CHAPTER X

THE ROLE OF KERALA SWATHANTRA MALSYA THOZHILALI FEDERATION AS A NON-PARTY POLITICAL ORGANISATION FOR SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION IN INDIA.

Organisation is an important component of a social movement as explained in the first chapter. In the case of fishworkers' movement, Kerala Swathanthra Malsya Thozhilali Federation (KSMTF), the organisation which spearheaded the movement in the state, was a vital element for its effectiveness. The present study is made under the aspect of the non-party character of this organisation. The theoretical frame of Antonio Gramsci given in the first chapter has been used to explain the non-party character of KSMTF. In the first section of this chapter KSMTF and the fishworkers' movement are analysed in the light of the theories of Antonio Gramsci. In the second section, they are analysed in the context of the phenomenon of non-party political organisations (NPPOs) in India. The third section briefly deals with the role of NPPOs in general for social transformation in India.

The Role of Kerala Swathanthra Malsya Thozhilali Federation in the Fishworkers' Movement.

Before we deal with the application of Gramsci’s theory to the fishworkers' movement, a brief description about KSMTF is pertinent. KSMTF played a significant role in bringing together
fishworkers throughout Kerala on a non-party basis and guiding them into a movement. As was shown in the history of the movement there were many district fishworkers' unions which were working for the traditional fishworkers. Their influence was confined to a district often based on local issues. But soon it was found that the basic issues of fishworkers especially those connected with mechanisation of fisheries were common to all fishworkers in Kerala. Therefore, a joint approach at the state level was needed to build up the collective strength of the fishworkers and to present the issues forcefully before the government and the public. Thus in 1977 all the district unions came together and formed the Latin Catholic Fishermen's Federation (LCFF). From then on many issues were taken up at the state level, and the government had to yield to many of its demands.

The influence of LCFF was limited mainly to the fishworkers of southern districts of Kerala, that too among the Latin Catholic fishworkers. To experience the collective strength of fishworkers in Kerala as a working class beyond the confines of caste and religion, a secular organisation without the label of a particular religion was soon found to be a must. Thus LCFF was changed into Kerala Swathanthra Malsya Thozhilali Federation (KSMTF) in 1980 and was registered as a trade union. The registration gave it a legal standing which was essential to deal legally with the government and other organisations. KSMTF
then spread itself to northern districts of Kerala where fishworkers were mostly Hindus and Muslims. Thus by the time of the 1984 agitation of fishworkers, KSMTF was recognised as a state level organisation of traditional fishworkers in Kerala by the government and the public. This was an important factor for the growth and success of the movement. Soon a national level organisation of fishworkers called National Fishworkers Forum (NFF) representing seven coastal states in India was formed. With the agitation on the issue of joint ventures for deep sea fishing, this national organisation was recognised as an organisation representing traditional fishworkers all over the country.

I. Fishworkers' Movement in The Light of Gramsci's Theories

The social phenomenon of fishworkers' movement and its organisation is explained in the theoretical frame of Antonio Gramsci under three headings: importance of the organisation of the subalterns, means for their organisation and the role of intellectuals in the organisation.
1. Importance of the organisation of subalterns

This issue is discussed under two headings: subjective condition for a socialist revolution and primacy of civil society.

A. Subjective conditions for a socialist revolution

According to Gramsci, the collective organisation of masses is very important for historical transformation. The historical materialism of Marx holds that socialist revolution takes place spontaneously once the objective conditions of capitalist development reach maturity through their own contradictions. But Gramsci held that subjective conditions of revolutionary consciousness of the masses is a must for socialist revolution. In other words, the proletariat should be class-for-itself and not class-in-itself. This means proletarian consciousness and collective organisation have to be consciously developed among the masses. Therefore, the idea of revolution is not dictatorship of the proletariat but ideological hegemony by which the proletariat become an organisational force through the development of critical consciousness.

In the case of the traditional fishworkers in Kerala, there was the exploitation of fishworkers by the capitalist forces represented by the mechanised boat owners. They were
also backward economically and socially. Though there were instances of sporadic violence and resistance against the exploitative situation, they never developed into a sustained organisational form. The reason was, as Gramsci said, that the fishworkers did not develop a critical consciousness leading to collective action. Through the consistent conscientisation programme of innumerable social workers for several years, KSMTF helped fishworkers to develop a critical consciousness about their exploitative situation and to mobilise them organisationally towards a movement. Political parties failed to organise the fishworkers because they did not work for the growth of critical consciousness among the fishworkers. If KSMTF succeeded where political parties including the communist parties failed, it was because, it mobilised them around the basic issues of the fishworkers, irrespective of party affiliation. In other words, the non-party character was an important factor for the fishworkers' movement in Kerala. It is thus an example of how an unorganised subaltern group steeped in poverty and illiteracy could become an organisational force with the growth of critical consciousness helped by a NPFU.

