to conscientize people the necessity of keeping the forest as we need to keep the eco-balance of the earth. We have organized

a dharna against the deforestation and selective felling of Mukkampetty forest. Efforts were made to draw the attention of the Excise Department and Village Office to take action on this. Padayatras were organized to conscientize the side effects of the thermal power station in Bhuthathemkettu, Kothamangalam and Koodamkulam. We had discussions on these issues in our women's group and youth circle. Students of Islamic Movement of India (SIMI) and we collaborated together to protest against the alcoholism. One rally and few protest meetings were held on it. I had contact with people of different organizations like social democrat, Christian Vimochana Veedi and the parish (K.C.Y.M). We have tried to organize the women through different issues like drinking water, latrine programmes etc. Parish involvements and welfare programmes, helped to widen the area of contact to the Christian area. N.S.S. unit of St. George College Aruvithira and we collaborated together for two work camps and its reflection. We used to have bible reflection for the parish youth (majority were boys) twice a month. I was on a search, how to respond in a situation where the system is so unjust, rooted in so much of socio-economic and cultural traditions. In Erattupetta, both Christians and Muslims are very traditional and it is so difficult to bring the women in the forefront. They are in a "culture of silence", comfortable, where they are and don't like to be disturbed. Many a time I felt the absence of a strong team to work with men.

MAMPALLY (1988)

As I was searching for a team to work with, I was asked to come to Mampally to experience the life and work of the fisherfolk. I had lot of hesitation to come to Mampally, as the official church was questioning the strategy that we have accepted to participate in the struggle of the poor and their movements. I came to Mampally to try for six months and see whether I can be part of the mission here. Within a short time, I could build a support with the people, mainly through my parish involvement. Life in Mampally gave me much insight and growth to my life about the wider society especially the life of the poor and who are marginalized in the society. It is a challenge, privilege and a duty to struggle with the people who are always on the plight of their life. Though I came for some experience the very life and struggle touched me and I loved to spend the rest of my life with these less fortunate brethren.





I participated in all the activities of MMS Mission in Mampally. My specific contribution is through parish involvement. This was an entry point into the life of the people through different groups of – children, youth, women, couples and families. Constant and regular follow up of these groups help me to be in touch with the hard realities of their life.

MY PRESENT INVOLVEMENT:

In the parish, I work in collaboration with the parish priest. The present parish priest Fr. Romanse, though he doesn't agree with us in all our movements, he is not against us. There are things that we agree to disagree. There are different groups of children, youth, women & men with whom I have contact and have a good support. I do hope that these groups are the entries to get in touch with the real-life situations of our fisherfolk. Gradually we will be able to form these groups as real potential groups to challenge and confront the different issues of their life through an analytical awareness building.

THE AREA OF MY INVOLVEMENT IS BEING PROGRAMMED AS FOLLOWS:

I. Faith formation programmes: These are purely church groups – different programmes are being conducted through pious activities of the people. Through these activities I do hope to give a deeper meaning for the rituals which our people feel as the core of our spirituality. Regular follow up and constant contacts can spell the values which are real human values and essential to build the kingdom of God.

(a) Preparation for First Holy Communion: For the last two years three batches of children (90) have been prepared for First Holy Communion. Daily an hour classes soon after the mass, for three months help them to form their character by assimilating the values of discipline, prayer, respect and love for the other person and learning to lead the basic principles to live in a society.

(b) Little way group: This groups is the follow up group of First Holy Communion. The children are being encouraged to come for daily mass and on Saturdays all of them come together. We discuss some of the virtues - like truthfulness, freedom, love, equality through different media -

stories, songs, posters and slide shows. Occasionally we conduct a half day camp for them when there is a holiday.

(c) Life guidance classes: This is a programme for girls of teenagers, in view of preparing them to have a deeper insight about their life. We come together on every Monday soon after mass, for an hour and discuss different subjects like - human physiology, value formation, problems of adolescence, social analysis of society, women's status in the society - dowry, bride burning, suicide, etc. This is an ongoing programme for 4 months at the moment there are 35 in the group.

(d) Bible reflection: A group of 50 girls come together for Bible study. This group is known as prayer group and is active for the last one year. These girls are interested to do some service in the church circle – like making the liturgy active by singing and reading for mass, helping the small children to participate in the daily Mass. They gather thrice a week and study Bible.

They are a great help to conduct B.C.C groups in each area and some of them are good learners. They have goals and occasionally their plan and evaluate their programme. They help out in literacy programmes, finding out school dropouts and supervising the children to study in the school, before the regular class starts.

(e) Basic Christian Community: The parish is divided into five areas and once a week in each area they gather together in the evenings. Mostly these groups consist of men, women, youth and children. Bible themes are being taken for their discussion in the light of the relevant issues. This group used to gather in the sea shore, and for the last few months these groups do not meet, as there is no common place for them to meet. More things are yet to plan for these groups.

(f) Women's Group: There is a wing of women, from the most back ward area of the parish. They gather together on every Saturday evenings and it is a sort of adult catechism group. Sacraments are being explained to them in the light of their daily life struggles. Towards the end there will be Bible reading and a small prayer. Women from this group come Infront for the anti-alcoholic programme.





(g) Catechism classes on Sundays: This year we have organized the catechism classes more systematically than the previous year. The children are divided into 12 classes and there are 21 teachers including 4 sisters from Anjengo to help out. Cultural programmes based on Bible themes are encouraged and we have occasional programmes to develop

their potentials and communicate scripture message.

II. CONSCIENTISATION PROGRAMMES :

Few seminars are being organized for different groups of women, youth and men of Mampally with the financial assistance of T.S.S.S unit and parish. Five girls are sent to K.C.C. (Kerala Council of churches) for a training programme “Youth for a just society” Two days camp for 20 girls was conducted in Vettuthura with the partial financial assistance of the diocese.

Anti-Alcoholic Programme: It was the outcome of some of the discussions on the ill-effects of alcoholism on individuals, family and society. Many of the women from the B.C.C. groups wanted to stop the sale of the illicit liquor. Few days demonstrations and Dharnas were organized by the women of Mampally. Public meetings, street drama, seminars and study classes were conducted to conscientize the people. Those who would like to place and end to the drinking habit of liquor are given treatment by the doctors from Medical College Hospital Trivandrum and Government Hospital Cherayinkizhu.

Motivation for education: The children of Mampally L.P. School are being helped to have motivation to study their daily lessons. Many students don’t know even the alphabets. The children come together in the mornings and spend an hour in studying their lessons and alphabets. In this process guidance are being given to form their character. The dropouts of the school are being followed up with the help of youth group.

There are 62 children in Mampally nursery school. I see that the different needs of the nursery school are taken care off.

Other activities: Collaboration with other like-minded groups like Programm for Community Organaization, Kerala swathanthra Malsyathozhilali Federtion, Mojaka Jeevaka Munnettam

Center are some of the other activities which gives wider vision and stimulation for analytical thinking. Studies on fisheries, women's issues, and other world realities is a boost in my mission and it gives a wider perspective.

FAITH HISTORY

The unassuming personality of my mother and my father's sense of justice and love for the poor were the foundation of my faith. My mother's deep faith in God and her trust in the goodness of people touched me from childhood. My father always had special love and concern for the poor. He was very particular that the working people should be fed well and their needs should be well taken care of.

Sharing the responsibilities at home, have helped me to discipline myself and form my character. Doing everything for the glory of God and good of the people" was the motto of my religious vocation on those days. Dedicating one's life for the service of God and spending life in prayer was considered as a greater value than family life. I loved to spend my whole life by praying for myself and others. Though it was painful to leave home and say good bye to my near and dear ones, the challenge and courage in responding to God's call was a noble and great action. Mt. 25:35 "what so ever you do to the least of my brothers that you do unto me" was an inspiration to choose religious life. The seed of faith sown in me has received manure, water and sunlight from my family, teachers and friends. In addition to these the priests and nuns who have inspired have played a great role to bring it as a small little plant.

Grazing the calves and sheep in the hills and valleys in my childhood have created in me a sense of harmonious relationship to the whole universe. I used to enjoy the cycle of life – grass eaten by the animals and the same animal becoming the same source of energy for human. The mighty mountain, thick forest; streams jump out through the hills – all these created in me an eco-sense and everything was a wonder for me. And now I realize it was the ecological sense budding in me those days.

From high school onwards I used to read and reflect on scripture passages. When I joined religious life, I learned to reflect it with wider perspective. Some of the priests like Thomas Kocherry, Jose Kaleekal, Samuel Rayan, George Souras, George Koonthanam and Peter D'Mello have helped to interpret Gospel in the light of life experiences of the sick & suffering people. Classes





on vows, religious life, helped a lot to have more depth and meaning for our call and response.

The state of the Fatherhood and motherhood of God and communion of humans is yet to come. As I live and work among the fisherfolk I realize the urgency of it, as many are suffering and dying without seeing the Kingdom. The image of God is distorted in so many human faces– the children dying before

attaining the fullness of life, the family not having a full meal for many days, the lady of the house who doesn't have a place to deliver her baby and no cloth to cover her infant, the father of the house having no means to buy medicine for his sickness and no employment for the son. Christ came to give life "I have come to give life and have it in its fullness" Jn. 10.10. It is a privilege and challenge to be here among the fishermen, to contribute my mite to bring forth LIFE in the lifeless situations.

For my final vows I took the reading from the scripture Lk. 4.18-23 the mission of Christ. For the same mission I am called. To liberate my people from the chains of many anti-kingdom elements - injustice, poverty oppression, in human treatment to women and children etc. The more I reflect on it, the deeper its meaning I receive. Muslim women in Erathupetta and fisherfolk in Anjengo are the two categories of crucified people who are challenging my life and commitment.

Life experiences with the crucified people have helped me to grow in the love and commitment to people and also to shed my own class consciousness. **My motto is to become human and be sensitive to people's needs and to their rights. And my prayer is to become a loving presence of christ the healer in all the situations of my life.**

The breaking of Bread and the word of God become a reality through the daily experiences when it is shared there. I give myself fully without any reservation in an atmosphere of freedom and respect for the other person. Then I experience the power of sacraments in my life. There I experience the tremendous power of prayer and faith. Action – reflection – action gives more meaning in my life. Deep action always calls for deeper reflection and reflection in turn calls for further action.

I love to work in teams and I find great strength and support in working as a team, where people understand me, confront me with love, challenge and guide me. This is What I am lacking in my present involvement and there is frustration of lack of time to prepare, free time for myself, community and others who need my attention and care.

The difficulties I experience: (1) The contrast and contradictions that I experience in the religious

structure, which is otherwise able to bring social change. Lack of commitment of the official church to the cause of the poor.

(2) The experience of lack of co-operation, VISION OF MISSION, and encouragement from the co-workers. (3) Dividing factors and the power structure in the society (4) Lack of committed and competent people to work in the team (5) When the demands of the mission and community's demands clashes (6) Personal limitations.

The supporting system I have: (1) Love and commitment to the cause of the poor - the conviction that it is my duty & privilege to be with the poor (2) The scripture and sacramental life, my reflections, presence of God within me and inner strength to transmit the above realities into my daily life and my ability to drink it (3) My living community, MMS in Poothura, Superiors, Society document, challenges and guidance from MMS Society. (4) The people and community in mission are a great support (5) Thirumala group and the present parish priest (6) Recognition and appreciation from others (7) Reading and updating my knowledge and vision in this fast-changing world. (8) Sharing & consultation with competent people, who are able to help, challenge, and guide me in different situations. (9) Network of relationship and collaboration with other like-minded people & groups. (10) My own family and friends.

FULFILLMENT IN MY LIFE & WORK:

I am happy about the present state where I am now, especially with the fisherwork. It is a privilege, freedom to respond, to the various needs of the society and the opportunities which lie ahead of me. I have lots of hope for building people as a power by bringing out their inner strength and potentialities. I do hope and work for the day that everybody may enjoy the inner freedom and recognize their worth and dignity and facility to live a full life. Each one of us in this process realize our rights and duties and fight for it and fulfill our duties. Let everyone enjoy the state of life that the image and likeness of God be retained in a world which is worth living for all human beings; Let the cycle of life in the universe become perfect by keeping and preserving it for humans, animals and all the vegetation. Let humans and earth go back into His original plan. "God created man and women in the image of himself and blessed them saying "Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth and be masters of the fish of the sea, the birds of heaven and all living animals on the earth." (Gen. 1:27-28).



13. PASSION FOR PEOPLE

I AM READING A POEM “THE EVERYTHING SEED.” Reflecting on the golden years of my religious life as a Medical Mission Sister the poem titled ‘the everything seed’ came to my recall. The poem begins “Have you ever watched a seed grow? Have you ever noticed how it begins, so small, so still, so quite like a gift wanting to be opened...” The seed of my being is unfolded in the palm of my hand as I recalled the seed Alice sprouting and unfolding its petals in the garden of life to be what I am today. As the saying goes ‘today’s beautiful moments are tomorrow’s indelible memories’ the images, the events, the stories, the places of my being, the many involvements, the journeys, the doings, the giving’s, the joys and the tears and all other events of my life flooded my being filled with joy and bliss. I share some of these precious moments to thank God for the marvels he has done in my life and together with to thank Him for his presence in my life as a religious for the last fifty years.



SR. ALICE MYLADY

A family of love and laughter but firm and disciplined was Mylady House at Kozhuvanal near Pala in Kottayam district. They are ever fresh in my mind as I recall them with joy in my heart with the chirping of the birds and beasts in those thick forests that surrounded my home. My father Mr. George was a teacher by profession and a great father in loving and caring for the family. My mother Mrs. Marykutty, was a simple lady who toiled for the wellbeing of the family in the home garden. We are eight siblings consisting of two boys and six girls. It wells up my being even now whenever I enter the courtyard of my home those by gone days where we all had memorable times together as one family. It vibrates my being even now as I recount them with great pleasure. Miracles do happen and it is true in my life as many would like to ask me how did I get this call to religious life? My memories tell me that it was straight from the skies that I received this call to follow the Master. No one ever imagined that I would choose to become a religious as in the school and in the parish as I was not even noticed as one to be counted for the religious life. Yet God chooses the weak and makes them strong for his mission.

God does not call the qualified but He calls and qualifies in whom He is pleased and it is true in my life as I vividly remember visiting Marygiri Hospital at Bharanaganam and meeting the sisters who were joyful and the dedicated services of the sisters there attracted me and ignited passion for religious life. This desire made me to contact Sr. Ann Kayathinkara the Vocation Promoter and her reply was via an Inland Letter that made the news to everyone at home through my younger sister. Initially there was some resistance from everyone but later with everyone’s consent and good wish I travelled to Ithithanam on 20th July 1969 the formation house of the Medical Mission Sisters.



The seed Alice began to grow in the garden of MMS at Ithithanam with 14 friends learning about the religious life and the call to follow the Master in a deeper manner. The plant began to grow and new leaves unfolded in diverse forms to make our first commitment on 25th March 1972 with only three to make it. I would like to mention here the radical decision after the Chapter in 1967 that brought more challenges in formation and on the formatters to

train the young minds according to the vision and mission of the congregation with dedication and commitment to meet the challenges of the present time. I gratefully acknowledge and thank each one of them for their contribution towards my religious life. A new way of formation for the future that made us to learn more new things and enhanced our ministry.

I fondly remember the turn of events that came on my way as I was allowed to carry out my interest to become a nurse and I moved out to Delhi Holy Family Hospital for the training. The capital city, the holy family campus, the interactive MMS communities, the companions from different States, the mingling of the different languages, four days long train journey, the hostel life with other girls, new friends, new contact persons for formation, new spiritual father from St. Xavier's... all brought many a new opening in my life. When I look back at those times of my life, 'the everything seed' poem has a quote... "then you know whatever comes from a seed usually ends up, looking very little like the seed it came from." which is true of my seed as well? I was qualified from the nursing school and reported back to Kottayam in the year 1976.

The new leash of life unfolded when I was sent to Poothura village community among the fisher people, Anjengo, Trivandrum a shift from the central Delhi to Kerala south sea coast. It was from the high profiles of the capital city of aristocracy and beaurocracy to the low profile of the poor working class fisher people. That was real challenge and change as they are still fresh in my mind. Elder sisters had already moved thither with a real radicalism. Moving to these very poor and simple settings where they identified themselves with the fisher people, living in a very small rented house, with no furniture or furnishings, with no walls of protection around, waiting in queue at the public tap with other women to avail drinking water were all new. The waiting for water would last to midnight in some days. Keeping an open house always, where people could walk in at any time, day or night to buy medicines, to offer a fish from the sea and to sit with sisters for sharing a meal, making no privacies, no inhibitions, no hoardings, no hidings,. the living was singular in style opting to the Nazarenes life style that said "like us in everything".

As a young and aspiring youth this call to live among the fisher people was a real challenge for me.

But I was sharpened and shaped by the seniors in mission, supported by the Redemptorist fathers under the leadership of Tom Kochery. I learned to identify myself with the poor and the ordinary. It brought a radical change in my being as a religious which has carried me to the present moment, living joyfully and loving unconditionally totally for the One who called to follow Him.

