The subject of social movements is emerging as an important field of study in sociology. The general objective of this thesis is to study the fishworkers’ movement in Kerala as a case study of a non-party political organisation with reference to its role for social transformation.

Kerala is one of the leading fish producing states in India with over eight lakhs of fishworkers who form 3.2% of the total population of the state. (Government of Kerala 1985) The fishing community is the most marginalised section of the society after the tribals. The main reason for this situation is the mechanisation of fisheries in Kerala started in 1953 as part of the Indo-Norwegian Collaborative Project. The mechanised trawling and purse-seining introduced as part of this project were destructive techniques which caused depletion of marine fish and decrease in its production. As a result, apart from the shortage of fish for consumption, the productivity, income and quality of life of the traditional fishworkers declined considerably. The traditional fishworkers not only did not get any benefit from mechanisation but also lost even what they had. It was against this injustice perpetrated by the mechanised boat-owners and supported by the government, that the fishworkers organised themselves to protect their livelihood and
fish resources. Their collective effort through agitations and struggles for seventeen years developed itself into a social movement.

A social movement could be explained as a collective action for rapid social change with an organisation, ideology and strategy. Fishworkers' movement is a social movement because it had the four basic components of a social movement namely collective action, ideology, strategy and social change. The leadership of the movement was collective and democratic. It had two fairly defined ideologies expressed in its theoretical position and practical programmes. They were the 'leftist' or Marxist ideology and the ideology of eco-friendly sustainable development model. The movement had a systematic strategy to pressurise the government for legal action against the mechanised boat owners. They used both confrontational and conciliatory strategies. Social change which is an essential component of a social movement took place in the fishworkers' community and in the wider society of Kerala.

The fishworkers' movement was spearheaded by Kerala Swathantra Malsya Thozhilali Federation (KSMTF) which was a non-party political organisation, not affiliated to any political party. There are many such organisations in India working mostly among marginalised people. Most of them face the problem of suppression or co-option by the political parties or
state machinery. They have a temptation also to join electoral politics. So the issue of the role of non-party political organisations vis-a-vis political parties is very relevant and vital today not only for hundreds of such organisations working throughout India but also for the vast majority of the oppressed people for whom the non-party political organisations can be a ray of hope in life. To analyse this issue the study is making use of the theories of Antonio Gramsci.

Gramsci spoke about civil society, subaltern classes and the role of intellectuals in organising the subalterns. According to him political parties are insufficient to prepare the subaltern classes who are excluded from the hegemony of the state and society, for socialist revolution. They form part of the state apparatus and their main concern is to capture power and maintain it. Due to the compulsions of electoral politics they are not able to raise the critical consciousness among the subalterns. So he spoke about associations like 'factory councils' for this task. Non-party political organisations could be such associations to work for the hegemony of the people, as against the hegemony of the state. They work as part of civil society and so do not have the constraints of electoral politics. In the case of the fishworkers' movement, KSMTF was able to organise the fishworkers, a subaltern class, while the political parties failed to do so. So such organisations are to function as part of civil society and strengthen it by
increasing the hegemony of the people. They are not to form themselves into political parties because they will be structurally conditioned and constrained by the parliamentary process to maintain the state power. Thus they will become part of the state apparatus losing their position in civil society. This has been proved correct in the case of the Dalit movement of Ambedkar, Jharkhand movement and the farmers' movement in Karnataka. They got weakened when they entered electoral politics. Therefore, the non-party political organisations are to keep their identity. They have a great role in social transformation in India.

The methods of data collection used for this research consisted of interviews, observation and secondary data. The Thesis has ten chapters. The first two chapters deal with theoretical frame and methodology of the study. The third and fourth chapters deal with socio-economic situations of Kerala and traditional fishworkers respectively, while the fifth one with factors of fishworkers' movement like mechanisation of fisheries in Kerala and the intervention of voluntary organisations. Chapters five and six give the history of the movement. Fishworkers' movement is shown as a social movement in chapters eight and nine. The last chapter analyses the role of KSMTF as a non-party political organisation in social transformation.