B. Primacy of Civil Society

In the superstructure, Gramsci speaks of two levels of society—political and civil society. The political society consists of state apparatus and civil society consists of various organisations and associations normally coming under the
'private' sphere. Gramsci gave primacy to civil society and wanted it to take control of the hegemony of the state. The civil society is different from political parties which form part of the state. Factory Council was one example of an association in a civil society. The reason behind this novel experiment of Gramsci was the inadequacy of political parties especially the communist party of Italy to prepare people for social transformation. "On the one hand, the dominant institutions - parliament, state, bureaucracy, parties, trade unions etc. organised within bourgeois society and could only function with its logic...these structures were strategically very limited... and hence would have to be transcended in the form of prefigurative bodies such as Councils." (Boggs 1976:86)

Since the political parties are a part of the state they are structurally conditioned and limited by the election, the parliament and administration. Their main concern is to capture power and maintain it. The political parties in India are not exception to this limitation. "All social democratic parties also function outside the electoral framework, just as all Marxist parties work for aims other than the ultimate revolution. But both the visions focus on the capture of state power, without controlling which it is considered impossible to effect social change. Little, if any, importance is given to spontaneous and autonomous action of individuals, groups and strata." (Wignaraja 1993:250)
C. Political Parties and the Fishworkers

In the case of fishworkers, Gramsci’s analysis of political parties proved right. The parties including communists did not pay much attention to fishworkers in Kerala as they could be dispensed with for the power game of the state politics. Secondly, the political parties did not take up the basic issues of mechanised trawling which were threatening their very life and livelihood. Instead, the parties in power including the left encouraged mechanisation in favour of the business class against the interest of the traditional fishworkers. This was due to the political compulsions of a parliamentary democracy by which the parties needed the business and the boat lobby for their survival and sustenance. KSMTF, as a non-party political organisation, scientifically studied the issue of mechanisation in the fisheries and suggested solution to the problem. The political parties, in the beginning, refused even to see the problem of mechanised trawling. Naturally fishworkers got mobilised around the issues vital to them. Thus KSMTF filled in a vacuum left by political parties. It is the case of a subaltern class neglected by political parties getting organised by a non-party political organisation even in a highly politicised state like Kerala.

Thirdly, KSMTF as a non-party political organisation, was able to assert the hegemony of the subalterns against the
state. The fishworkers had no say at all in any policy decision of the government. But, as a result of the fishworkers' movement, the government was forced to make many laws concerning marine regulation including the one on monsoon trawling. Thus the state hegemony got controlled and the hegemony of the subalterns in the civil society was established at least in a limited way by the fishworkers. This means that a non-party political organisation is better equipped to control the hegemony of the state and establish the hegemony of the subalterns in civil society.

The relevance of non-party political organisations is confirmed by the interviews the researcher had with the fishworkers. To a question about the reasons for their joining KSMTF, 95% of the respondents gave its non-party political character as the main reason for joining KSMTF. In a related question whether they would wish to make KSMTF a political party, 88% of the respondents opposed the idea. In fact, a group of fishworkers were angry at the very question of making KSMTF a political party, expressing how much they were averse to the political parties.

D. Political Parties and the Fishworkers' Cooperatives

The inadequacy of political parties in managing the associations of people in civil society is further verified in the case of fishworkers' cooperatives mentioned earlier in the
history of the fishworkers' movement. The main purpose of the fishworkers' cooperatives was to remove the exploitation of middlemen in the marketing of fish and to enable the fishworkers to manage their socio-economic affairs by themselves. In some sense they could be compared to the factory councils of Gramsci. But the cooperatives were a failure due to the control of the political parties. This could be explained in the light of Gramsci's theories on civil society at two levels - at the level of the political parties and of KSMTF.