As I was called to grow, grow to live and live to change, a new challenge dawned on my life that made to choose the path of living for the poor and marginalized. This challenge was to choose between private and government hospital care that changed the entire course of life as a religious. As I have mentioned earlier it was from the high system of holy family hospital in Delhi to the living situation of Poothura and the reference to a Govt. hospital nearby. The choice before me was either to go to the highly proficient hospitals or to the Govt. hospital, where commons went. We the medicals had made life options in regard to the hospital system after Prof. Francois Houtart who did socio-political analysis of our hospitals and had asked us to get out of the best care system to reach to the least and the last. The challenge stayed with us not only to give away our hospitals but as well to walk the path of the poor in our own health care styles. And so I decided to go to the government medical college, Trivandrum and that became yet another challenge in my nursing option. My eyes opened to the very poor nursing care offered to the poor in the public sector as against the high quality offered to the well to do in private sector. We already have learned from our Chapter documents that vow of poverty is to take us to the side of the poor, standing with them, fighting with them, walking with them to the end destinies of the kingdom of God. This experience of mine compelled me to leave out of our own hospital care system and to work in the government sector. I hold credit in being the first medical missionary to have opted out to the public sector working in Govt. Medical College.

The life experiences as a nurse for eight years at MMT Hospital at Mundakayam enhanced my professional work. This MMT hospital was the initiative of the estate owners and the Medical Mission Sisters whose joint venture rendered care and support of the poor estate workers and the general public around the place. I remember the joy of working in different wards of the hospital as part of the nursing care, the people, the doctors, all the staff and our loving mms community. The great intimacy of living in Mundakayam can never be erased.

Perception of the society was in constant transformation as new and novel initiatives were thrown open to the human society in all aspects of life. And it was the response of the MMS to answer to these signs of time as first we came up with the notion of the “best health care” that was where we started and we constructed quality





level hospitals of high standards. Then the socio-political analysis taught us that the best does not reach the last and the least in the society. Thus we gave away some of our plans, projects and institutions. Transformation concepts took us to the notions of taking hospitals to communities through community health programmes, prevention before cure, justice vindication for a healthy community. As I volunteered to work

in community health the leadership asked me to do the public health nursing training of one year at Delhi Lady Reading Public Health School in 1985-1986 that brought me back to the capital.

Exposures, experiences and trainings gave me confidence to move out to work in the village situations but the turn of events came to be that I got the appointment order from Govt. to join the health services and finally I joined on 12th June 1986. It was a Real change and a Real challenge. Life of that little seed was taking a turn- to become larger... larger... larger... to grow and to bloom. 21 years of my life as a Nurse in the Govt. Hospital from 1986 to 2007 from Being a sister of the Medical Mission Society and Becoming an employee of the State Government has made me to be what I am today as a faithful witness to the religious life as well as to the public health care systems. It was totally new to the society as well to the community to balance life between as a religious and as a nurse in Government Sector. The first thing to reckon with was the community itself. I had to live in by my vows attached to a community of sisters. And I had no community to join in the neighbourhood of my employment. This gap threw me open to the wider community of people and the hostel community of the nurses working with me. This became my first challenge to witness to the healing presence of JESUS WITH THAT BIG COMMUNITY of nurses and the other greater challenge was the one solitary witnessing by the person of me of the healing presence of Jesus Christ.

I felt overburdened in the wards as I was assigned on the whole. It was a tough game. At these moments the words of Mother came to my support:-“if you really love you accommodate yourself. If you love, you want to give. You are tireless, selfless and generous. If you love you really try to give and not just work. One does not spare oneself if one loves.”

The burn cases, cancer cases, accident cases, assault cases- all demanded my attention and demanded my time totally. This definitely was not the experience in the MMT circumstances. Over a period of time I began to love my situations and circumstances of work and living. To connect myself to my religious community I opted to be part of the Mampally community. After

three years in Medical College, I moved to the Taluq Head Quarters Hospital in Chirayinkeezhu which is closer to MMS Mampally. So I got replenished by my community every day, placed in the midst of traditional fish workers. There were experiences in the hospital campuses that demanded the best of my profession and there were experiences and exposures to nourish me from the socio-political involvements of the two MMS communities in Anjengo area. My sisters there had matured to be high activists of the trade union movement in the sea coast of Kerala, India and the World. Some of them were holding responsibilities in KSMTF in the State and in NFF at the national level.

We were not highly ritualistic but we were highly spiritual, drinking deep from our own wells of life and involvement, connecting our very selves to the Divine. We sat in planning and prayers for long hours among ourselves, along with our people around and with the many leaders of the movement. The God-quest, the passion for life, the friendship with people all took us to a communion of living. Hearts on fire was our constant experience. We lived simple. We loved profusely. We readied our own meals and managed our house jobs by ourselves. In the end it was a busy life all the while and a happy one with fond memories.

Some of the lived experiences are really enrapturing. I wouldn't want to elaborate all that. But I would just put the caption that came out in a Malayalam Weekly with the photograph of one of our sisters in front that read "SHEPHERDS TO LEAD THE AGITATION". (SAMARAM NAYIKKAN IDAYANMAR.) That is where we had come to as to lead the people in agitation fronts to vindicate their rights. I myself joined them in demonstrations and agitation fronts as duty permitted. While I lived the experiences of involvement and work, what struck me most were the different options that were set before me. One was to stay with hospitals of our own. The other was to move to the profession of teaching in nursing schools as a tutor with higher pay and honour. Definitely I pride in the option that I took to stay with the poor as a bedside nurse and to live with in their midst. This has given me joy, satisfaction and life fulfilment and I feel contented with my choice of being with the community.

The journey of the seed Alice continued until I retired from service in the year 2007. The movement in the public sector have come to an end as one moment like the Agony of Jesus Garden. This path was chosen by me or better and rather the path chose me. Times of deep involvement and commitment of joy and sorrow, of creativity and despair, death and life lay strewn on the path that I walked. Now I have come to the tip end. The beyond unseen but I looked back on to the faces that I was





leaving behind from the time of my nursing studies to the time of retirement as Head Nurse of the Taluk Head Quarters Hospital - a count of 35 years. Thank you... my years... places... people...patients... friends and collaborators.

The retirement is not the end of the ministry for a religious and neither the full stop for work and involvements. Out from the corridors of the Govt. Hospital systems as I stepped out and there behold the MMS community was there waiting to welcome me back to new pastures of service. My religious society intermittently had requested me to fill gaps in the hospitals of ours. I stuck to my option to work in the Govt. service. But no more could I go with those choices of mine, for reason of the norm of age limit in government service.

Now I was asked to join the Northeast Sector of the society's mission. We have five communities involved with the Tribal in the North East of India. For the reason of my professional background, my placement was with Shalom Rehabilitation Centre for Drug Addicts and Alcoholics. A totally new pasture and experience with so many persons coming for treatment and recovery. Caring for the substance abusers was another fulfilling moments of my life as a health care professional.

Till now I was caring for people with body ailments. Now the turn was to care for the physical and mental illnesses. The situation was quite different. I had to attend to many youths, adolescents, sometimes very elderly people who were victims of drug addiction and alcoholism. They and their families were in depressive situations. For me it was a very heart rending situation. In those years I tried my level best to avail myself heart and soul so that they could be cured. There were moments of joy, of cure and freedom. And Shalom stays close to me even now. I remember the commitment and earnestness of the team there. I thank them profusely for their support and their holding. My appreciation and thanks to my sisters who cared and supported me all those five years of stay and involvement.

Times and seasons change so too my life had changed and conditions at my parental home were different. My father had expired in 1990, when I was part of the community at Angengo, serving in the Taluq Hospital. That event had affected me terribly and it took me such a length of time to come out of the gush of sorrow and agony of pain. Now my mother was already ninety plus and somewhere deep within my heart felt the need to be around home. So that I could offer some presence and some bit of help for her. We were two children - me and my elder sister Agnes Marie Mylady - who were given to the service of the poor in the healing mission of the congregation of the Medical Mission Sisters. As both of us were far away in the missions, we felt that one of us should come to Kerala region to be available and to be availing to our mother in need.

I was assigned to Anna Dengal Home, Changanachery, and not very far from home village

that served the purpose of being close to my beloved mother. From time to time I could reach to Amma's needs on one hand and on the other hand I could take care of the senior sisters in ADH. Enclosed into the community of elders was definitely a big challenge again. Amma moved away from us into the land of paradise on 27th October 2018. We had celebrated her 100th birthday in great grandeur with family gathering around her reminiscing her love, care and concern for us all for a whole century - for all of us, the eight children of hers, in laws, their children, grandchildren and all. I cherish her memories and learning's from her in love, motherly care and compassion. Thanks to the divine for having given our mother to us for such long years. The family always stood by me in my options and decisions. In all my involvement places they have visited me and it had been comforting and strengthening in my religious life. Thanks to everyone. May they and their families be blessed and this is my constant prayer.

At 68, my openings still continue. Petal by petal the seed in me has been opening all these years. The new layer of petal got opened in the year 2019, when I moved to Seluid village in Chattisghad. It is a small place with a long tradition of 41 years of services to the rural people over there and the communities around. The initial stages of clinic and health care have dwindled due to the new Govt. policies that do not allow a qualified nurse to work on her own, without a doctor's presence. We can be only a healing presence standing by them, listening to their cries and doing the very little that we can offer. Yet there is gladness in our lives and joy in our hearts as we witness the healing presence of Christ in our midst. He is our life model and inspiration. I join with the Medical Mission Sisters all over the world trying to radiate joy to the world and witness the healing presence of Christ and mother Mary. As the senior member in the community I try to offer the best of me as a mother, teacher, healer and a person with a vision for the future. Having lived these golden years as a religious, I stay still in this fiftieth year, recognising God within me and magnifying his name saying with Catherine of Genoa, 'MY DEEPEST ME IS GOD'.

Thank you my God. Thank you my beloved parents. Thank you my brothers and sisters and all my family. Thank you my sister companions in the Society. Thank you every companion on my journey. Thank you doctors, thank you nurses and all hospital teams. Thank you my formatters and leadership teams. Thank you my mentors and friend companions in Priest's roles and lay promoters. I repeat that you have carried me in your shoulders and that I am because you are, may we travel on together into that kingdom of God... together, fulfilling our call differently. I just pray: thy kingdom come and I offer my **yes** to the last breath of mine in love and service to the poor of Yahve.



14 THE POWER I DEVELOPED WITHIN ME AS A WOMAN

INTRODUCTION

The storytelling method is a powerful way of stating self-identity. According to the famous Korean feminist theologian Chung Hyun Kyung, storytelling is also an invitation to listeners to enter into the world of the tellers. They are invited to be co-pilgrims in the tellers' historical journeys. Through this process of dialogue, the listeners would become participants of the teller's historical experiences. Storytelling calls not only for participation but also analysis of the background, structure as well as development of an emerging spirituality, which is the power within. Chung Hyun Kyung adds that Asian women form a collective consciousness through their life-story sharing in small groups which leads them to struggle against exploitation and discrimination. When

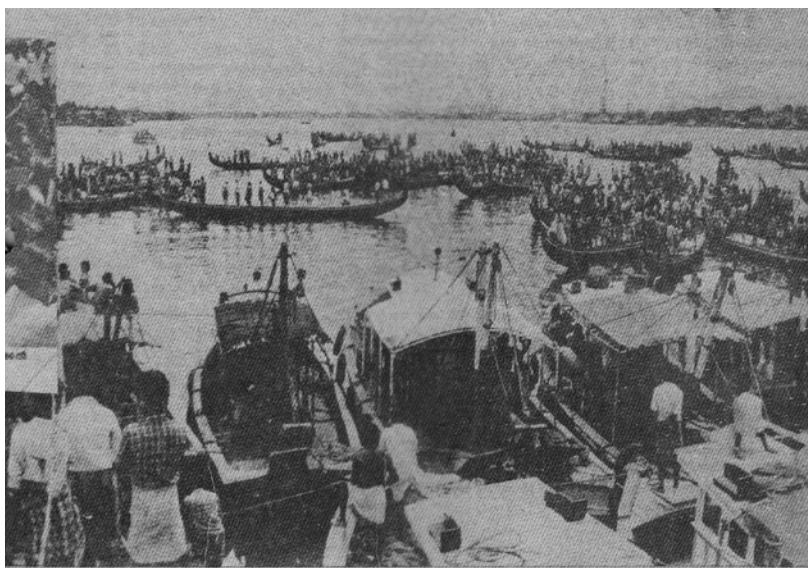


SR. THERAMMA PRAYIKALAM

women speak the truth of their lives in small-group setting they are empowered by other women's support and move away from self-hate, shame, and guilt. They achieve a clearer understanding of their authentic selves, which have been obscured by patriarchy. Let me tell a few stories of my 30 years of life among the fisherwomen in Kerala. I can name them as the process of "The Power I developed within me as a woman"

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 a coastal village of Kerala. Gradually we began to enter into various aspects of the life of the fishing village, soon becoming part of that community. 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, shaped my convictions in life. So, when I did my studies in Philippines on 'Women and Religion' I decided to do a research on the spirituality (the power within) based on their struggle for survival and my own personal experiences with them.

In the fishing communities of Kerala, usually the men concentrate on fish-harvesting, while the women undertake a number of land-based occupations like net-making, fish-curing and fish-vending. The government promotes western technologies, ignoring the skills and potentialities of the large number of traditional fisher people. As a result of mechanization



and central fish-landing, women fish-vendors get less and less fish for local sale and so they have to travel far and wide for purchase and sale of fish. In many places, they have to walk more than 10 kilometres to the market, with head loads of fish. The women fish-vendors suffer severely from lack of public transportation too. When they get to the fish markets, the merchants, moneylenders and their henchmen

control the business. They do not have any protection against the harassment of men.

The new mechanized boats introduced by the government as part of development usually operate close to the shore in competition with the traditional fishworkers for both space and resource. In many parts of India this led to a drastic fall in the catch of the traditional fishworkers and even to depletion of certain fish resources. This threat to their livelihood forced the fisherpeople to establish new linkages and to get organized. "A small minority of community organizers – radical Catholic priests, nuns and social scientists – played an important role as facilitators and animators, in the union-building process". Many other activities were initiated simultaneously for development programs and unionization. Motivated by Christian teachings about justice and freedom for the poor, priests and nuns of different Religious Congregations including Medical Mission Sisters played a significant role in bringing the fisherpeople together. The educational programmes helped the fishworkers to understand better their experiences and problems. From the training programmes and collective thinking emerged the common ideals and goals of fishworkers' movement

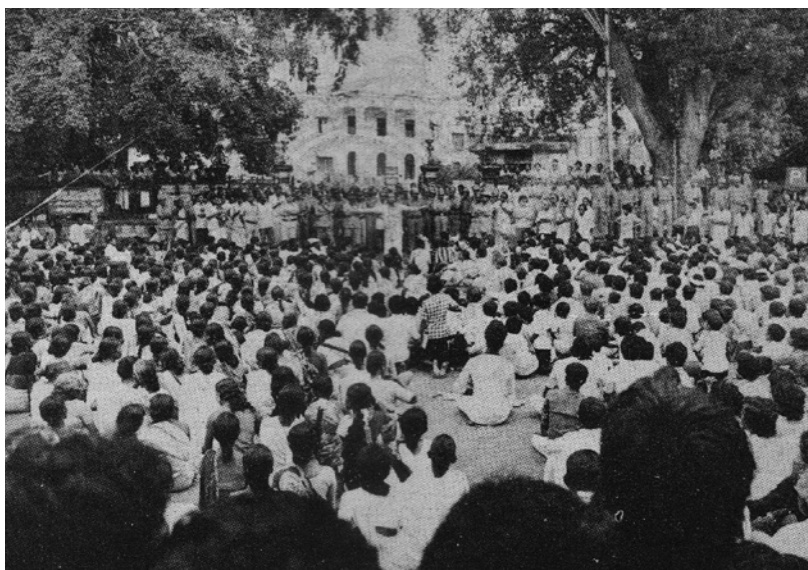
The fisherpeople are very much attached to the Church. On the one hand it is good that they can uphold the values of Christianity, but on the other it creates a sense of dependency on the Church. The affairs of the Church and the Christian community are almost exclusively in the hands of the parish priest and the parish council. His words remain the last word, and the Sunday pulpit provides him the platform from where decisions and directives are proclaimed to the whole congregation in an atmosphere of sacred awe and unchallenged submission. There have been some signs of hope from year 2000 onwards because in certain coastal areas, the women began to participate both as individuals and as members of women's group/peoples' movements in the life of the Parish Church. In addition, many women from these women's groups were elected as the members of the parish committee when the policy was first implemented through the formation of Basic Christian Community (BCC) in the diocese of

Trivandrum / Kerala. Motivated by the secular women's movement, and following the directives given by the Second Vatican Council, fisherwomen started assuming greater leadership roles in the coastal parishes like Anjuthengu. However, the more conservative clergy and men of the local parishes did not always appreciate the increasing confidence of the fisherwomen. Some even objected to the presence of women in the parish committees.