It was the Left Front government led by the Marxist party which introduced eighty one fishermen cooperative societies covering all the coastal villages of Kerala. They were to be managed by the elected members of the fishworkers on democratic principles and procedures. But the CITU fishermen union of the Marxist party captured all the societies for their own members. Later, because of the public protest against this undemocratic method, the Marxist party shared some societies or their membership in the managing board with other Left Front ruling partners and KSMTF. But the cooperatives did not function properly as the parties controlled them for their own ends. The testimony of a former M.L.A., a partner in the left ruling front, is pertinent: "CPI (M) made the cooperatives their 'pocket societies' and destroyed them. We, the other ruling partners were thoroughly dissatisfied with the approach of the Marxist party. But to avoid the collapse of the ruling Left Front government we kept quiet."
When the United Democratic Front came to power in 1991 they increased the number of the fishermen cooperatives to 222, and allowed the unions of their parties to control the new ones. These societies were nicknamed by the fishworkers as 'Congress societies'. The researcher was told by the fishworkers in the interviews that the old societies were deprived of funds by the government, though this allegation was denied by the director of Malsyafed, the state apex body of the fishermen cooperatives. Whatever that be, most of the cooperatives did not take up marketing of fish to eliminate middlemen, thus defeating the very purpose for which they were started. The societies functioned as a department of the government for channelling its programmes without any democratic procedure of the cooperatives. The evaluation of the cooperatives by KSMTF is relevant. "It was reported from all districts that both ruling and opposition unions do not have any clear plans and programmes for the cooperatives, but they are eager to capture the power for themselves." (KSMTF annual report 1988-'90)

The fishermen cooperatives were a failure because they were captured and controlled by the political parties. The benefits were to go mainly to the members of the party which controlled the societies. The cooperative societies by their very principles should be functioning as part of civil society giving an opportunity for people especially the subalterns to exercise their hegemony and power. When the political parties
controlled them they were making them a part of the state apparatus. In such situation, as Gramsci said, the hegemony is not transferred to the people, but kept with the party and through it the state apparatus. Since the fishermen's cooperatives were controlled by the parties they were working like a government department without proper participation of the people in their management. They were transferred from the area of civil society to the area of the state. This has happened to the farmers' cooperatives in Indonesia which gave their benefits only to the members of the ruling party. (Scott 1990)

E. Collaboration of KSMTF with Left Parties

From the point of view of KSMTF, its experiment in collaborating with the left parties in the first election to the fishermen's cooperatives was an example of how a non-party political organisation could be ineffective by cooperating with political parties for power sharing. When the Marxist party adopted undemocratic procedures by capturing the cooperatives there was widespread protest from other parties and the public in Kerala. But KSMTF which used to take a clear stand on any issue of the fishworkers, did not sufficiently oppose the policy of the Marxist party. This was strongly criticised by the fishworkers and others. From the interview of the researcher a sizeable section of fishworkers (44%) was of the view that KSMTF did not strongly oppose the undemocratic procedure of the Marxist party in the cooperatives. Forty nine percent of
the fishworkers were of the opinion that the good image and independence of KSMTF as a non-party political organisation was tarnished by its alliance with the left parties.

What one fishworker's leader said is relevant. "The cooperation of KSMTF with left parties in the cooperatives really affected our independent character. The Marxist party simply choked us and other left front partners. In the cooperative also they made decision on their own without taking into account the views of the coalition partners." One news correspondent of a leading English national daily said in the interview: "The non-party political character of KSMTF was affected by the slavish, unrefined support of KSMTF to the left parties. If KSMTF collaborated with the Marxist party, it would become blind like that party."

We can explain this phenomenon in the Gramscian theories. When KSMTF had alliance with left parties in the cooperatives it was indirectly becoming part of the state apparatus, and losing its place in civil society. When it became part of the state, it had to function within the parameters of the government and the ruling parties. So it had to make compromises and adjustments to satisfy the political parties, and thus to maintain the alliance in the management of the cooperatives. Naturally it lost its freedom to take objective stand on the undemocratic procedure of the Marxist party. This experiment of
KSMMF, though limited, shows the limitation of a non-party political organisation when it aligned itself with political parties. KSMMF should have been working for the hegemony of the fishworkers, the subalterns, as a shield against the hegemony of the state. It should be asserting and fostering the hegemony of the subalterns in civil society. But by joining with the political parties it lost this role in civil society in matters of fishworkers' cooperatives.

2. Means of Collective Action

According to Gramsci the collective consciousness does not grow spontaneously but progressively by political education. In reference to Neo-Marxist thinkers like Gramsci, Bottomore said the same thing. "The growth of the Nazi and Fascist movement and the ineffectualness of working class resistance to them, seemed to confirm the view that it is erroneous, and dangerous to envisage the spontaneous development of a socialist outlook in the working class...or an inevitable transition to socialism." (Bottomore 1975:34) If so, there is need of progressive acquisition of proletarian consciousness. This was true of fishworkers who were in an exploitative situation but did not possess the consciousness to change the situation. They acquired it by the educational programmes of praxis initiated by KSMMF and social workers.
For the proletarian revolution Gramsci distinguished two strategies: the war of movement and the war of position. The former is conquest of power through direct frontal attack on the state apparatus, while the latter is conquest of power through gradual struggle of the people in civil society. He suggested the latter for democratic countries where state and civil society are powerful through its army and institutions. The state like India is militarily powerful to suppress any revolt. "In the post-independence period ..there was no breakdown of civil authority. The coercive apparatus of the state to suppress any kind of insurgent threat has been quite effective." (Judge 1992: 173) The civil society is strong in India with its caste and feudal structures. So war of position is suited for India. The war of position is struggle of the people at intellectual and cultural level. Unlike the war of movement which is led by political parties, the war of position can be led by associations other than the parties. That is why Gramsci himself advocated associations like factory councils. Non-party political parties can be one such organisation which can work for the war of position through education and organisation of subalterns. KSMTF as a non-party organisation did the same thing by organising the fishworkers.
In the war of position Gramsci gave a prominent position to the subaltern classes. His idea of subaltern classes as those "excluded from the participation in the hegemony of the dominant classes" (Salamini 1981:80) is true of the vast majority of the people of India especially fishworkers in Kerala. Even when all sections of Kerala society benefited from the socio-economic development, fishworkers did not get much benefit and so remained poor and illiterate. When all sections of working class got organised in Kerala and shared certain political hegemony, the fishworkers remained mere votebanks without any political hegemony in the government or political parties. They were thus marginalised by parties even in a highly politicised state like Kerala. Fishworkers' movement was able to empower them so that they got some economic benefits and political hegemony.

According to Gramsci, hegemony is not only coercive power of the state but collective will of the people expressed through 'any social groups' in civil society. Hegemony is also sharing the power of the state. There can be independent power centres expressed through various people's associations in civil society. Through the fishworkers' movement and its organisation, the fishworkers succeeded in forcing the government to make legal changes like a ban on monsoon trawling, and thus they got a share in the decision making process in the fisheries sector. It was the case of a subaltern group.
acquiring hegemony with the help of a non-party political organisation. Therefore, non-party political organisations like KSMIF has a role in increasing the hegemony of the subaltern classes like fishworkers in India.

3. The Role of the Intellectuals in the Fishworkers’ Movement.

Gramsci gave substantial role for the intellectuals to prepare the subaltern classes for social transformation. According to him the intellectuals are those who have an organising and educative role in society to help the subalterns for developing their critical consciousness so that they are able to break their 'passive' culture and articulate their intellectual dimension.

Gramsci speaks of two types of intellectuals - the traditional and the organic. The former who are recognized from historical past as intellectuals, consists of clergy, teachers, artists etc. The latter belong to a particular class and articulate its interest. In the case of fishworkers’ movement intellectuals had a significant role to play. The social workers including educated youth, teachers, Catholic clergy, nuns and fisheries scientists were playing the role of intellectuals. Among them there were both organic and traditional intellectuals. The organic intellectuals were the teachers, the educated youth, priest and writers who hailed from the fishworkers’ community. They helped their own people to
raise their consciousness and to get them organised. Their role was very significant for the success of the fishworkers' movement.

According to Gramsci, some traditional intellectuals would join with the subaltern classes and identify themselves with their cause. He encouraged them to join the subalterns. He further said that they should be influenced and won over for socialist reconstruction. For the success of a revolution, the leading class should 'assimilate' the traditional intellectuals. "One of the most important characteristics of any group that is developing towards dominance is its struggle to assimilate and to conquer 'ideologically' the traditional intellectuals, but this assimilation and conquest is made quicker and more efficacious the more the group in question succeeds in simultaneously elaborating its own organic intellectuals."