However, the history of the fisherwomen is not only a history of oppression and suffering. It is also a history of resistance and struggle for their survival and total liberation. Unlike in most of the other people's movements, the role of women in the fisher people's struggles has been significant. While marching shoulder to shoulder with men on the issue of trawling, fish depletion, displacement, etc., they were also engaged in the struggle to safeguard their own identity and rights as women. In the midst of all these, the fisherwomen find their power weakened day by day in the economic, social, and political arenas. In spite of these negative experiences, there is a spirit that pushes them forward. To the poor fisherwomen, especially those who are in the forefront of the struggle for full humanity, it is an intimate and real-life experience. This unfailing power within or unwavering spirit, we would like to name a 'spiritual force'. The spirituality arising from this force does not consist in mere ritual practices and pious exercises centred on the Church. It is something down to earth; it is the sum-total of all the happenings in their everyday life. The spirituality, the power within the poor fisherwomen is evidently a strong ingredient in the bedrock of solidarity that binds them in their struggle for justice and human dignity.

My involvement in the struggle of the fisherwomen was spontaneous and a conscious decision at the same time. My own commitment for the poor in their situation of exploitation demanded of me to jump into the frame. My upbringing at home taught me to be sympathetic and to be concerned about the poor neighbours. My formation in religious life helped me to make this a conscious choice and commitment to the cause of the poor, as an expression of authenticity in my religious life. I was strongly inspired and influenced by Mother Anna Dengel, the foundress of the Medical Mission Sisters, who had a special insight into and concern for the plight of women. She worked tirelessly for the uplift of women, especially the Muslim women in Pakistan when it was still part of India. She dreamed of a world where no boundaries existed, where all had access to what would make them fully human and fully women. Her mission





is being carried on by the Medical Mission Sisters to this day.

My involvement with the fisherpeople in Anjuthengu was part of the radical change in the perspective of the charism of the Congregation during the seventies. Since we were living in one of the small houses among the fisherpeople along the coast itself, we got the opportunity to come into close contact with the suffering people

and to understand their problems. We spent a lot of time with them in informal discussions, singing, joking, eating together, and having fun and friendly informal conversations till late in the night. These times fostered a spirit of intimacy and a sense of belonging. When we started adult education classes, the promotion of social awareness was an integral part of it. The social analysis and awareness building process helped the fisherwomen to come to a better understanding of the causes of their poverty and exploitation. In course of time they were ready to confront the authorities for their rights to demand justice. When the fisherpeople got organized as a trade union in 1978, the MMS in Anjuthengu area automatically became part of their struggles for survival. In 1984, the fisherpeople's movement reached its height and the Sisters' imprisonment in the central jail with other women as a result of campaigning drew a lot of attention from the general public and provoked a great deal of debate even in the church level.

THE DEVELOPMENT PROCESS OF THE POWER WITH IN ME

1. The Development Process of the Power with in me started with a simple life style to going to Jail and Hunger-Strike as a sign of solidarity'.

We started to live in Poothura /Anjuthengu in a very simple house of one of the fisher people. We began to participate in all the activities that took place in the parish, like teaching catechism, giving classes to the children, and giving health instructions to women's groups. We were well appreciated for our option for the poor and the simple way of life (a small two roomed thatched house) by many people, especially by other religious groups, priests, and even by our bishop. Gradually, we began to enter into the life of the people forming community with them. When the fisher people's union was formed, we got involved politically in trade union activities, shouting slogans, participating in Dharnas (sit in) and picketing, fighting for the rights of the poor and oppressed. At that time, it was very difficult for others to comprehend 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 being banned from the Church and so-called Church activities gave us a different kind of freedom.

It is the Power within me that gave me the courage to go through the ten-day hunger strike in front of the Secretariat in Trivandrum in 1984, and twelve - day hunger strike in Alleppey in 1985. It was an experience of deep solidarity with the fisherpeople when I was put in the central jail with three of our sisters and four other fisherwomen and the spirituality of struggle became all the more powerful within me. For me it was a real experience of death and resurrection (Power of Cross), sharing a little bit of my body and blood with my fellow beings for a just cause. The hunger strikes were the real experience of Eucharist for me.

2. An Experience of being challenged by the fisherwomen was the first stepping stone in The Process of the Power I developed within me as a woman

‘THE HOUSE ON FIRE’

The process of development of the power within me challenged to make conscious and deliberate choices in my life. After a few months of our arrival, we prepared a new ‘Way of The Cross’ for Good Friday by narrating the oppression and exploitation in the village. Though we were not directly targeting anybody personally, it affected so badly the rich exploiters and oppressors in the village. Together with the people we composed meaningful songs and prayers for each station. Every thing went on very well and there was active participation from the people. But on the second day of Easter, around one o’clock at night, we found that our house was on fire. We were only two sisters in the house. It was a small thatched house with only one entrance. Somehow, we managed to get out of the house. Somebody had set fire because it started from the outside corner. We became so frightened, since we had only a few months experience in that village. 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 the women whether we would like to continue or not in the midst of such opposition.

It was an experience of being





challenged by the fisherwomen and we were asked to respond to them from our power within. With that incident we made our conscious and deliberate choice to live and work among the poor fisher people.

3. The process of development of the power within me Called for Transformation/Conversion and Change.

‘JOURNEY WITH THE FISH VENDING WOMEN FOR SEPARATE BUS FOR THEM’

The process of development of the power within us demands Conversion and Change. In 1979 together with a group of fisherwomen I went around different villages in Trivandrum, presenting the street drama about the problems of the fish vending women in the market. It took almost two months to cover all the coastal villages. Those experiences; travelling from one village to another, staying in fisher people’s houses, eating and sleeping with them, listening to their stories of suffering and pain brought about a change in me. There I decided for the first time, to stay with them and struggle with them for their rights. We started our struggle to have a separate bus for fish vending women and to increase the basic facilities in the market. We met the fisheries minister as well as the chief minister and submitted a memorandum; side by side we conducted several dharnas in front of the Government Offices. Finally, on 6th February 1980 thousands of women blocked the Transport Bus Stand and did not allow any service from there. It was a historic moment in fisherwomen’s struggle in Kerala and that forced the government to start separate transport buses for the fish vending women. Later the women got a railway wagon, to take the fish to different markets as a result of the struggle.

Here I learned more about the fisherwomen and the Power within them. Above all it was a Process of Conversion and Change within me. It enabled me to look into myself, my own petty cherished values and to make a strong decision of being with them and it went on for 30 years.

4. The Process of Development of the Power within me as a woman forced me to take a stand with the poor

‘THE COST OF GIVING PROTECTION TO THE WOMEN AND CHILDREN’

To take a stand with the poor people is not an easy thing; it is a challenge as well as a risk. In the village where we were staying, there was always the fight between the Congress and Marxist parties. In 1991 there was a big fight and a boy from the congress party was killed by the other group. Within a few seconds the whole village was occupied by the police. All the

men ran away, jumping into the sea as well as the nearby river. The women and children ran towards us and crowded into our small house. The people who were behind them became wild and tried to get into our house even pushing us aside. They began to throw stones at our house, went around and destroyed many people's houses, burned fishing boats and nets, and carried off their belongings. One girl was raped by a group of boys, and all the other mothers became frightened for the safety of their girls. Families left the village and were scattered to different places and we four sisters were left alone in the whole area for months. During nights the gundas (the men who make trouble) walked around with the support of the police, we were frightened inside, but we got the courage to stay and look after the ruins for the people. Some people even organized a group of women to force us out from our house and lock it, but we managed to handle the situation. Because of our perseverance and six months hard work and facilitation we could bring back the 32 families to the village.

During that time, the power with in us as women was the sustaining force and that gave us the courage and strength. That enabled us to face the challenges, helping us to take a stand with the poor and oppressed.

5. The process of development of the power within me as a woman is A Story of Cross and Suffering

'THE POLICE ARREST AND THE HUMILIATION'

In my life there have been times where I had to take the stand knowing the consequences. This incident took place not in the fishing village but in an Adivasi (tribal) village in Wayanad district. I happened to be there for a solidarity meeting of the women to take some classes for them in the light of my experience with the fisherwomen. While they were having their village celebration there was a fight between the Adivasis and the non-Adivasis. While the fight was going on some supporters of the non-Adivasis went off to the police station and the people became restless about the possible intervention of the police and the women began to talk about their fears since it was getting dark. Suddenly the power with in me as a woman forced me to move into some action. I asked the women to get organized and be ready to block the way of the police. When the police were in sight, we all ran towards the vehicle and formed a woman's chain to block the police, we did not allow the police to get out of their vehicle. The police became angry and wanted





to arrest the women but we asked for lady police to do that. The police officer muttered in anger “We will see you tomorrow” and went away. The police filed a case against the villagers including “the sister” who took the lead. Next morning the police came with two lady police and arrested me, not any of the Adivasi women, with fifteen men from the village. The ride in the police jeep accompanied by the police was a strange experience.

The police irritated me a lot by asking questions and taunting me. “What a big leader you are coming to organize the Adivasis? How bold you are! You are a disgrace to your congregation”. When we reached the police station we were ordered about in very crude language. I was boiling inside, but I just obeyed calling on God to keep me calm.

The process of development of the power within me is a story of the cross, a narration of suffering and in the process, I experience the new life. My experience in the police station with the Adivasi men, where I was abused by the police was a real experience of my own strength and power within.

6. The process of development of the power within me as a woman is the real experience of People’s Power

“MY GOD, MY GOD, HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?”

In Wayanad police station the men were ordered to stand in one corner, and I was asked As I entered the room all others dispersed in different directions and I found myself face - to-face with a terrible looking police officer in the room. I kept myself composed, cool and concentrated on the image of Jesus being brought before Pilate. All sorts of questions were directed to me but I just made minimal replies. Most of the vulgar questions were not worth answering. The officer shouted a lot but I didn’t feel that it was at me. I don’t know from where I got the courage to withstand all those things. After some time, he called out for Sub Inspector to do his share and I felt like I was handed over to Herod! In front of me a most inhuman scene took place. All the men were stripped naked and pushed into the lock up. I was apprehensive about what was waiting for me. I stood alone for hours feeling terribly lonely and forsaken and really prayed with broken heart “My God, my god, have you forsaken me?” There I stood outside the lock up holding the clothes of my brothers, pressing my head against wall I cried and prayed with Jesus on the cross-begging God for the strength to suffer. The police men

who were passing through that way stared at me making comments and asking many funny questions. When I felt thirsty, I asked for some water and they gave me the water and I drank it but later I realized that it was from the toilet. It was a day of passion and suffering.

By evening the teachers and some other people arrived from the village with food, and they began to move the process for bail. Later at 6.30 pm hundreds of women and men from the village got organized and appeared at the scene shouting slogans at the top of their voice. The women were ready to court arrest if the sister was not released. They boldly said to the police that they, too, were responsible for whatever happened and for detaining the police vehicle. The women pushed themselves into office room and blocked the officer. The entire scene was over whelming and the police were at a loss and we all had to be dispatched before dark. All of us had a triumphant ride back to the village. Next day all the women came and shared the great sense of achievement that was theirs as a real hope for the future.

I truly believe in the words of Scripture that God provides the words and the strength to bear witness (LK: 21: 9-19) “not to meditate before hand how to answer, for I will give you a mouth and wisdom“. The process of development of the power within me has been linked to my concrete experience of women’s power when I entered into the lives of the poor people.

7. The process of development of the power within me is also a realization of the power within the poor fisherwomen.

In this context it would be nice to listen to some of our local leaders, how they were empowered through the experiences of the power within them. One of our activists Pushpam Antony shares her experiences.

“I am a married woman of 48 and a mother of three children. My parents had eleven children, six boys and five girls, I am the third one. My father was a good fisherman but he spent most of his money on alcohol. So, my mother had to manage the house with much difficulty and suffering. Until the birth of her seventh child, my mother lived in the joint family. She was beaten up not only by my father but also by the other dominant figures in the family. Beating, fighting, crying, frustration, poverty and disappointment were part of our daily life. During my childhood, there was only suffering and poverty in our house. When my father comes home drunk most of the days, he





would throw away the very little and precious food, which my mother had prepared and we were looking forward to eat. My mother was a very loving, caring and understanding woman and was a real inspiration for me. Because of our suffering and difficulties, she sent my eldest sister to one of our relative's house where she had to work hard day and night. Finally, she ran away from that house. Then we had to

surrender our 'ration card', the only treasure we had, to a money lender to get some money to bring her back. My mother's faith in God gave me the Shakti (power within) to face all the sufferings, pain and difficulties in my life. I used to get angry when she asked us to join the family prayers while we were hungry and had nothing to eat.

I couldn't continue my studies because of our financial difficulty. When I was working as a housemaid in other people's house, I happened to meet the Medical Mission Sisters in one of the fisherpeople's meetings. That was the turning point in my life. I got the training as a nursery teacher and I began to forget my own sufferings and difficulties. I became conscious of the sufferings and difficulties of the people in our society. I began to feel an urge within me to do something good for others. I joined the group discussions and the meetings of the fisherwomen. In 1981 I joined the fisherpeople's organization in the struggles against trawling. I remember once when we were in the rally against trawling the rowdies and supporters of the boat owners began to throw stones while we were crossing a bridge. I was behind the line and not yet in the bridge. I was frightened; ran away and hid myself behind a tree. But now I have changed, I am not at all afraid of any thing. I have developed a kind of power within me. During our 1984 struggle our group, picketed the train. Many women, men and children were arrested and beaten up by the police when we were sitting in the railway line. I became the secretary of our union and was ready to face any difficulty to get justice for us. I received the Manakaruth (the power within) to face the reality from my mother and grandmother. That gives me the courage to go ahead.

Although I am able to think about my community more than myself and my family, I am still worried about my family - their food, education and the future of my children. My husband hardly goes for any work. He often comes from the sea with empty hands, not even having a single fish for us to eat. He hardly takes any responsibility of the family. I have to find ways and means to provide everything. There are times I feel like committing suicide, when I do not have any thing

to cook for my children. My heart breaks whenever I hear them asking “amma (mother), don’t we have any thing to eat today”. When I say “no” my daughter will cry, but the two boys will go out to the shore and sit there looking at the sea. I can just imagine what is going through their minds and hearts. We are in big debt; the money lenders are not giving us any peace.

In spite of all these sufferings and difficulties I like to work in our fisherpeople’s organization and struggle for our survival. I can see the face of God in my boiling rice pot when it comes up to the brim and overflows. “I also long for the days (“Vayaruniraye Aaharam Kazhikunna Divasam”) when my children will have enough food and I can see the face of God every day”. The image of the resurrected Christ is so strong in me. He gives me the Shakti. I always feel that like Jesus Christ we, the fisherpeople, will resurrect one day from all our sufferings and pains.

I feel so proud of our fisherwomen who are empowered with clear convictions. This realization is a process of development of the power with in me as a woman.

8. The process of development of the power within is shaped through concrete Life Experiences

LILA ALIYARUKUNJU (AGE 34) SHARES ‘HER STORY’.

I am an unmarried Muslim woman. We are five in our family, papa (father) umma (mother) and three girls. I am the eldest. My papa has two wives and both of them are alive. My mother is the second wife. My step-mother and her two daughters are living in another house. Actually, my mother didn’t know that papa was already married. The two wives are not in good terms but among the children, there is no problem. Papa doesn’t have any property or any other possessions so we do not have to fight each other for that. Papa spent all his money on drinks and took no responsibility of his wives and children. Now he is paralyzed and I am taking care of him. We find our own way to earn something for our survival. My poor parents do not have the money “to buy” men for us. So, we three girls are unmarried and staying at home. Dowry is a big problem for us... Anyway, I am happy that I am single. I can be independent. I am free to move around and do something good for our Muslim community.

When we became part of the fisherpeople’s organization I began to participate in their struggles. In the beginning I had to face a lot of problems and difficulties. Since I was working closely with the Christian community of fisherwomen, our Muslim community began to suspect my conversion into Christianity. Our religious authorities strictly warned me against that. When





I continued my participation in the struggles, the Madrasa committee (mosque authorities) questioned me. The children who participated in the awareness activities were beaten and locked up in the Madrasa. The women were beaten up by their husbands when they participated in the struggles. All these sufferings and misunderstandings deepened my commitment. I got the Manakaruth to take an independent stand. I decided “there would be no turning back”.

With the help of the fisherwomen’s organization we took up two special issues connected with our Muslim women’s group. One of our group members was beaten up by a man. We filed the case and organized a protest rally. Another time one woman, suspected as sex worker was arrested by the police when she happened to be alone in the bus stand around 8 pm. She was kept in the police station that night. The next day morning as soon as we got the news, we marched towards the police station. The Muslim women who belong to the fisherwomen’s group proved our Shakti (power within) in both cases. The man who beat the woman was punished and police who arrested the woman at the bus stand was suspended.

The women in our groups are very strong and powerful compared to other Muslim women. We are known to be talkative and Thantedikal (strong and courageous, with a negative connotation of stubbornness). But I believe that when we take a clear stand with real convictions people will be able to understand us. Now I am an elected member of our panchayat (local government body). To elect a Muslim woman as a panchayat member is not an ordinary thing in our Muslim Community. Our group gives me the moral support and that provides me enough Shakti to do something good in the society. Our mothers and grandmothers suffered a lot, silently staying at home; but we gained the Manakaruth and Thantedam from them to stand against the injustice. From my own experiences and the stories of the fisherwomen I came to the conclusion that the power within the women is

A story of Suffering and Hope

A story of Awareness and Consciousness

A story of Growth and Development

A story of Social Commitment and Struggle

And finally, A story of God Experience in Everything.