(Gramsci, Hoare edit. 1971:10)

The priests, nuns and scientists who are traditional intellectuals, got assimilated to and identified with the cause of the fishworkers. It was a new phenomenon of clergy belonging to traditional intellectuals joining the cause of a subaltern class. Inspired by the liberative message of the Bible, they identified themselves with the fishworkers, a subaltern class, for their socio-economic emancipation. For this they had to face stiff opposition from the ecclesiastical authorities.
traditional intellectuals. As was shown in the chapter on factors of fishworkers' movement it was the Catholic clergy who at first took leadership to organise fishworkers at district level. Their support and active involvement were great determinants for the success of the fishworkers' movement. Thus Gramsci's theory can meaningfully explain the role of traditional intellectuals like priests, nuns and teachers in the fishworkers' movement.

A special mention should be made about the role of fisheries scientists belonging to both traditional and organic intellectuals in the fishworkers' movement. As described in earlier chapters mechanisation in fisheries in Kerala had an adverse impact on the traditional fishworkers. From the experience of fishworkers they found that the mechanised boats were causing depletion of fish resources and deprivation of their means of livelihood. They reacted to it through clashes with the mechanised boats and burning them in the sea. But they failed to have a sustained resistance to the boatowners as they did not understand all the implications of mechanisation. The fishworkers had what Gramsci called 'common sense' knowledge about mechanisation. From their experience they 'felt' the injustice done to them by mechanised boats and reacted to them emotionally but did not 'know' the implications of the process.

The fisheries scientists, who supported the cause of the fishworkers and knew the scientific principles of mechanisation
tried, in Gramscian term, to 'feel' with the fishworkers' problem. They explained with scientific facts that mechanised trawling was destructive and would lead to depletion of fish resources. They also suggested a scientific solution of control on trawling. Since most of the fish in Kerala coast had their spawning period during the monsoon season, trawling during that time would destroy the young ones. Therefore, to protect fish resources trawling should be banned during the monsoon season. Based on this scientific analysis of the scientists, KSMTF formulated its basic demand: 'enforce a ban on mechanised trawling during the monsoon season. So the 'common sense' knowledge of the illiterate fishworkers about fish depletion was confirmed and explicitated by scientists. Thus fishworkers' movement is a clear example of how the intellectuals analysed and articulated the experience of the fishworkers, a subaltern class, in scientific concepts and language. Thus there was, as Gramsci said, a dialectical relationship between the intellectuals and the fishworkers leading to the organisation of the subalterns.

In the fishworkers' movement it was a non-party political organisation like KSMTF which took up the basic issues of mechanisation in the fisheries and not political parties. KSMTF was able to do so because of the intellectuals. They had the intellectual freedom to study the situation objectively and present it to the public. In a political party the intellectuals work within the discipline and restrictions of the
party. Such restrictions were experienced by the fisheries scientists working even in the research institutions of the central government when the issue of ban on monsoon trawling was raised by KSMTF. Except for a few daring scientists who supported the cause of the fishworkers, others were afraid of expressing their objective views about mechanised trawling as they were employed in state-run institutions. Thus a non-party political organisation is likely to provide freedom for the intellectuals to function freely for the cause of the subaltern classes.

The opinions of the fishworkers expressed in the interviews about the role of the intellectuals in fishworkers' movement corroborates what is described above. The vast majority of 81% of the respondents held that the social workers like priests, nuns and scientists were the main force behind the conscientisation and organisation of the fishworkers in Kerala. In a related question as to whether it was time for the intellectuals represented by the social workers to withdraw from the movement, 91% of the respondents were strongly opposed to the idea of their withdrawal and wanted them to continue in the movement. From the analysis of the role of the intellectuals in the fishworkers' movement, we can conclude that mobilisation of subaltern classes is likely to succeed if it is supported by the intellectuals.
II. KSMTF as a Non-party Political Organisation

This section attempts to explain KSMTF and the Fishworkers' movement in the context of the phenomenon of non-party political organisation in India. It examines how far KSMTF fits in with the idea of non-party political process found throughout India.

According to the working definition given in the first chapter, a non-party political organisation is a political organisation of mainly marginalised people, which takes up the issues of justice and human rights with the aim of social transformation towards an egalitarian social order. It is not part of or affiliated to any political party, and so it is termed as a non-party political organisation.

The social phenomenon of non-party political organisation emerged in India in 1970's. Kerala Swathantra Malsya Thozhilali Federation (KSMTF) which spearheaded the fishworkers' movement was founded in 1977 in this wider national context. So it had all the characteristics of a non-party political organisation given by social scientists. KSMTF which was an organisation of traditional fishworkers and was registered as a Trade union, was not affiliated to any political party nor did it follow the
ideology of a particular party. It mobilised the unorganised 
traditional fishworkers on the issue of mechanised trawling to 
protect their livelihood and the marine resources.

As a result of its struggle for several years, KSMTF was 
able to bring about legal changes in the fisheries sector 
leading to social change. The fishworkers became an organised 
political force in Kerala. Like other non-party political 
organisations in India, KSMTF was supported by social activists 
like priests, nuns, middle class youth and fisheries scientists. 
If KSMTF succeeded in social change in Kerala, could it be due 
to its non-party political character? As a non-party political 
organisation what were the strengths and limitations of KSMTF? 
What would be its future possibilities? The answers to these 
questions are likely to shed light on the role of non-party 
political organisations for social transformation in India. 
This section is treated under three headings: the limitations, 
strengths, and future possibilities of KSMTF as a non-party 
political organisation.

The source of data for these queries is the interviews 
the researcher had with 250 respondents (both fishworkers and 
non-fishworkers). Open-ended questions were asked to the 
respondents about the limitations, strengths and future 
possibilities of KSMTF as a non-party political organisation. 
Their answers are summarised and given below.
1. Limitations of KSMTF as a Non-party Political Organisation

The most glaring limitation of KSMTF as a non-party political organisation, which most respondents pointed out, was its lack of power and influence in the government. The parties control the government, and are represented in the legislative bodies, while there is nobody to speak for KSMTF in legislative bodies. It could not directly influence the decisions and policies of the government. It could neither directly do anything for the people nor for its members through the state machinery. Collective action was the only weapon it could use to influence the government; so it had always to be in the opposition to the government of the day. Constitutional means of collective action could be ignored by the government. This was particularly experienced by KSMTF during its six-month long agitation in 1985 to get monsoon trawling banned. As the government and the opposition parties did not respond to the state-level agitation, KSMTF had to organise a joint agitation with the opposition parties, which also did not last long.

The achievements of KSMTF from the government were often preceded by some adjustments with the ruling parties. For the agitations on fish disease and joint venture it had to make adjustments with the ruling United Democratic Front to get their support, and for the monsoon trawling with the Left Democratic Front. Any non-party political party is forced to do so since they have to depend on the ruling political parties to enact a
law on any of their demands. Besides, all political parties whether in the opposition or in the ruling side, try to sideline and defeat a non-party political organisation since they are a threat to their own existence. Even when KSMTF influenced the government to pass a law, it had to exert pressure for its implementation. A classic example was the marine regulations to keep the mechanised boats away from the shore for the protection of the traditional fishworkers. Though the law was passed in 1980, it was never strictly enforced in spite of the yearly agitations for the same.

Another disadvantage of KSMTF as non-party political organisation was that in many cases its members did not get due share in the programmes and projects of the government, in comparison with the members of the ruling parties. The bureaucracy, especially the police, followed the dictates of the party bosses and so the members of KSMTF had to depend on political parties to get things done. Other limitations experienced by KSMTF were the lack of finance, difficulty of sustainability of an organisation without the support of a political party, and of formulation of a coherent ideology for the organisation with members belonging to different political parties.

2. The Strengths of KSMTF as a Non-party Political Organisation

In spite of the above mentioned limitations, 99% of the respondents wanted to keep the identity of KSMTF as a non-party
political organisation. One group of fishworkers said, "The non-party character is the most attractive factor in KSMTF." They had many reasons to substantiate their position.

One great strength most of the respondents pointed out about a non-party political organisation was the 'power of the people' which KSMTF exploited for putting pressure on the government. "The non-party political organisations with people's power can make party and the government servants of the people; at present they make the people servant," said a well known Malayalam poetess in her interview with the researcher. It was in a sense, a strength not to be part of a political party since KSMTF as a non-party political organisation had the freedom to take up issues of fishworkers without the approval of a party high command. Though there were cases of discrimination in distributing the benefits of the government, most of the members of KSMTF, it was pointed out, were powerful enough to wrest those benefits from the government.

3. Future Possibilities of KSMTF as a Non-party Political Organisation

The respondents of the interview almost unanimously expressed the view that there was a lot of scope for KSMTF in future to work for social transformation. Many were of the opinion that KSMTF should take up issues like pollution, marine ecology, exploitation of women, and human rights, since political parties are not concerned about them. It should work
as a unifying factor to bring together various non-party political organisations for the cause of the marginalised. In this connection some pointed out that non-party political organisation meant 'working together with' instead of 'working alone'. So KSMTF could take initiative for net-working of such organisations at national and even at international level. The cooperation could be extended also to the political parties.