The fisherwomen commonly use these three strong words Manakaruth / Shakti / Thantedam in their local language to express their inner power, the energy that impels them to move ahead in the midst of suffering. Inspired and motivated by their Manakaruth / Shakti / Thantedam, the power within, the courageous fisherwomen dare to hope for a better future. For the people in Kerala, Manakaruth and Shakti are positive terms, while Thantedam has some negative connotation of stubbornness. But when a woman uses it to define her own person, she refers to it as a very positive quality deep within her. This suggests that nothing can prevent her from achieving what she has decided in her mind, from reaching her goal and purpose in life. “Shakti means power, force, the feminine energy; and the whole universe is the manifestation of Shakti. Shakti is a Sanskrit word and Manakaruth is local Malayalam word. So it is adequate to name their power within, using their own word Manakaruth (Manam for will and Karuth for power), which is their spirituality too.

In tune with Chung, I too, would like to say that the fisherwomen do not merely accompany Christ to Calvary as spectators. They carry the cross with him and undergo his passion in an act of identification with his self-giving. The fisherwomen’s Manakaruth makes them free enough to question and argue with Jesus even on the way to Calvary, pause for a while with the Thantedam of their foremothers to gather more power and strength. I join with many of the feminist theologians when they say that there is the power with in us as women, beyond our being compassionate, nurturing, understanding, creating or loving. It is true that the Indian women also have the courage to stop crying, wipe their tears and recover from their losses. The death and resurrection is a daily process in our life but the Indian women as life-givers and supporters of life-in-relationship are worthy to witness to Jesus’ resurrection and work for a humane society.

I vowed to become a Medical Mission Sister, hoped to capture the experience of being human and ordinary. MMS showed the ways and means, and supported me to become human and ordinary to learn from the poor fisherwomen.



(I vowed to become...)

It is they who taught me to be loving and human.

It is they who taught me to be human and ordinary.

It is they who taught me to be ordinary and religious.

It is they who put flesh into my initial inspiration to become an ordinary human religious woman.

(I vowed to become...)

It is they who taught me to accept conflict as part of transformation process.

It is they who taught me transformation as

a never-ending process, a sign of growth...

a way to become human and ordinary.

(I vowed to become-----)

It was exciting, energizing and overwhelming

It penetrated my whole being and changed my life.

It deeply touched and moved me into creative actions

My soul expanded, my heart burned with “Fire and Flame”

And I became more and more human and ordinary.

(I vowed to become-----)

I was bubbling with awe and respect

When I found the power within them

The inherited powers from their foremothers

And, my joy found no boundaries

When I discovered it as Manakaruth Spirituality?

(I vow again and again to become an ordinary-fully human MMS)

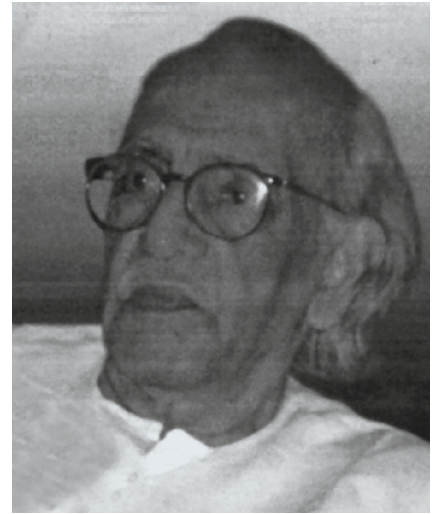
15. REFLECTION ON EXPERIENCE IN THE PARISH

Let me refer to my two parish experiences, quite different in character sociologically economically, politically and culturally.

The first one is a parish of the settlers in a semi high-land area, of hills and streams, with lanes and by-lanes, a beautiful place reflecting the beauty of the landscape of Kerala Village nearer the high ranges. I was there from May 1985 – May 1986.

My observations necessarily have to be at least to begin with confined to the church framework. The prominent members of the parish (at best the ones who count as far as the Diocese is concerned!) are settlers from the low lands who have occupied the forest area about $\frac{3}{4}$ of a century ago. They did that with the help of the outcastes who were almost slaves. Some poor families belonging to the Syrian caste also came with the former and settled here. The situation at present is about forty families, all Syrians are fairly well-to-do with some land which can support them. Now quite a number among them are teachers in the High School in the parish. Others reach out to other areas. Another 50 or so families are the descendants of those who came along with the main settlers, also Syrians, economically poor. But they have managed to go abroad to the Gulf-countries and are now pretty well off, no more dependent on the rich farmers. The rest about 30 families are from the outcaste community, the converted harijans. They are poor mostly rubber tappers in the rubber estates belonging to the rich Christians. Because there is a school in the parish, they go up to the 10th standard but seldom cross over. They may at the most get a peon's post in the High School or a primary teacher's post in the Lower Primary School.

This is the general picture of the people who belong to the institution called church. Let us turn to some general aspects which control their thinking pattern and behavioural framework.



REV. M. J. JOSEPH

1. FAITH AND SPIRITUALITY OF THE CHURCH

Irrespective of whether one belongs to the CSI, Mar Thoma, Pentecostal even Orthodox or for that matter Roman Catholic Church, they have a common faith articulation. What they hold dear is a concept of God who is handy, who provides everything they need. He controls the law and order situation, and guards the universe as it is. They observe the 'Creed and Cult'; they are loyal to the church, worships, sacraments and are keen in supporting the church, these are all what they mean by faith and church. But even then they are heavily under the

influence of a sense of Communality so much so that it is not the uniqueness of Christ that they talk about by the uniqueness of the church denomination they belong to. Even while they vie with each other on the score of church denomination they have quite a few things in common.

- the moralism they draw up
- the concept of sin and punishment and salvation pitched against it.
- The consolation in an otherworldly hope
- The miracle-working faith
- The God who punishes the wicked and the sinner and who is pleased with those who 'obey'.
- There is salvation only in 'my church'

All other religions, those who do not subscribe to 'my faith' are doomed.

The prominent features are the kind of moralism and piety that are thrown around and also the at-any-cost my faith, approach. There was a incident of one of the prominent members of the congregation a senior High School teacher, heavily drunk, coming to the parish house making overt gestures and trying to misbehave with the women there. Two things stand out in this context one, none from the rich section in the church committee thinks that this is a question which has to be taken up at the church committee level. While they have an overdose of piety and sense of moralism, they do not think that a question of justice is involved in this issue. According to them it is a non-issue for the church committee. Secondly because it involves one from their family, there should be no record of it anywhere. The question is not the violation of human rights or justice involved in the issue but because this involves one from among them as per their moral code (which is very much "Christian") it cannot happen and it cannot be recorded.

All these set the parameters of the spirituality which is respectable and socially acceptable. This is the end-all and be-all of the church. So when questions like,

- Who is Jesus Christ for us today?
- Whose side did God take in the Exodus even in the struggle of the slaves in Egypt? and why?





- Whose side did the prophets take?
- Does the Bible speak about a God who liberates the poor and the oppressed?
- Why was Jesus crucified?
- Why did Jesus consider the option for the multitude, the publicans and the sinners a 'must' in his ministry?
- Is not the Cross a symbol of protest against injustice and the unjust rulers

and structure?

- What is salvation for those who are not members of the established church?

are asked, they are the least bothered. In fact these questions are well outside of their religious frame-work.

The faith of the church can be summed up as the articulation of some convenient articles which conform to the norms of the society they are part of and which legitimize every aspect of the status-quo. Hence Spirituality is your commitment to a set of dogmas instituted to safeguard the interest of the rich and the powerful in the society. These can be illustrated in the experience of the church over just one year's period.

The CSI has a supposedly democratic set-up. It is only a facade as far as Central Kerala Diocese is concerned. I doubt whether any Diocese in the Church of South India has a different experience to narrate!

When the Pastor tried to raise the question of attempt at molestation in the parish house, the church committee with the exception of 3 (who represent the poor section) obstructed the proceedings of the committee. The Pastor sent copies of the proceedings to the District Minister and to the Bishop. Nobody responded. The group that caused disturbance, after consultation with the Diocesan authorities met separately and blocked all bank transactions of the Pastor, thereby virtually denying the sustenance of the Pastor and family. What the rich family/families in the parish say is the guiding principle for the District chairman and also for the Bishop. So there is no respect for democratic principles in the church. The so-called love, concern etc. the Christian virtues have no relevance when things prop up against the interest of the rich section in the parish. The Bishop never even enquired as to what was the reason for withholding the salary of the Pastor whom he appointed to the parish.

After seven months i.e. in January a commission was sent to enquire into the matter. From all that happened there the commission was convinced that the Pastor's stand was right. And the commission members returned saying that the matter would be settled; they would take measures with immediate effect. But that Commission Report never saw light.

What followed was an example of the utter immorality of the church. By mid-February the Pastor got a transfer order which was to be effected with effect from May 1st. The Pastor wrote to the Bishop saying that prior to the transfer question the issues in the parish had to be sorted out, one, the Commission Report to be published and, two, the arrear salaries to be paid. The Pastor never got any reply and so did not get ready to move. The Bishop's reply was the drastic action which followed. On May 25th Sunday morning, the Pastor as he was getting ready to go to the church, the police accosted him and he was put under house arrest. Another Pastor was ushered into the church and it was announced that he was to be in charge of the parish. Then the worship services started. There was host of police surrounding the church and the church compound right from the morning. As the service proceeded some from the congregation mainly young people stood up and asked for explanation why their Pastor was put under arrest and how a church service could proceed with no reason being given to the bastardy action. Immediately the Pastor in charge of the service called the police inside the church and wanted them to deal with the situation. The police caught hold of them, beat them, dragged them out and they were very brutally lathi-charged.

And for what?

For not singing praise to the rich in the parish.

For not obeying the unjust order of the church.

For asking for justice.

For saying that using the police and the goondas to safeguard the vested interests of the elite, is betraying the Gospel.

Why did they do that?

Underneath was the faith that sustained them.

- That God of the Bible is the Liberator God.
- It was this God who saw the affliction of his people in Egypt and came down





to redeem them.

- It was this God who acted in and through the prophets when they said “Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like the ever flowing stream”.
- In Jesus they have the friend and life-giver who is there always to stand alongside of the poor and the oppressed.

• That faith means willingness to stand for the right, for justice, for freedom, for equality, for community, for sharing and for all that Jesus witnessed to, the Kingdom of God.

The Pastor who talked about the values of the kingdom and the church’s role to stand with the poor and the oppressed, and who stressed that the church was the church of the poor, could only helplessly watch through the window of his house turned prison, the young people who talked about a new faith and a new spirituality involving in the struggle of the people for their rights, throated and beaten mercilessly by the police.

The point we observe here in that the church with its age-old spirituality and doctrines of faith has not even a semblance of guilt or shame when it penalizes a Pastor without giving him natural justice or making use of the brutal state force to beat up church’s young people who were attending the worship service.

It needs mention that on the 18th of May, the Sunday prior to that, the Annual General Body of the church was held and there, after due discussion the Resolution were passed to the effect that what the Pastor did was right and that his salary arrears should be paid. But the church not only was not prepared to go into the merits of the issue involved, but arrogated with a power consciousness and vindictiveness, it took to immoral and inhuman tactics which would mar the pages of the church history. Who writes history and, for whom? All that is not elaborated here, but the point is, the church which supposedly can act only according to its revered dogmas and the codes of spirituality how can it throw to winds basic natural justice and act on the likes and dislikes, whims and fancies of those who are at the helm of affairs. And the fact is the that these precedents become the norms and thus the facts of spirituality.

2. FAITH AND SPIRITUALITY OF THE COMMUNITY

When we speak about spirituality, the attempt is not to draw up a parallel set of faith articulation

which can lay the parameters of a new spirituality. Let us look at some of the things that happened in the above parish. After two weeks of taking charge of the parish, it was suggested that a meeting of the young people be held on a Saturday bringing together all the young people in the parish, those from the out-stations as well. The background is important. In the Diocese, the rift had taken place with original youth group with Changanacherry as the headquarters which was derecognized by the Bishop and a new Youth Group had come into being under Bishop's patronage. The church committee earlier had taken note of it and had said that neither of the groups should hold meetings in the church. But the Pastor had called for a meeting, a neutral one, not proclaiming allegiance to any one of them. But some of the church committee members gave a letter to the Pastor saying that the meeting should not be held. The Pastor said that it was his prerogative to call together youth in his parish for Bible study and reflection. On the appointed day the Committee members and some other muzzle-men were in the church hours before the meeting was to commence. When the meeting started they raised objections. The young people also were present. After some exchange of words, the youth group decided to withdraw and to hold the meeting in the parish house.

There the young people were introduced to an altogether different element of faith. Faith need not shy away from arguments or even resistance, opposition or protest, but we must be sure of where we stand. Even when the church elders are opposing tooth and nail, if there is justification on our part, we can go ahead. Through that we would be discovering and experiencing a spirituality of resistance and struggle.

On another occasion, when the Pastor was out-of-station, the dominant section in the church committee wanted to hold a meeting of the committee in the church. The young people arrived on time and took the position that they would not allow the meeting to be held in the church without the knowledge and sanction of the pastor.

A third occasion which in a sense was far more exacting for the youth was the Maundy Thursday worship. The pastor was called by the Faith Movement to be on indefinite hunger strike before the Diocesan Office from Maundy Thursday onwards. The pastor tried to explain his own stance to the congregation on the previous Sunday, but the Bishop-loyalists, did not allow the Pastor to complete his explanation. The Pastor





had made alternate arrangements for conducting the services in his absence.

But the prominent group in the committee wanted their man a senior retired Pastor to conduct the service. The young people knew about the move. They challenged this. When the guest Pastor got ready for the service, they told the Pastor, “nothing doing, if you have the permission from

the parish pastor, you can celebrate, otherwise no”. With the whole lot of supporters ready to conduct the service, the young people could send away the senior clergy-man without conducting the Maundy Thursday Service. The young people who could never think of missing service on such an auspicious day as per the traditional faith, firmly challenged the “Spirituality on show” by the church.

Of course the young people were part of that Breaking of Bread in the Hall in Kottayam before the indefinite Hunger strike started. Also they took part in the Easter Communion Celebrated at the way-side under the Pandal. These occasions unfolded before them a faith and a spirituality which was of an altogether different dimension to what they had experienced so far. They found that the new experience had much in common with the celebration and sharing of Jesus with the people around him. They were able to get a glimpse of the essential spirit of the tradition – ridden ritual. Once you break the cover and get inside you find a whole lot of meaning and relevance for some of the things we do.

And then, the climax was their being broken as Jesus was broken on the cross. Their natural intervention for justice was turned down and the church which was supposed to be the guarding of truth, justice freedom and spirituality was in fact ,the perpetrator of violence, injustice, oppression and all kinds of brutality. They were fully convinced that they could not get justice in the place where they sought it, in the church. The church was the preserver of a god who was in alliance with the rich and the powerful and the state power to suppress the rights of the poor. So the search is on for the spirituality which they need for their sustenance. They can no more seek it inside the church. They used to be members of the choir and they thought they were singing praise to God. They thought their prayers were the constituent of the spirituality that they were trained to be part of. But the revelation was too sharp and sudden. They see

before their eyes, in their own experience, they were being pulled out of the choir stalls and beaten in the name of that God whom they thought they were worshipping. And so,

- they could no longer go to the church: Sing in the Choir,
- Join the prayer: Sit down and listen to the homilies that were given by those who speak in the name of the God and yet who beat them up right in the church.
- They could not think of a God worth the name inside the church they were naively part of. That God is the one who takes sides with the rich and the exploiters and who empowers the forces that suppress the yearning of the people.
- They could no longer conceive of a fellowship in the church in which they grew up. The others see them as unbelievers, brand them as communists, who are against God, against the church, against the Bishop branded almost as sons of Devil destined to hell. How can they be in fellowship with them!
- How can they receive the Body and Blood of Jesus kneeling at the altar in the company of those who beat them in the name of the same Jesus? No, they cannot do that, because Jesus they proclaim is not the Jesus of the Gospels. They have their own idols which will be hand-made for them.

(a) They realized the presence of Jesus with them as the Israelites realized the presence of Yahweh “I will be who I will be”, when the poor and the oppressed in the parish, those who were beaten up by the church hierarchy, conducted a lighted – torch demonstration the same night, shouting the slogans,

Church is not a club of the elite

Church is of the poor.

God is not in the church but with the poor who seek liberation.

(b) They experienced the Jesus who was broken for others for who actually lost his shape as a result of the torture and the beatings. The people when they said together the words; “The bread which we break, is it not the communion in the body of Christ”, when they participated in the words of institution of the Breaking of the



through their own fellowship and study and action. They are members of the Left Trade Union as well as the prayer fellowship.

It is in this development of the new, a going together of the faith and political in the struggle, that we observe the qualitative progress that the group makes and the emergence of a secular spirituality.

REFLECTIONS ON THE PARISH EXPERIENCES.

The Second experience is in a working-class parish consisting fully of Christians belonging to the converted scheduled caste. Including the head-station there were eight congregations and in all about 150 families. The main station had about 50 families. Except two or three the rest were landless agricultural labourers.

Being Kuttanadu area, where the consciousness of the agricultural labourers is rather high and unionization has happened, the people had a left orientation, a few among them having party membership also. One could make a few basic observations as regards ministry in a context like this.

1. Ministry as identification with the poor did not pose any major question, although the ones that were economically slightly high did not approve of it and tried to cause difficulties.
2. Politically left did not mean faith wise left of even different. Faith was considered something different; church and all that goes with it is spiritual. Politics, trade union, strikes, organization, all this pertained to the mundane, worldly-totally other as far as spiritual matters are concerned.
3. Over the years, there developed an aspect of protest and resistance and they were, excepting one or two congregations (out of the eight), critical of the church's attitude to the scheduled caste Christians. They were taking part in the protests and struggles initiated by the Peoples Movement of Faith for Liberation (Faith Movement in short) and the Youth Movement. So there was a congenial atmosphere to develop the aspect of Resistance as a positive element of church's faith.
4. One of the very intriguing aspects was that being the exploited community. It was liable to easy persuasions and seeking of short-cuts.

One thing, with all the professed allegiance to left politics, they would easily fall prey to the trap set by the





fundamentalist religious groups like the Pentecostals. The reason perhaps could be that, why all this botheration, this going through the mill, here is a comparatively easy faith, a short-cut to the heavenly bliss, once you closely follow the stipulations laid down by the leaders, there seemed to be immediate rewards and there were miracles happening. Religion became an easy way out of all this sufferings

and long waiting.

In spite of the left leanings in politics and being part of trade union this beguiling faith worked and many moved away into the apparent shelter and assured – heaven. Even while they talked about the need for protest in the church against the blatant discrimination on the basis of caste, the easy way out promised apparently by the same faith in a very attractive emotional garb induced them to leave all the struggle aspect of faith and get merged in the apocalyptic faith freeing them of any initiative or personal risk-taking.

The Second Aspect Again the exploitative situation was conducive to some of them slipping back and becoming party to the fleshpots of Egypt. The church with all its institution and the jobs they promised and the power position it had, both locally and at the Centre, could buy off the people from the poor community. The attractions mainly were a peon's post, teacher in the primary school, job as an Evangelist. The very calculated tactic by the Diocese was the offer of ordination.

In one of Congregations quite a lively one where the evangelist was the Headmaster of the Lower Primary school. he was tipped for ordination. It was a very convenient proposition, a very tempting offer for him and his rather large family for which he was pulling the strings. With all the secularization that has gone on in our society, the status of a priest is considered high. Especially in the Christian Church where you have a very conspicuous position with the six-yard white cloth around you, it is a very tempting deal. He was ordained priest and the whole congregation is siding with the church authorities. Once you get some benefit, then rights and privileges are no more issues.

Thus, one congregation en-block was against any move questioning the stance of the diocese ; what the church does is good for the people, according to them. When the Diocese through

its organ. The Treasury of Knowledge in its November issue of 1987 said in so many words that the Diocese was a Syrian Diocese, none of the backward class parishes protested. They need not, because for those who have secured comfortable posts, the church could never be wrong.

5. Caste is a powerful force to be reckoned with. Caste can transcend faith and political affinity. There were occasions when primary caste-linkages seemed to control every other aspect. After 4 years in the parish, during a Fellowship meeting one person who was bought off by the diocese with the best offers and berths in the Boards etc., openly challenged the faith and spirituality practiced by the Pastor and accused him of unbiblical and anti-church teachings. Not one person in the congregation raised a voice against that. The obvious explanation, is that, we have to be one; neither faith nor politics can be allowed to drive verges into our unified caste front.

These premises, are states not as universally valid, but as a back curtain against which four years of experience did take place.

II The wretched of the earth.

You are there amidst a set of people whose life is miserable.

- During Monsoon months i.e., for five months their huts are in water, literally so, the flood waters in the dwelling room.
- The people have work (mainly, work in the paddy fields) only for 60 or 70 days a year/
- They depend mainly on the harvesting and the paddy they gather as wages. This may see them through the lean months, but then they are in trouble.
- Buying capacity is very low because of under employment and unemployment.
- The children are systematically evaded from the state's educational system. It is obvious that the educational system has nothing in common with the life-cycle of the agricultural workers. Quite a percentage become drop-outs. The annual exam comes at a time when the whole family is in the field for harvesting.

Somehow the children go up to the 10th standard. And that draws the line.





Any amount of help at that stage is not of much use. Very few have base for studying up to the 10th. In the parish as a whole, those who have gone beyond the 10th can be numbered on the fingers. Finally the boys settle down to brick-making or some such jobs. The girls are married away.

As a community what is their future? This was a haunting thought that pervaded right through. On the one

hand the Marxist Party was there to look into these matters. Some of them were party members and most of the youth, members of DYFI the youth wing of the Marxist Party. The women were attached to the AIDWA the women's wing. Education and employment are political problems. But how far the party or parties have succeeded in facing up to these problems? Perhaps an experiment which merits mention is the starting of a women's cooperative society by the Taluk Women's group which has provided job for 20 women from the locality. Some from the parish also got job in the cooperative's Book binding project. It is beside the point to attempt an evaluation of this project at this juncture. The point is apart from the party and the society in general, the church did not seem to have any prerogative to pursue these problems independently.

One thing needs mention. The financial condition of the church was really pathetic. Even with half the amount of the salary of the Pastor being given from the Diocesan office, the rest could not be raised from the parish. The Church Committee thought about various plans to raise fund by making use of the church compound. There was a scheme to construct a semi-permanent structure and rent it out to the Women's Society. But the Diocese screened it and the application for building construction was turned down.

Another aspect of the situation is the abject neglect of the village congregations. With 8 congregations, the Pastor can only visit them once in two months. For the rest 7 or 8 Sundays the congregations are at the mercy of the so-called Helpers. This is a category of voluntary workers getting a mere travel allowance of 20-50 rupees per month. They have no training. What they have is probably the secondhand revival talks given by some of the fiery evangelists and the tracts and journals of the so-called Pentecostals. So with all ones effort to impart progressive, liberative thinking of the Bible to the people, what we have is the shouting at the top of one's voice of some lay people who are at least ready to take up the assignment. The

moral is that the majority of the church people are fed on this dung material. The church has no machinery to meet this need. So the poor and the wretched are starved spiritually also. If you are rich you get the regular services of a Pastor. If you have money you can buy that kind of spirituality that church has. But if you are poor you are denied even that.

One could only silently watch this decay setting in. The feeble attempts to pump some life into this system was turned down by the Diocesan authorities, as the new proposal would upset some of their plans to placate some people and with their support. In other words, one could only watch with a feeling of helplessness an inevitable collapse of the churches.

This is not saying that the structure of the church will collapse soon. No. The church as far as CSI the Madhya Kerala Diocese was concerned was a church of the poor converted scheduled case Christians. The eight stations that are referred to here were strong big congregations in those days. But with the assuming of leadership by the Syrian elements this gradually began to slip. The city/town congregations were the economically better ones. They could support Pastors, theologically trained ones. The city/town congregations were mostly Syrian in composition. That meant there developed new categories; village-urban backward Syrian, poor-rich. Naturally, the financially better off congregations received better attention. The rural, backward class parishes were by and large left at the mercy of the helpers and untrained evangelists. The caste discrimination was showing its ugly face in different ways through this neglect of ministry. And so, over the period of time, the backward class Christian gradually slipped away from the church either to other churches like Salvation army and Pentecostals or they went and opted the Hindu faith because of favourable reservation opportunities or they simply became uninterested in faith and became indifferent and cynical. Thus the percentage of backward Christians decreased. The fact has to be registered that major rifts took place in the church at the time of the formation of PRDS and later in 1966 at the formation of the CMS Anglican church.

Gradually the number is depleting because of the various unfavourable circumstances existing in the church as a social phenomenon. The present policy of the Diocese, while it tries to placate the leaders of the backward class Christians by doling out gifts, is aimed at subjugating the backward community both numerically and





otherwise so that they are no more a force to be reckoned with. The rural congregations are consciously neglected; even the spirituality that the church has to offer is not imparted. The feeling that they belong to the fellowship is consciously played down. A patronizing attitude is developed placing the backward class Christians at the receiving end, with no rights. Unless very conscious and earnest

efforts are taken and carefully planned programmes are floated, the village congregations will die out and the Diocese will remain a prestigious club of the rich town-people.

III In spite of these frustrations, there were important challenges to be faced and experiments to be launched. The two challenges that such a parish situation posed were.

I. The initiation and experimentation of a new spirituality in line with the faith in the God who liberates and consciously takes the side of the people in their struggles for freedom, justice, equality, fellowship and sharing as revealed in and through Jesus in history.

II. The relevant spirituality of the militant community has to find its base and strength and sustenance in the culture of the community. There has to be a conscious effort to make the people 'drink from their own springs.'

1. The experiences in the participation of the sufferings of the people and in their struggles have unfolded a new god-experience. The Bible has been placed before the people of God-the open book, the basis of the new community of God's people.

2. Faith in the God who liberates

GOD IS THE GOD OF REVOLUTION

The discovery of God the liberator in both the old and the New Testaments and the story of Exodus of the people towards the ultimate celebration of their humanity and even the everyday experience of the foretaste of this liberation changes the whole scenario of the religious life. It is no more a life-negation but an embracing, a clasp of life with arms extended. The experience of a new Godliness in participating in the struggle for human dignity opposing, challenging and meeting face to face the force of oppression is what brings meaning to life. Faith is no more a passive notion of always being at the receiving end. It is participation in the

transformation of life and relationships and structures. Faith is the experience of transcendence i.e. the experience of transforming situations. Faith is “contending against the principalities, contending against powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Eph. 6:12).

Faith activity, faith praxis can no more be passive acceptance of the grace, it is no more repetition of a liturgy or prayers or even singing and chanting, it is not believing in a set of dogmas and responding to those in a set pattern as designed by some from up there. But faith is discerning the signs of the times, “putting on the whole armour of God”, and be right there in the battle, being ready to place one’s neck on the line to transform, transcend the human and the nature so as to be worthy of the image of God in which God has created us all and the universe. So faith is the commitment for the human; to make and keep human life human. And that means spirituality is the praxis of this faith. It is qualitatively different from the religious piety that the church and the religions talked about. It is the militant stance against all that makes and keeps human less than human, against all that dehumanizes him/her, against oppression of all kinds, exploitation, pollution, and against the rapist approach to life and nature. Spirituality is that which expresses itself in the concern for life, for the preservation and sustenance of life.

GOD OF THE BIBLE IS THE REALITY THAT UNFOLDS IN PEOPLES STRUGGLES.

Secondly, Biblical faith brings in a dimension of the unfolding of reality of truth, of life and ushering in of light.

The reality of Yahweh is unfolded in the exodus experience of the people. In the commitment and praxis to the cause of the human, people experience the power and mystery of life. Jesus’ own understanding of God and his mission is unfolded in a history-making manner in his suffering and death on the cross.

Here faith is conscious participation in the history – making process and the constant striving and search after the new that alone can steer the universe onward. Hence the old is not good enough, everything has to be placed in the hands of Him who makes everything new. The spirituality can never be the old; it has to express and manifest in the new form and pattern.

3. Faith is in the creation of the God’s





people. Humanity which is created in God's image finds the fulfillment or realization in the vision, 'Behold, the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them'. (Rev. 21:3).

God's image is in the community of men and women. Creativity is in the community. It is in the togetherness and in the common action that symbols

of new and sustaining reality is created.

If the church is to participate in the creative work of God, this faith in the community and the common search has to be real. Jesus explicated the values of the Kingdom. The values of the Kingdom are the community values viz., justice, equality, freedom, sharing etc. Spirituality is the spring that links together these values of the Kingdom for meaningful common action. This vision and need for such a spirituality is what makes you opt for the ministry in the parish.

In the true sense of the term community means Community transcending religion, caste, colour and nationality. We are not talking about a CSI Christian community. It has to get across denominational and religious boundaries. To be precise it has to be the community of the poor because it is only the poor and the deprived who would be available (Luke 14: 21).

This vision and need for such a spirituality is what makes you opt for the ministry in the parish. But this is a far distant cry.

ON THE SIDE OF THE POOR.

Take a rather less radical example. We have been, I mean the churches through its various conferences and statements, proclaiming the Biblical emphasis on the 'bias for the poor'. Jesus identified with the poor and Christian ministry has to be in identification with the poor. But in the context of the Kerala Churches, has there been some practical application of this? I wonder. Perhaps a prior question has to be raised, how many honestly subscribe to the Biblical emphasis, "option for the poor"? But it is true without any exception, the Episcopal churches have made joint and separate pronouncements highlighting this Biblical truth. The fact is our confessions/pronouncements and actual practice do not have much in common. In reality the Kerala churches have not started experimenting with the ministry in identification

with the poor. There have been a few attempts. The participation of the Clergy and Sisters in the struggles of the traditional fisherpeople on the Kerala coast is a case in point. This is an experiment which has caught the attention of the secular world. But the official church has not acknowledged it as the Church's ministry. In fact the church has taken a stance against the position taken by these priests and nuns.

Another example is that of Fr. Sebastian Kizhakkekuttu in one or two parishes in the Palai Diocese of the Roman Catholic church. But Fr. Kizhakkekuttu was served with suspension order by the Bishop. It is remarkable that later on from higher up sources this order was made invalid. This has not happened. The suspension without giving occasion for the victims to explain their position which happened in the case of 5 catholic priests also can be quoted as another rare example of this experiment. These clergy as a group had been meeting for study, reflection and documentation for some time as a group which they called 'Navyadarsana'. They published pamphlets taking up relevant issues and also responding to some of the official church pastoral letters like the one on the infiltration of Marxists into the church and warning against the atheistic influence at the different levels in the church life. At the time of the 1989 Elections, they held corner meetings explaining the need to vote for a non-congress, Left Front Government. By October/November, 5 of them were served with suspension orders, not even providing sustenance money for them. (This needs separate discussion, but here it is mentioned as a case in point.)

Apart from these, Kerala Churches have not experimented with the ministry with definite option for the poor. Of course the story of the experiences in the CSI parish Kumplampoika in 1985 - '86 is exactly on this issue. (This is being discussed separately).

But with the appeal Liberation Theology made among both the intelligential and also among working class and youth, the question of a different pattern of Spirituality was very much in the air. The WCC Assembly in Nairobi 1975, where Dr. M. M. Thomas expounded the idea, 'spirituality for combat' gave an impetus to the thinking.

But to go to a parish in Central Kerala and to assume that this can be practiced is unrealistic, to put it mildly. This is the experiment that was conducted at Valanjavattom from 1986-90, during a period of 4 years' time. As mentioned earlier, the people have





their age-old understanding of church life, what it stands for and how far it can go. Also this is a parish which had taken part in the struggles of the Faith Movement and the Youth Movement from 1982 onwards although with some reservations. At last they were familiar with the resistance moves and could expect what was to follow when a Pastor involved in those struggles came as their Pastor.

SPIRITUALITY OF CHURCH LIFE

Apart from the regular Sunday worship services and such gatherings, there were two fellowship gatherings, one a monthly gathering of all the congregations which is taken in turn by each congregation. Then there was a combined Fellowship meeting of the Mar Thoma and CSI churches which had a committee which met once every month and organized an annual revival convention. Valanjavattom being a very accessible place was invariably the location and there were temporary setting to erect Pandal every year. This used to be a typical revival meeting where the wandering evangelists (most probably revivalist speakers or on some occasions tourists from America) would be given our platform to do what they want with our people and their spirituality. If we are thinking about an alternate, relevant spirituality where the congregation is to get involved in the everyday struggles of the people for the restoration of their human dignity and promulgation of justice, the usual revival meetings are a counterproductive exercise. It so happened that, we discussed the programme of the convention and names of speakers and dates of the convection were suggested. But later it was told that because no one from the suggested panel was available on the dates suggested, they had pitched on some American visitors on dates which suited them. This had to be objected to. It was necessary to emphasize that we have no moral or spiritual right to lend our platform or expose our people to people whose theological and Biblical position we do not know. And being in charge of the church where the convention meetings were to be held, the disapproval was registered. The committee was offended at this “fellowship-like approach” and the joint venture ended then and there. This was the beginning. Though a negative step, at least there was the solace that no additional harm was being done through theological/biblical/noise pollution.

The monthly parish Fellowship meeting was another issue which was the show-piece of the

Spirituality of the parish. This has positive aspects in the sense that the whole parish gather once a month and have a time together, a fellowship. In spite of the distances whether during monsoon or in the summer, people used to gather and rejoice with a lot of singing, fiery speeches and times of witnessing. Those were the times of individual salvation, revival and good harvest for the church. Now the whole ethos has changed; the distances have increased, in the sense that people are not prepared to walk long distances except perhaps the old set of people. But they have grown old and are not able to walk even if they want to. To come by bus, it is expensive. More than that the new generation is the least inclined or moved to listen to the kind of revival talks and the ethos created there by the singing and the more than all to listen to the same old stories verbatim repeated over the years by mothers and young women. It is difficult to claim any authenticity for such witnessing. One may have to grant that for some of the people this may be a dear thing, may give a kind of emotional satisfaction. But to say that these patterns followed without any change is the measure of the spirituality of the congregation is nothing short of a lie.