Another possibility of KSMTF is to take up issues of all sectors of fisheries like marketing and processing. For this it has to cooperate with various organisations in these sectors, as it did on the issue of joint ventures. This means that KSMTF keeps pace with new issues emerging in the fisheries sector in the light of the globalisation of economy and the technological advancement. This process can also lead to diversification of fisheries sector for traditional fishworkers as it happened in other traditional sectors in Kerala. This implies a lot of scientific studies based on which fishworkers have to be prepared to face the new challenges. In the changing political situation of the state, KSMTF might not, some said, remain a mass organisation, as in the past but be a 'creative minority' playing a 'prophetic role'. It would be a corrective force collaborating with various organisations based on issues and concerns of the people.
III. The Role of Non-party Political Organisations for Social Transformation in India.

If KSMIF as a non-party political organisation had and still has a role in a highly politicised state like Kerala, the question is posed as to whether the non-party political organisations in general have a role in social transformation in India. This is answered as a last section of this thesis in two parts – presentation of data on this question gathered through the interviews of the researcher, and analysis of this data based on the opinions of social scientists.

1. Presentation of the Data

The data from the interviews about the fishworkers' movement from 250 respondents including non-fishworkers is based on the open-ended question as to "what is the role of non-party political organisations like KSMIF for social transformation in India." Most of the respondents agree that there is a definite role for non-party political organisations for social transformation in India. The nature of the role explained by the respondents is summarised below.

Most of the respondents are highly critical of political parties. According to them the parties basically work for power and money, and so seek for their own vested interests, leaving out the basic issues of the people especially the
marginalised. Even when they do, they show undue favouritism to the members of their party. They are corrupt, and exploit people for their own benefits. As one respondent said, "The people are made victims of political process. So the parties are getting irrelevant."

When they are in power political parties do not organise agitations on the issues of the people. They do not give the necessary freedom to its members to respond to such issues. As one I.A.S. officer in the fisheries department of Kerala said, "There is no freedom of expression in political parties, which is possible in non-party political organisations." This freedom also includes freedom of scientists to do research and to present facts objectively about the issues of the people. This was pointed out by another fisheries officer and scientist during the interview. "Under the party and the government, the intellectuals have a lot of constraints, while the non-party political organisations give them freedom to make research objectively and creatively."

Since the parties do not function according to the needs of the people the non-party political organisations can influence them to be pro-people and pro-poor. They can function as a critique of the system and a pressure group for the government. In this context what some sincere leaders of political parties said in the interview is significant. "All efforts to help weaker sections should be taken at the level of
non-party political organisations. The party distinctions will only weaken the process with each one seeking one's own political goals... Cooperative societies and panchayat raj could be managed by non-party political organisations, " said one CPI state leader and a former member of Kerala Legislative Assembly. A state functionary of the Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh was even stronger in his criticism of the political parties. "Parties cannot work for social change while non-party political organisations can. Much of the social changes take place not by the government policies but by collective action of the people. The government can only complement the efforts of the people."

There were differing suggestions from the respondents about the issues which could be taken up by non-party political organisations. Some of the issues could be social justice, environment, human rights, women's problems, and even wider issues like General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). With the help of scientists they can formulate an integral and sustainable development model which would ensure justice, equality and dignity for all.

2. Analysis of the Data Based on the Opinions of Social Scientists

The analysis of the above data in the light of the opinions of social scientists forms the second part of this section. This is done by answering the following questions. What is the relevance of non-party political organisations when
there are political parties in a democratic set up? If there is, what is the specific role of non-party political organisations for social transformation? What should be the relation between the non-party political organisations and the political parties?

From the experience of fishworkers’ movement and its data given above, it becomes evident that there is a definite role for non-party political organisations for social transformation in India. Their relevance comes from the fact that political parties are not fulfilling the aspirations of the people especially of the subaltern classes. They fail to respond to their problems and needs.