So after having sat through one or two of such forces, the Pastor made it a point to convert it gradually into an occasion of a free, unrestricted occasion for Bible reflection, discussion, free sharing of concerns, time for prayer, singing (not the type of apocalyptic songs, but different ones) etc. This went on. But it has to be admitted that this was not easy, it was not appreciated. The reasons may be varied and could be traced and the fact explained away. But the plain fact was that those who attended these fellowship meetings wanted the perpetuation of the old and any change in the pattern was abhorred and branded as unbiblical, unspiritual and almost atheistic. Those who had a glimpse of the new truth and wanted change in the pattern of worship and fellowship gathering in effect stayed away. So it was paradox. And when someone expressed openly that the Pastor has no spirituality and his presence was detrimental to the spiritual progress of the parish, there was a silent approval from all those who were present.

WORSHIP AND SACRAMENTS

With all the new understandings and conviction about a relevant Christian life-style and spirituality, the Pastor has no choice but to recite what is written in the liturgy followed by the church. But even there the Pastor tried to introduce extempore biddings and even changes in the consecration





prayer, rather major ones. But that probably went unnoticed. If the Pastor were to use a different liturgy that would have caused a flutter.

The point still needs further probing. It is terribly complicated and complex. And one wonders whether it could even be sorted out. Here the fact is the congregation by and large know and approve of the fact that the Pastor has progressive and radical views, he

is different, he does not conform to the ordinary image of a Pastor, his understanding and interpretation of the Bible and theology are different and he professedly stands for the poor and is prepared to lead the struggles even against the Diocese for the right cause. And the members of the congregation have joined in the struggles at Kottayam on various occasions especially on July 2nd 1988 when the people were severely beaten up by the police.

But the point is all these do not provide an adequate structure of experience and thought – form for a sustained action or even a line of approach.

Resistance to change – Peoples Culture cut-off from faith. This is an area which needs careful perusal. Only some very tentative observations can be made right now.

For majority of church-goers or those who have a popular religiosity. this is all a package. You who were the outcastes in the society, slaves at the time of your own parents or grandparents have been accepted into the church. This is a point of departure. But even then, they could not walk on the road. The older people including the senior church warden of the church often quoted their experience in going to the church. The church they attended was the church in Tholasserry, Thiruvalla. They keep the clean clothes in a bundle and they walk through the bye-lanes. The Pulikeezhy bridge was not yet a reality. Then the regular ferry was operating. They could not come that way. They would swim and cross the river somewhere up with the bundle safe and dry. And then they would take interior lanes. They could not go near the temples. So, it was a roundabout route they had to go. And they would change before they climb the Tholassery hill. Then they would take the side seats in the church. With all this the church experience was a definite departure from their early life. The gospel was quite true to them. Behold, everything is made new. Once you accept Christ and when he comes into you, you are a new person, the old is gone.

Because of this impact, they have a new beginning right from the time of Baptism. They leave all of their experience behind which are all acknowledged and marked evil. Victory is won over their devilish influences and ways of life and you are a new creature in Jesus Christ. This meant a physical newness also which was expressed in the social contacts and their acceptance in the church. Even while they did not get the total acceptance in the society, the fact that church valued their humanity and there was at least a recognition of their selfhood in some form, meant a world of difference for them.

And they wanted protection from their Hindu and also Christian landlords. It was the church that initiated this change and assured their security. Later on the Communist Party and the Agricultural Workers Union assured them of their rights as workers and enabled them to better their working conditions. Thus the hold of caste and religion in the society lessened considerably and there was the freedom of a secular ethos.

Whatever be the changes and development that came later, to the general church members the gospel that liberated them from the shackles of a caste-bound society is very crucial. This is the experience from where they start. Their thought – forms and pattern of response comes from this life experience. That may be the reason why the difference or progressive thinking or radical approach to faith, does not make any dent there. They have their own myths of faith in their personal Saviour Jesus. Jesus shed his blood on the cross and thus bought their freedom from slavery and sin and all that. This Jesus has gone to heaven to prepare place for them and whatever be their sufferings on this earth right now, they will be led on to the other shore where there are no tears, no weeping, no starvation, no misery, but will have the dwelling places decked with gold and silver and the brightest tapestry with the angels flying around to look after them. This faith provides the structure of thought-forms as far as the popular Christian is concerned. And your liberation theology cannot make much change in that framework.

If you can offer short-cuts, well and good, they will follow. That is what the Pentecostals are doing. You do such and such things, your salvation is assured. But when you talk about taking the cross of Jesus and continuing the struggle for justice, freedom, equality, community and human dignity, even while they acknowledge the need and significances of that, they are not simply able to think or act differently





from the already accepted structures of experience and thought-forms.

Again, if you are talking about the transformation of society and the human rights, right now, here in history, the Party is there looking after that side. You do not expect the church and the Pastor to lead the demonstration and shout-slogans. That is politics. Faith and spirituality have an altogether different role. Perhaps an observation

can be made here. Why this coming together of faith and trade union happened in Kumplampoika is because that was the experience of the community there. Here, in Valanjavattom, faith and politics, spirituality and political activity were held in almost water-tight compartments.

Even where they come out of their usual frame of mind to take part in a struggle at Kottayam, that was only an adventure, a venturing to see how it looks like. It was not the outcome of a changed structure of Faith experience. And they never probably felt inclined to experiment in the area of faith which would perhaps give them new experiment leading to new thought-forms.

ONE OR TWO EXAMPLES COULD BE QUOTED

1. A proposal was made and seriously discussed and almost plans worked out for constructing a shed to house a Reading Room and Community place. Somehow the thing would not move. The only conclusion one could arrive at was the unwillingness or the inability to widen the horizon of church-life and faith-locus.

2. Earlier a reference is made to the proposal to build a semi-permanent Hall to accommodate a business so that it could provide a permanent income for the church. This was thought out several times and plans were made. A team went to Kottayam to move the project. The Property committee secretary ruled it out just like that. The reasons given were irrational. The committee was upset about it. Seeing that an earnest effort to raise funds for the church was turned down by the Church, assurance was given that money would be made available in case the church committee and the youth were prepared to start the work overnight. It is true it meant launching on a warpath with Diocesan authorities, but for a just cause, not benefitting any individual but the ongoing mission of the church. The young people and the committee would not bite.

That was not the concept of church and understanding of faith they could gulp. Or it may be the basic diffidence and docility which Christian faith has created in them.

During the four years the only enthusiastic and disinterested service the youth and Church Committee undertook was, the construction of the church compound wall and the white-washing and painting of the church building. This confirms the observation that the church people are for the maintenance and support of the existing church structure than for change and transformation challenging unjust structure and value systems.

II. The second aspect that explains the hopes and frustrations in the search of a militant spirituality of a militant church has reference to a major theological and cultural bottle-neck.

During the course of the discussion on the first point regarding the search of a new spirituality, mention was made about a new beginning in the community's life and thinking beginning with the conversion to Christian faith. While acknowledging the contribution made by the Christian Missionary Movement in challenging the caste system and slavery, the deeper issues concerning the relation between faith and culture merit fuller analysis and reflection.

1. Turning one's back on one's own culture in the name of faith.

This has been referred to in the earlier discussion also. On one occasion during an informal fellowship session, a song with the rhythm used and sung by the community in earlier days was sung in the church. While it proceeded with the 2nd verse, one of the mothers in utter dismay asked the Pastor, why that old song was sung in the church. "It was something we left when we accepted this new faith". The members of the congregation especially the older generation could never suffer the use of old original rhythms and tunes in the worship services. They brand them as heathen, belonging to the devil. The Western hymns and the new lyrics accepted by the traditional church are the real Christian ones for them. Singing the peoples songs is "going back" for them. The folk songs and folk art-forms are unchristian and so they cannot be used. This has come in the way in introducing change in worship services and in experimenting with the liturgical forms. When you talk about change and experimenting with new forms in worships and liturgies, what do you talk about change and experimenting with new forms in worships and liturgies, what do you have? What does change involve? Is it just going in for what is available in the market?

What has come to us as Christian, the cult and the creed are heavily influenced by the western culture. The singing and the language all are tainted





by that. And then when we want to make it more people-oriented, more relevant and understandable and acceptable to the people and above all give it a touch of life what is it that we have to look for? Not the culture of the media, not at all, then what? This is a matter of faith. In fact, for any meaningful search for relevant symbols and myths, culture becomes central; faith and culture have to come together.

CULTURAL FALLACY INVOLVED IN THE CLAIM OF THE CHRISTIAN UNIQUENESS

The missionary era of the church was marked by the superior claim of the Christian religion. And it naturally was upheld and in many cases it was said exactly in so many words, that all other religions are of a lower nature if not of the devil. What it meant was that Christian is 'the' faith which can save you. It is on a different pedestal and aloof, no comparison possible with anything that went before it and ever will follow. The Christian revelation is unique and hence that applies to the church which is the carrier of that message. In other words what is acknowledged as Christian is perfect, self-contained and it stands on its own; there is a total discontinuity with what has gone on before. Christian faith calls for a cultural iconoclasm. The culture that existed so far has nothing to contribute to the Christian culture and value-system. And the Christian can begin only with that kind of turning back on the earlier culture. This was literally emphasized by the Christian evangelists. Even now this is the magna carta of the Christian Missionary work.

But this is a fallacy, it must be said. This is the experience of the missionary history of the church. From the Gospels it is clear as day-light that Jesus was part and parcel of the Judaic-Greek culture. He does not claim any kind of total discontinuity with all that went before. He was right in the line of the prophets. He echoed their slogan "the blind and lame will praise God". He broke new grounds, off the beaten track. The Bible uses symbols like the "burning bush", the "rushing wind" where we meet with forces of nature which have to be harnessed to fight the entrenched forces for a counter-culture movement of the people as in the case of the liberation struggle of the slaves of Egypt.

It has been pointed out elsewhere that people right from their primal life process in history harnessed their own and nature's power to struggle for their dignity, and freedom. The human

history has in it the strands of freedom and celebration of human dignity. Jesus comes into the human history to enliven and give new life to the human and the nature. This stream flows on enriched by the lives and commitment of many who have found meaning in offering their lives to make and keep human life human as Jesus did on the cross.

There can be no cultural iconoclasm. It is denying human history and God's creative work in nature which continues right through.

What is called for in the ministry in the parish is the openness to this challenge. As, no one community, religion or geo-graphical region can claim perfection in culture, what is historically imperative is the coming together, of various strands that make history. What is called for is a confrontation – synthesis – transformation process as far as faiths and cultures are concerned. Faith and Culture have to meet.

DRINK FROM OUR OWN WELLS

History is not going backward, it goes forward. The moment that we have reached as church, community, human society, universe, we have to search and research, dig and dig and be open to gather and drink from our original sources. These rich resources will enrichen us and enable us to go forward.

The local parish has to be a community of persons who discover this richness of their own springs. Their rich resources are available for all. The community of a parish is a community of communities. trans-religious, trans-caste, trans-gender. When we discover the continuity of the cultural stream and the process of synthesis and transformation of cultures, we are breaking the communal frame-work built up by the so-called religions which are in fact serving the vested interests of the economic group, and the market forces.

Finally, in talking about the four years' experience in the parish, while on the one hand we keep a vision of this new community and its spirituality which cuts across the selfish human interest clothed in the sophisticated garbs of economics, politics and religiosity, we meet with frustrations of caste, communality, and lack of political understanding and will. The Pastor is not altogether above these human reactions and limitations.

POST SCRIPT

In this discussion quite a bit of details





by way of clarification, elaboration and application is required especially on the aspect of primal sources or the general stream of human experience to which reference has been made as contributive to the creation of God-experience or spirituality of the human community.

The God-experience of primal communities have been acknowledged widely. John Taylor who has gone

extensively into the study of African people and their culture, observes that the cultural Mission of the church is to discover a new synthesis between a saving Gospel and a total unbroken unity of Society. The total unbroken unity of the African Society, Taylor places along side of the Saving Gospel

In Central Kerala we have the ancient art-form known as Padayani or Kalamthullal. This is present only in some places in the Central Kerala – rather Central Travancore region. The opening part of this art-form is a dance drama of the agricultural cycle. The paddy cultivation is depicted as a sexual, reproductive intercourse; the whole is made, seed is buried in it and the new plant sprouts up. The ‘Thullal’, the rhythmic dance depicts this celebration. For the actual performance the symbols used are the coconut flowers which again is the product of man’s creative intercourse with nature. Then the decoration is own the ‘pala’, the areca nut tree flower cover. The picture of various animals are drawn with natural colours. The dance is in fact a celebration of the creativity of nature, which happens in the coming together of the powers of nature, light, water etc... In a very real sense depicts a God-experience of the community. The conscious human participation is an indispensable part of creativity and history goes on. God is not the wonder worker, the miracle-maker. The myth of the sex-drama in Padayani is a very powerful and effective one. The God presence is not altogether away from the human. The “unapproachable”, totally other concept is not there. Neither is it a mere human creation. For productivity to go on, for preservation of life, for history to progress, this God-presence is essential. It is the spirituality that interprets life, gives meaning to it and that which sustains it and drives it forward.

There is no claim that all primal myths and art-forms are pure and creative. For example in Kalamthullal itself, there is reference to treating the mother earth after the harvest. The comparison is that after the harvest (child-birth) mother needs special care. Sacrifices, offering

of blood, are made as special care for the mother. But this has gone as far as offering human blood. The development of the sacrificial ritualism which has done terrific harm through the ages which has accrued so much of superstition around it is a case in point.

The point that we want to make at this juncture is that there are very positive, creative dynamic myths which have contributed to the “unbroken unity of the society”.

The problem perhaps is the religious claim of superiority, infallibility, otherness, aloofness, of revelation and God-experience. The best example is the Christian claim of absolute monopoly of salvation. The claim is that salvation is possible only with Jesus Christ. It starts from there and is confined to the church. The indication thereby being that outside of that framework, salvific work is impossible, is out of question. This is very much in the consciousness of the Christian, especially the protestants and there seems to be no deliverance from this communal and simplistic idea of religion and salvation.

The claim of superiority of Christian (Western missionary) ethics is laid bare by an event quoted by W. H. Hunt the CMS Anglican Church Historian. The Missionary came in contact with a Pulaya who was the chief cultivator in the area. This is an incident which happened in Kumarakom. This Head-Pulayan wanted to be baptized into the church. He was pretty convinced about that. When details were looked into, it was found that he had two wives. The missionary made it clear as per the Christian code of conduct, it is not possible, nobody can have two wives. The Missionary said he had to choose, retain one and leave the other. The Pulaya was not detracted. His first wife was a sick person, she had no children. His second wife was young, healthy, had children. Choose he must but whom? He decided for the first one. He said that if he were to leave her, no one would care for her, she would die. But if he leaves the second one, she would find another husband, she could work and make a living. He retained the sickly woman and got baptized.

It is beside the point to make a comparison between the missionary's code of ethics and that of the Pulaya. But this lays bare a far too noble human consideration in society before Christian faith and ethics ever came on the scene.

The folk songs, the original rhythms, the primal art-forms etc., have lot to contribute in this line. Our grouping for a more meaningful God-experience





or spirituality must lead to a serious understanding and going back to such rich resources of the people.

In the Parish experience, one thinks of possibilities of re-enlivening such concerns. Once an effort was made to hold a people's festival around Resurrection Day. It is more appropriate than Christmas time because Resurrection falls during the Harvest Season. Resurrection, the

thought of new life, preservation, sustenance, all form part of the creativity of the mother earth. The people who work on land, the agricultural labourers could understand the mother earth as their source of God-experience. The attempt was to discover, re-enliven forgotten art-forms, songs, enacting, paintings and so on. It requires a commitment both to our moorings and to our history and future.

But this attempt had to be abandoned. There were several reasons.

1. The Christian faith framework could not tolerate or understand this not to speak of accepting the wider framework.
2. The onslaught of the Western Christian culture on the people was so total and complete that the 'old', 'pagan' can have nothing good in it. It is all evil – this thinking is still pervasive.
3. The impact of the 'modern culture', the influence of the media and the pull of commoditization of art and music leaves very little room and urge to get back to the old – to discover our own roots and the source of peoples culture.
4. The people's life was an integrated whole, when they cultivated their own land, harvested it and the ploughed and sowed seeds and the cycle continued. But then the land was taken away and they were slaves on their own land. At least they had the mother earth to link to. In their conversion to the new faith their authenticity and spirituality were exchanged for something else. But the work even when it became a burden, was theirs. What has happened right now with the modernization of agriculture, monocrop system, hybrid varieties of seeds, fertilizers, pesticides and so on, their rhythm of life is totally upset.

So, in a way here is a people who have lost their rhythm and their spirituality. In place of that, they have very artificial, alien culture, faith, religion and art-forms.

Herein is the very serious question. What is meant by going to the original springs?

What is the relation, if there is any, between their own and what they have now?

But now that also is gone. In place of the old they had borrowed spirituality.

But what is the form of the new? Can the old be brought back?

5. The old art-forms, songs etc. are a rare specimen. Since its popularity has faded, the practice also is rare. It requires quite an earnest attempt if these art-forms are to be preserved. The little attention that is given now is because of the market interest. That is to say, it is only a spiritual quest that can really make possible a “coming alive” of these original art-forms.

The Peoples Festival idea had to be abandoned, the result being that festivals like Resurrection is just a repetition of the alienated liturgical exercise, the people having no part in it, so much so that there is no God-experience or experience of spirituality.

The Pastor on his request said good-bye to this experiment in the Parish. It was out of frustration? Yes, that was there. Was the experience/experiment a failure? It can be termed like that.

Being face to face with a situation where you cannot any more claim intellectual honesty and spiritual integrity is more than one can put up with:-

You are caught up with a vision and a faith which defines a militant spirituality. But day in and day out you dress up, stand, sit, talk, sing and conduct your worship services and celebrate the liturgy in a way which only sustains and promotes the established church's spirituality of pietism, communal religiosity and disintegration of peoples culture. How long can one manage the game? What is the purpose? It is this hypocrisy of the double game and the feeling of purposelessness which called the shot.

Then what is left? All is not black, No.

The experiment continues. The search does not stop. May be the approach needs new frame-work.

The slogans have to be different and the methodologies too.

Two or three aspects that should go into the next phase of the search are just mentioned in passing.

1. The forests are plundered, the land is looted, the waters are polluted. That is where modernization – science and





technology as used by the present greedy rapist society - has reached us. This has brought us to the edge of the precipice. The human and the universe are heading for a global disaster.

The only way out is for man/woman to strive for a science and technology that can preserve life, that has got reverence for life, that wants to sustain life. The plundering of the earth and its resources

and the rape of the human society must give way to the love and care which can sustain life.

This can happen only through a counter-culture movement of the people. The “exploit-the earth”, hi-technology, the reductionist science and the development strategy aimed at the anti-people programme have to be opposed. Have to go forward reaching out to a technology in harmony with nature and an organismic scientific approach where the power concept is pro-people and not anti-people as it is today. Today the few in the higher-up decide the mode of technology and development.

The new approach will necessarily restore the harmony of nature and society. The people will regain their rhythm and harmony and beauty.

2. The present race for profit, for market heading for the destruction of the universe is the result of the wrong development policy. This has to give place to a growth and life pattern which does not upset the ecology system, nor the animal, plant, human life nor destroy forests, land and water. Alternate paradigms of human fulfillment have to be evolved.

3. The loss of political models is another reason for the failure of the formation of communities. The developments in the socialist countries and the western propaganda that the last word socialism is said, the last nail on the coffin of socialism is driven, have cast a shadow on the political process especially in the poor countries like ours. This too needs careful reflection, study and analysis. Capitalism cannot be the answer to human search for meaning and fulfillment. The greedy, ‘exploit-the-earth’ science and technology and disintegration of the global life, that is where capitalism has landed us. The socialist countries by following the path of development set by the capitalist countries have come to the same impasse. Here much severe soul-searching has to happen among those who have upheld socialist policy as

the vision of the new human, to move away from the life-negating policies and resort to life-restoring economic, social, strategies which will uphold life and community and move on, may be at a slower pace for human fulfillment.

A parish and for that matter, a church or any institutions which clings on to the apron – strings of the present development model and its value system can never be a vanguard or even cherish ideas like this however much one tries to show its roots in the Biblical tradition. This is the reason why the Pastor decides to retreat from the parish situation. This is no withdrawal, but a forward leap. The difference mainly is in the understanding of parish ministry. The locus of the wider parish concept is the community of women and men who can envisage women and men not in a religious framework but as a community transcending religion, caste and communal loyalties. The can be nothing else but the community of the poor.

1. The power and hold of the clergy have to be minimized.
2. Some sort of a boycott of the clergy should happen. This is being simplistically said but it merits serious consideration because of reasons such as:-
 - a) This is a personification of the masculine reasoning and thinking. It is used as a position of power and domination. As long as the system of clergy remains in the church, even if women clergy also are there, the ethos will ever be the same.
 - b) The status and position attached to it is what makes it lucrative. It is the monopoly over sacraments that makes them so much the holders of the myth of the “other”. As long as the clergy are there, the sacraments can never be of the people. This is a vicious circle. If the sacrament, especially the Breaking of the Bread is to be a myth powerful enough to challenge the unjust structures of this world, then it has to be liberated from the ecclesial monopoly.
 - c) If the community is to recover the feminine concerns of creation, preservation and sustenance of life in harmony with nature, the clergy concept, an overtly masculine one must go.

This thinking, while it has yet to be sorted out and sharpened is one important factor that.



16. MMS PARTICIPATION AT FISHER PEOPLE'S STRUGGLE IN KERALA

MMS participation in the struggle and its deeply human and liberating experiences was made against the back ground of our search for a meaningful religious commitment, spirituality, obedience etc. Our being more in contact with the people in their immediate life situation awakened in us the need for healing not only of physical ills but also of the injuries and exploitation of Socio-Economic and Religious order. The Medical mission sisters came to live among the fisher folk of Trivandrum District as a response to the call of Vatican II through their Constitution which says "We live out our healing mission as we enter into the lives of the people, open to be affected by them and simple enough to give of ourselves. In community with them we search for the evils which are at the root of so much suffering, so that together we can transform these situations" (con. 9-1973).



SR. PHILOMENE MARY

THE KERALA FISHERFOLK

Along the 580 K.M coast of Kerala there live 10 lakhs of fisher people of these 1.52 lakhs are active fish workers, eking out their meagre livelihood from the rough seas. More than half the fisherfolk are Christians They have a sad tale of faith superstition, exploitation and apathy. They are the poorest, illiterate poorly housed and margined community of Kerala. Though Kerala has a literary rate of 70-80% the coast area has only 20-30%; 93% of the fisher people live under poverty line. Most of them are entirely guided by the parish priests. But the response of the church to their economic plight has been one of welfare work. The church has traditionally collected 5% of their income but only succeeded in putting up magnificent churches and schools where only a few fisher children attended. They also organize extravagant festivals further exploiting their poor income.

To this situation we came. Three of the Redemptorist fathers were already living there with them. The programme for community organization organized by few lay leaders were also in the coastal area of Trivandrum, involved with education and conscientization programmes. The sisters joined them in the process of education and conscientisation. There was learning experience on both sides. We learned from the fisher people the values of equality, sharing,

acceptance of reality and their dependence on God for tomorrow. We organized them to struggle for their basic needs, like health care, transportation facilities for fishwending women, housing etc. As the fisherfolk realized their various demands and the need for fighting if out from the government, they formed a Trade Union in 1980. There was already a trade union at Alleppy organized by Fr. Arackal known as Latin Catholic fisher men's Federation (LCFF). Fisherman of Quilon and Alleppy were members of this Union. The Trivandrum Union was more secular in nature, including Muslims, Hindus and Christians. To be a bigger force, a state federation of the District Unions was found necessary. In the beginning there was some conflict in changing the Sectarian name - Latin Catholic fisher men's federation the disagreement mostly came from the clergy. But by a majority decision the name was changed to Kerala Swathanthra Malsiya Thozhilali Federation (KSMTF) Kerala Independent Fisher Peoples Federation.

The movement grew through small struggles and culminated in the 1981 struggle lasting for 34 days. It was historic. Though Kerala is known for its workers organization and struggle for various demands, this was the first time that fisher men were organized as an occupational group to fight over issues on a massive level centered on their life problems. The church had used them to protect their schools and colleges. Thirteen of the fisher men lost their lives for something they or their children never used.

The traditional fishermen use country boats (Kattamarams) nets and hooks. Since 1953 bottom trawling was brought into Kerala by Indo - Norwegian project. The trawlers increasingly encroached up on the territory of the traditional fishermen, tearing their nets sometimes completely destroying them even they lost their lives. This infuriated them and stray clashes occasionally occurred. Government saw this only as a law and order problem.

Over the years the fisher men had noticed sharp decline in the fish resources, which was proved by scientific data. The data collected by the P.U.C.L is as follows:

1971-1975	-	4,06,000 tons
1976-1980	-	3,31,000 tons
1981-1982	-	2,99,000 tons

The traditional fishermen with their innate intelligence realized the dangers of over fishing and the consequent





damage to ecology caused by the trawlers. In the case of bottom traveling the sea bed is ploughed through to catch prawns, and similar species. As a result, vast amount of small fishes and eggs and sea vegetables are destroyed.

In a study by P.U.C.L it was calculated that about 1500 tones of potential fish were destroyed every day by trawlers.

In 1980 marine act specified that sea waters up to 10 k.m. should be exclusively reserved for the traditional fishers. In Kerala it was never enforced, the apparent excuse being that the government did not have enough police force. Increasing enforcement of trawlers into the area of the traditional fishermen deprived them of their livelihood.

These circumstances led them to the 1981 struggle. The government seemed to be on the side of the Boat owners. They had power and economic upper hand. The traditional fishermen demanded ban on trawling at least during the spawning season of June, July and August. Indonesian, Norwegian and Philipino experience support partial ban. The fisher people had only manpower to fight the boat owners. The govt had failed to prevent over exploitation of marine resources. The danger of water pollution and ecological imbalances were also ignored.

The traditional fishermen were denied their livelihood. Their basic human rights were ignored. The govt. and vested interest groups aligned themselves to deny even the just demands of the poor fishermen. Few of the priests and nuns joined the 1981 struggle. Indefinite fast, picketing, blocking Highways, rail way stations and aerodrome were some of the means used.

Though the church was silent during the struggle the after effect proved their stand incorrect. Fr. Thomas Kocherry C.S.S.R, Fr. Jose Kaleekel a diocesan priest and Fr. Louise (late) Panikulangara a Salasian who actively participated in the struggle were transferred at the request of the Bishops of Quilon and Trivandrum. There was no definite reason for their transfer. The Provincials simply compromised to avoid conflict. It was felt that the parish priests of the coastal area were behind the transfer. When the fishermen were conscientized of their rights and exploitation and injustices done to them even by the parish priests they started questioning them, and demanding their rights. This threatened the parish priests.

After 34 days of intense struggle, it was called off. Some of the welfare demands were granted. A commission (Babu Paul) was constituted to study the trawling issue. The commission submitted its report on 27/07/82. There was unanimous agreement on twelve recommendations but to ban trawling was rejected by a majority of two persons.

After a year passed and the government did nothing to implement the recommendations. By this time the ministry had changed. The Karunakaran Ministry took over. The KSMTF had detailed discussions on joining the other Trade Unions in the fight. Finally, it was decided to do it alone. Immediately after the decisions Fr. Parsuvila the then President of KSMTF sent a personal circular withdrawing the planned struggle. The Federation committee consists of Priests, Nuns and a majority of lay people like Joychan Antony, Sheela Paul, Andrews, who were strong leaders, themselves fisher people. The Committee objected to this procedure and finally a split happened in the federation - All Kerala Swathantra Malsyathozhilai Federation (AKSMTF) was formed under the President ship of Fr. Parisuvila. This was done with the backing of the Bishops. This was known more as diocesan union.

Fr. Parasuvila was always submissive to the Bishop. Even in 1981 struggle he dismissed a crowd at the request of the Bishop. Bishop told them that he would see that their demands would be granted. But nothing happened. Bishop was really siding with the government (Congress). Bishop could not distinguish between the hierarchical power and the trade union power. The split caused lot of misunderstanding even among the public. The priests and nuns who were with KSMTF were questioned by Bishops Priests and laity.

In spite of all this KSMTF grew in strength and organized the 1984 struggle. The demands were the implementation of the 'Babu Paul' commission Recommendations and total ban on trawling during June, July, August months. A memorandum signed by 10,000 people was submitted to the Chief Minister. After this agitation was intensified with Dharnas, Marches, picketing blockade, indefinite fast etc. 39 persons in various centres went on fasting. Many were arrested and put in Jail including Nuns. A group of 184 persons including a six-month-old





child were kept in the jail for a day. They were arrested and lathicharged while picketing the rail way station. Sisters Mercy Kuttiani, Valsa Paraparakath and Luke Veliathumalil were in this group. This case went on for two years. In Calicut Sr. Alice's (Assumption sister) and Mr. Velayudans fast went on for fifteen days. In Trivandrum Sr. Philimina Marie fasted for 23 days.

Other leaders's for 4 to 12 days each. One of the key point of the struggle was the March to the Secretariate. About 1000 people walked from Quilon to Trivandrum in the Pouring rains, covering 60 k.m. They had the symbolic experience of the 'Exodus'. The government did all in its power to stop the march with intimidation, parade of police force and blocking the vehicles. In spite of all this about 2500 people gathered around the secretariate. That day showed the public how disciplined the movement of the fisher folk was. The demonstrators remained determined and calm in spite of heavy provocations.

At the beginning the government ignored the struggle and later accused to false motives of the leaders. But finally, it gave some welfare demands like Lumpsum grant to students, old age pension etc. Seven Bishops met the Chief Minister and they compromised and asked us to call off the struggle. The federation stuck to the major demand - ban on trawling during June, July, August.

In Trivandrum Sr. Philimina Marie's fast caused anxiety. If death happens to her, the people's reaction might get out of control. The deteriorating condition of Sr. Philomena Marie, Paucity of funds, and fatigue of the fishermen were reasons enough to call off the struggle for the time being.

The response of the media was surprisingly wide and helpful in keeping the tempo of the struggle.

But the emphasis was not on the fishermen's issue but on the clergy and nuns and the subsequent problems in the Catholic church.

The response of the hierarchy was confusing. At the personal level Bishops of Telliserry and Verapoly took an interest in the movement. But the KCBC (Kerala Catholic Bishop's Conference) statement did not go into the merits of the struggle. They were on the disciplinary and moral matters regarding the participation of nuns and Priests in the struggle.

- 1) Fast unto death is suicidal, Violence not allowed.
- 2) Participation of Women Religious with the permission of the local Bishop, and their major superior.
- 3) Men Religious with the permission of local Bishop.

There was no dialogue with the religious and laity from the Bishops prior to their statement. There was no in-depth analysis of the issue of the fisherfolk, so that we can work together toward a meaningful and loving human community.

When human rights are trampled no one can stay neutral. Neutrality in such occasions is equal to the crime. In a democratic situation organization and political clout are necessary for obtaining Justice. From the experience of the struggle we learned that justice is not given but taken by the concerted effort of the people concerned. Here we cannot be neutral observers.

“The church by her neutrality is supporting the existing political and economic system which are denying the power and responsibilities they have to contribute to a just and human, social order” (Susanne Joher). Like any other social institution, Church has to play a significant role in determining the quality of the life of the society. Church can become liberative only when it breaks off from narrow fundamentalist garb and meet all people.

When we struggled with the people even ready to give our lives, Bishops could see this only as disobedience doing Violence and entering into politics etc. Ten lakhs of people's livelihood is threatened by the c. Bishops could see only violence, when one of those boats is destroyed by the fishermen, and their supporters. The boat owners go





with the blessings of the Bishops.

In 1957 in the liberative struggle and in 1963 and 1971 agitation to protect schools and colleges, the fisherfolk were asked to join them. Also, they were agitating against the government's decision to protect the teachers and proper salary for them.

But when it is the question of poor

fisherfolk they join the ruling class against the poorest of the poor.

On the one hand they preach to lay down one's life for others, but when one resorts to indefinite fast to protect justice for them, it becomes suicide in the eye of the Bishops and Priests.

Fast is advocated by Prophet Isaiah as Justice. Agitation and Violence are used by the church to protect schools and colleges.

This is the kind of dichotomy and politics of the church. When poor people fight for their rights they will be characterized as communist and Naxalites. Church can understand only charity and distribution of bread. The response to the symptoms not to the root causes of the problem. That is why Arch Bishops Camara says "when you give food to the hungry you will be called a Saint. But when you ask why one they poor, you will be called communist'.

Church as an institution will never support the cause of the poor. Only individual Christians, priests and nuns and Bishops who are committed will take up the cause of the poor.

The spirituality of the individuals who are committed to the cause of the poor is one of loneliness and rejection. Constant struggles and opposition he has to face. They are sustained in the struggle because of the solidarity of the poor. Selflessness helps us to sustain us in the struggles.

To those of us who were in the front line, the struggle was deeply human and liberating experience, with definite spiritual, economic and political overtones. After the struggle thirty of us came together to share the experience of the previous moment in the history of the struggle. Some of our reflections are as follows:-

A young women from the fishing community who had joined the hunger strike. said “Hunger was never a stranger to my life. In the extreme poverty of my people, my fasting seemed to be so trivial. As I lay fasting my mother came and stood before me weeping and begging me to go back, while Sr. Philomine Marie’s mother was sitting quietly near her while my mother half-starved persuade me to stop Sr. Philomina Marie’s mother like the mother of Jesus gave her support. This touched me deeply and gave me courage I said to myself “In this movement I have thousand fathers and mothers.”

One of the workers who fasted for twelve days shared - “The sixth day of his fast his young wife came with their child and pressed him to stop and come back home. But he said “I am doing this for thousand children’s and woman like you. Therefore, no question of stopping. The Mother of Jesus did not ask Jesus to throw away the Cross. I am happy even if this will mean my death”.

Fr. Aloysious Fernadas a young diocesan priest from Quilon Shared - “AS I lay fasting I used to open the bible at random. I always got the book of job and whatever I read had a new depth a new warmth. It was in that experience that I discovered meaning of the Eucharist, that is essentially a gift of self for others. By this I had two new experiences.

(1) A reverence and esteem for the struggling people.

(2) A sense of in separate unity and solidarity with them, once a seventy-year-old fisherwomen came with her basket and with her smelling hands took both my hands in hers and with tears in her eyes said “Father you are doing this for our children !” And both of us wept.

The struggle is still continuing, with successes and failures. A solid leadership has emerged from the fisherfolk. Their Commitment and enlightenment will Sustain the struggle for life. We are aware that we are striking against the fossilized structures and systems. But with trust in God and perseverance, we hope to overcome.



17. PIAMMA MAKING COMMUNITY WITH ME AND MY SON APPU

“I will rescue them and honour them I will reward them with long life.” Ps.91.15-16.

Philomine Marie has been honoured by the God for the service she did unto the Divine, that she has been rewarded with a long life. We will also honour her. Rejoice with her over the grace and bow to the Divine in Thanksgiving.

I just want to note in minuscule what I saw, heard, tasted and experienced in Sr. Philomine Marie over the years. I met her first in 1976. She was then the administrator of St. Thomas Hospital, Chethipuzha, Changanachery, Kerala. She wore a Saree worth Rs. 5 or 10 availed from the ration shop at that time. At the very first meeting she impressed me as a person of simplicity and woman without blemish. The times afterwards has proved this time and again.



MRS. ROSAMMA VELAPPAN

In 1981, Fr. Thomas Kocherry, along with others in the State got to organize the traditional Fisherpeople as the trade union of Kerala Swathanthra Malsya Thozhilaly Federation (KSMTF). By 1982 the organization spread over to all over Kerala sea coast and Inland areas among the traditional fishers. Reading the signs of the times they (who?) moved from the context of churches and convents, moving to new avenues of involvement of the service of the Divine. They opted to stay with the poor, joining in all their suffering and sorrow, tears and heart rending. The Medical Mission Sisters had already opted to move into the midst of those made poor, to dry their tears, to fight with them for their rights and demands. They were ready to stay with the suffering and marginalized, seeking the divine in the midst of them. The first to move out to live with the poor fisherpeople were Srs. Luke Cherian, Theramma Prayikalam in Poothura and later Srs. Philomine Marie, Patricia Kuruvinnakunnel and Mercy Koottian in Mampally. They decided to collaborate with the fisherpeople's trade union.

Quite a lot of work was initiated by way of educational programmes and many other involvements to transform the fate of the poor fisherpeople. They moved into the trade union work with full energy. Today when I see the farmers on the streets of Delhi fighting for their rights, I am remembered of the fisherpeople in Kerala, in the eighties. Protest marches, padayathras, picketing of the offices, blocking the roads, railway traffic, airways, and hunger strikes were all the methods of the agitation in all the districts of the coastal Kerala.

Srs. Philomine Marie, Patricia Kuruvinnakunnel, Theramma Prayikalam along with other women

and men volunteers demonstrated and picketed the fisheries office and were arrested and jailed. There was no move on the part of the Government, in spite of many actions on the part of the fisherpeople for a very long time. The main demand was the forbidding of trawling in the monsoon months of June, July and August. Finally, a fast unto death was declared and Philomine Marie took up the fast unto death.

Most of the leaders in Anjengo were centred in Trivandrum Secretariate area. Sr. Mercy Koottiyani was alone in Mampally. She had major physical disabilities to move round. But she moved to organize women and children to picket the trains in Kadakkavoor area on a Sunday. Sr. Valsa Paravarakath who had come to visit Mercy on that day and myself, who was there to help Mercy, joined the demonstration and picketing. Over four hours we blocked the trains in Kadakkavoor. We sat on the rails until police came and arrested all of us and removed us from the track. Mercy Koottiyani was thrown into the platform and that was a mistreatment on the part of the police to a disabled woman. Later we all were taken to Thrivandrum sub-jail.

Sr. Philomine Marie's fast unto death was under serious attack in Church circles and among the public. In spite of all criticisms and objections from authorities and public PM stood to her decision to die for the cause. The fast lasted for 23 days. Sister was arrested and removed to Medical College Hospital. She refused to be force-fed and continued the fast in the hospital even. She was not ready to move back on the demand and vindication of the cause.

Around 1992 Fr. Thomas Kocherry got to the leadership of National Fishworkers Forum. He searched for an office in Trivandrum. Fr. James Culas offered his ancestral house for the purpose. Philomene Mary took responsibility of the central office of NFF for many years. I had moved out of MMS in 1983. I moved to family life. But I continued to serve the cause of the poor, involving myself with the work of ICM sisters under the leadership of Sr. Rose PV, in Valiathura, Trivandrum. I also collaborated with PM in the NFF office at Valiathura. In 1993 I lost my life companion Mr. K. Velappan. Life without him was really hard for me and my son Appu. Life as a widow was really hard. My own parental family was in no way ready to come over and stay with us in support. We were lost in fear living in an unfamiliar place by ourselves. It is at that moment PM decided to come and stay with us. We had very little space in the home. I could not believe that Philomine Marie to accommodate into that space. But she came and we formed a new community- Philomene an MMS sister, me an Ex MMS and my son. Her stay





with us was real peace joy and security for me and my son. My son started calling her 'Piamma'. She used to take my son to the school. She was part of us for 12 full years. Every morning PM used to go to the NFF office, I to the office of Kala Kaumudi periodical and Appu to his school. Evening the three of us would come back and share and shared life. It was perfect joy. This continued till PM came out of the NFF office, for whatever developments

occurred in the NFF. That ended our community.

There are many events in our community living that stay strong in my mind. One major story was in 2004 with the Tsunami. On that day everyone in the shore was running away packing anything they could carry. They had to save themselves. We had our house one furlong away from the sea. The NFF office was so close to the sea. We were not sure as to what to do. Finally, we decided to move out. We got frightened that any time the sea would come and wipe us out. So, we packed whatever we could and as we tried to move, PM said that she would just go over to the office. She went. We waited for long. PM was not back. So, after much time, as we could not be moving without her, we walked to the office near the shore.

When we reached the scene, we saw PM seated in the office, lost in herself looking into the deep-sea roaring and rising up like a mountain. She seemed immersed in thought of the fate of all the files and records connected with the fisherpeople of the whole coast of India. She wouldn't want to part. She evoked in me the Old Testament Mother Respa keeping watch of the bodies of her sons crucified and left on mountain top exposed to the birds and animals to be eaten as punishment for their defiance to the king. (2 Sam 3:6-11; 21:1-14) Unimaginable! But PM had already offered herself to the Fisherpeople her whole life.

Yes, we had found new meanings and ways to commit ourselves to the cause of the Traditional Fisherpeople thereby to serve the divine with a new sense. Yes we were there together to offer ourselves to the people in the name of Godde. And to this moment we are there. We pray for blessings on the sea and the people, thankful for all that the sea and the fisherpeople have given to us. My only wish in sharing my indebtedness to Philomine Marie is to pray that the publication of the sharing's in this book will inspire the "New Age Religious" for greater daring and deep commitment to the poor to whom they are wedded with their vow of poverty in particular. May we be blessed.

18. CONTRIBUTION OF THE MEDICAL MISSION SISTERS TO THE FISHWORKERS' MOVEMENT IN KERALA

I am extremely happy that Fr. Jose Kaleekal has taken the initiative to publish a book on the 90th birthday of Sr. Philomen Mary MMS. That the book has highlighted the involvement of the Medical Mission Sisters in the fishworkers' movement and their faith experiences based on it, is very relevant and meaningful. The involvement of the Sisters in the fishworkers' struggle and life are very well illustrated in their own life stories. I am just articulating it in my own way.

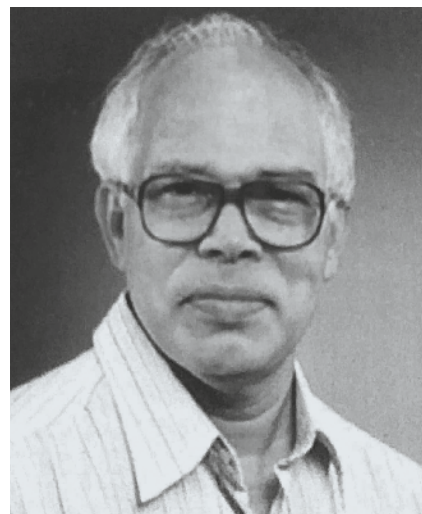
Fishworkers' movement is a very significant event in the socio-political history of Kerala and India. The contribution of the Medical Mission Sisters to the fishworkers' movement is very significant. The high point was the 23-day long fast of Sr. Philomen Mary during the agitation of 1984. The struggle started in Trivandrum along with that of other districts, with the indefinite fast in front of the Secretariat, of three Medical Mission Sisters including Sisters Philomen Mary, Theramma Prayikulam and Patricia Kuruvinkunnel along with Fr. James Culas and others leaders of the fishworkers. During the agitation other MM Sisters including Sisters Mercy Kuttiani, Luke Veliyathumalil, Valsa Paraparath and many other fisher people picketed train at Kadakavoor and faced police lathicharge in which many of them got injured. The Sisters took part practically in all the agitations in Trivandrum district all through the struggle. Their presence motivated women in large numbers to participate in the agitations. Many of them came to leadership position also due the example and work of the Sisters.

The option for the poor adopted by Congregation of the Medical Mission Sisters was remarkable in comparison with that of other Congregations. They courageously implemented their option by giving up most of their hospitals including the prestigious Holy family Hospital in Delhi. After leaving these institutions, they went to rural areas and the North Eastern States. It was as part of this option that the Province sent the Sisters to Puthura, a small village of the fisher people in Trivandrum district, Kerala, as testified by Sr. Pia Poovan.

Specific contribution of MM Sisters to the Fisherworkers' movement

Fishworkers' movement in Kerala was the fruit of combined work of many organisations, fishermen leaders, seven Religious Congregations and diocesan priests. Each had its own role to play in the movement. The Medical Mission sisters had some specific contribution to the movement.

1. The fast by the MM sisters in 1984 in Trivandrum gave a momentum to the agitation. This was especially true of the fast of Sr. Philomen Mary for 23 days, which gave a powerful message to the government of the seriousness of the issue of trawling and which almost forced the



DR. MATHEW AERTHAYIL SJ

government to appoint the Kalawar Commission to study about the issue. When Sr. Philomen Mary completed 22 days of her fast, the State Council of KSMTF, met in Ernakulam on the same day, in which I was also present, to assess the situation. After discussing the whole night it had to make a choice between, on the one hand, saving the life of Sr. Philomen and, on the other, protecting the rights of the fishermen community. Thus the fast of the Sister was a turning point in the dynamics of the 1984 agitation.

2.The discussion on the morality of 'Fast unto death' was generated in the Church and outside in the context of the fast of Sr.Philomen Mary. This was healthy, and intelligible for people and secular society since it was based on a concrete life situation.

3.With the constant participation of MM Sisters in fishworkers' struggle, a new image of Religious life committed to the cause of justice and human rights of the poor was given visibility to the Church and to the wider society in Kerala. This is very important for the Christian Church in Kerala, which is basically traditional and conservative. No wonder, the Church hierarchy in Kerala took a very unhelpful stand regarding the fisherworkers' struggle.

4.Through their conscientisation work at Puthura and Mampally, the Sisters helped the fishworkers to take up local issues especially related to the mechanised trawling. On such occasions, awareness and leadership training imparted by the Sisters energised them to stand up to the boat owners and the government which supported them. Thus the fishworkers became aware of the issues of the fisheries sector and the need of getting organised as a trade union at Anjengo which was the epicentre of Trivandrum District Fishermen Union. The fisher women's involvement in the Union was also very much due to the presence and leadership training of the Sisters.

5. The work of the Sisters by means of nurseries, literacy programmes, health classes and other activities in Puthura and Mampally made the people aware of the need of human development in all the areas of life. Besides, life of the Sisters among them was inspirational for a new perspective and awakening for their life.

The great contribution of the Medical Mission Sisters inspired by the 2nd Vatican Council and their own Chapters, to an important peoples' movement of the poor fishworkers covering the entire state of Kerala, is something for which the Sisters can be happy about and grateful to God. May God bless the Sisters to continue the mission of justice and human rights of the marginalised. I wish all the happiness and blessing of 'Navathi' to Sr.Philomen Mary.



19. POSTSCRIPT

I was taken aback when Jose Kaleekal requested me to write the postscript to this collection of essays all written by people who chose religious life as a way to live out their Christian calling, which I did not. All these people have been close friends of mine - some who have left this world and others still around. In many ways we have journeyed together though with very different life trajectories.

Reading these essays has rekindled memories of the past - a very rich and dynamic time of togetherness and involvement in a common cause - the marginalized communities and particularly the fishworkers. Fortunately these friends have all been able to write their journals at a specific juncture of their lives which gives the rest of us the opportunity to get to understand the main phases and important turns in their journeys, what motivated them and how they sustained their commitment, while at the same time appreciating the wealth of experience that the people in the fishing community brought to their lives. Together with them, several of us lay people had been able to understand better the Bible and celebrate the liturgy more meaningfully making our faith more lived than a ritual. For this I am ever grateful.

For me, the challenge to open my eyes to rural India came from my student days when in the AICUF we understood that we needed to do our bit to build Independent India. Again, for this I am most grateful to the Jesuits who inspired us. I always say and believe that my real education started in the fishing community. It is from the fishing community that I understood what parasites we so called 'educated' people are and how unjust the social order is. Without the fishers, farmers and other trades people where would we 'educated people' be? It is this opening of the mind and heart that has humbled me and led me to realize that at every step I have to make a conscious choice to live honestly and that nothing should be taken for granted. In this journey, the large collective of people - from the fishing community and outside, the large group of religious people - sisters and priests, the struggles of the fishers and other workers in the NAPM - men and women, have sustained me and helped me grow. To each of them I am ever grateful.

Except for Patricia whose essay was written as late as 2015, the others seem to have written much earlier, which means we do not follow them for over the last two decades. This is also indicative of the fact that things changed substantially in the last two decades - old solidarities waned, the fishworker's movement grew more autonomous, the 'outsiders' of the coastal community took a distance from the movement, the institutional church which had a phase of democratic participation and an openness to the poor began to tighten the reigns, and the globalized world fostered post modernism thinking which seemed to open more vistas of



NALINI NAYAK

involvement while at the same time it camouflaged the need to overthrow capitalism. I feel this has led to the market and religious fundamentalism we find ourselves in today. It is actually a time now when we need to develop a new analysis and develop new strategies and alliances. Pope Francis indeed challenges each of us Christians and the institutional Church to recall again the Christian mission for justice and love both in the human realm and in our relation to nature.

It is in these present times, that Fr. Stan Lourdsamy lost his life in the prison where he was incarcerated for his commitment to the Adivasis. His stand was unwavering and powerful because of his conviction regarding the rights of the Adivasis to their land. The kind of imprisonment he underwent is different to the kind we all experienced in the 1970s and 80s when several of us were put behind bars. Similarly, the farmers are on strike and hunger fast for the last one year - far more numerous and fiercer than the fishworkers were in the 1980s and 90s. Yet no one is listening to them. The powers that be steadfastly ignore them as they know they cannot take their corporate agenda forward if they give in. Today the ocean is targeted more for its non-living resources than the fish that sustained so many communities for livelihood and the beaches are eroding or being taken over by tourism instead of providing access to small fish workers. We land-based creatures remain blissfully unaware of the need to conserve the oceans which actually sustains our planet and so here again the oceans are being privatized rapidly. Today, unlike in the 1980s when just 100 fishworkers were the first ever international worker's group that gathered in Rome to claim their right to the EEZ, thousands of people from all over the world are campaigning internationally to save agriculture from genetic seed and Agri business, to demand rights for the indigenous people, to fight racism and to save the planet from climate change. But the nature of struggles has changed, the internet plays an important role in mobilization, bringing all classes of people together with the slogan that Another World is Possible. Yet reaching there is a herculin task because we have all gotten used to a way of life that is difficult to change. COVID has manifested this as we are all more than ever slaves of the internet.

While intimidation by the forces of hate are on the rise, resistance and descent to such forces have to be visibilized. For this we have to find ways to transform ourselves and the heart of the other and to find the light and strength to do this. How do we continue to build multi sectoral and multi religious communities and a spirituality that transforms us and the other? A spirituality that nurtures diversity and love? Discovering the nurturing needs and abilities within each of us may help us. Discovering Wisdom and Goddess feminine presence will surely redeem us. May the religious, young, men and women, show the way.



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