According to Kothari (1990) the party system is losing credibility, and it does not work for the needs of the masses but only for electoral gains. They have also deviated from their objectives and got corrupted. “The problem is not in connection with political parties but in the fact that parties in the country have lost their clear objectives in political life and got polluted.” (Fernandez 1984:50) The author cites the example of the Bhopal gas tragedy in which the organisations other than political parties did much of the work for the affected people. “Representative democracy is distrusted because it weighs power in favour of the representatives who enjoy extensive autonomy away from those they represent.” (Scot 1990:27)
Even the left and socialist parties are not exception to this deteriorating phenomenon. "Both problems have been pointed out by Alan Ware who shows that the pressure of institutional politics pull parties which are committed to grass-root democracy away from these principles, in part because of the requirements of efficiency and effectiveness." (Scot 1990:34) This is the structural limitation of political parties in a democratic set up, which was also mentioned by Antonio Gramsci.

Since the political parties are ineffective, the non-party political organisations have a role of filling the space created by parties, by being a corrective and complementary force to the parties. According to Scot (1990: 135) non-party political organisations in the form of social movement are to "articulate the grievances and demands of groups who are excluded from the benefits typically available to the average citizens." In Gramscian terms they are subaltern groups whom the non-party political organisations have to empower by their own collective action. Thus they have to provide agenda for the parties based on such issues. The non-party political organisations are "not non-political but political in a different way than are parties- not for capturing power but to take up all problems of the marginalised.... Their key contribution lies in making and giving to politics a new orientation to reconceptualise the political process." (Kothari 1991: 402, 430)
While the political parties have power in the government the non-party political organisations have 'people's power' as their base. The function of non-party organisations is to mobilise and build people's power through the 'politics of the people' as against the politics of the parties and the government. The politics of people is related to grass-root social formations. "The grass-root and social formations define the theoretical field within which subaltern consciousness is located." (Guha edit. Chaudhary 1987: 238) In the light of Gramsci's theory non-party political organisations should have their root in civil society and should work towards increasing people's hegemony as against the state hegemony.

When the role of non-party political organisations is emphasised, naturally the question arises as to whether the political parties have become irrelevant. The answer is that political parties have a role in a democracy. They make laws, policies and programmes for people and the state. The non-party political organisations often working at grass-root level cannot and should not become a substitute for parties but be complementary to the functions of the parties. They are not to become political parties or join with a party but are to influence the party and the government. They are not oriented directly to the 'capture' of state power but 'to change the nature' of power by making it people-oriented.
It is significant to note that even some prominent political leaders have advocated the idea of non-party political organisations in contrast to the political parties. Mr. V.P. Singh, the former prime minister of India said, "Today people have a poor opinion of all political parties...The need is to have a 'janapaksh' (people's party) which will not contest elections but which will exert tremendous moral and mass pressure on all parties so that they do not trample on the people's interest." (The Times of India, 16-7-1994: ) Dr. Sankar Dayal Sharma, the President of India in his independence day address to the nation in 1995 stressed the importance of people's power and organisations. "The power of the people, the ultimate and the greatest power, is with us citizens. That power is to be exercised." (Indian Express 15-8-1995)

Though the non-party political organisations are not to take the place of political parties there is always a tendency and temptation for non-party organisations to form themselves into parties or enter electoral politics. So the question often asked among the non-party political organisations is whether they should enter electoral politics. Since their effectiveness will be lost by entering electoral politics, the non-party political organisations are to keep away from party politics. Social movements and non-party political organisations got fragmented and weakened when they entered electoral politics. A
few instances of non-party political organisations entering electoral politics are given below to substantiate the point.

When the Jharkhand movement was converted into a political party it made electoral alliance with several established political parties with the result that it became fragmented and ineffective. "The Jharkhand party...has passed through many a twist and turn and factionalism and fragmentation...Today the situation has arisen when the problems of the grass-root people have become irrelevant. The present movement is for power." (Das 1992:202) Though the fragmented Jharkhand parties had some gains due to the alliance with the parties the movement as such got weakened. "The impact of development and macro-political system and merger with the Congress considerably weakened the demand for a separate state." (Sing 1982: 27)

The Dalit movement of Dr. Ambedkar had the same fate. When he founded the Independent Labour Party and stood for election to Bombay Legislature in 1937 he won eleven out of thirteen reserved seats from Bombay region. But the election created factionalism in the party from the members who did not get ticket for the election, and the movement got weakened. "While he could count on the grateful support of all untouchables so long as he fought to secure their interests, this support dwindled into factions the moment he sought to
develop a political party. Electoral politics called for large funds; it also called for a compromise of factional interests. (Gore 1993:152)

An example in recent years of a social movement getting weakened after it entered electoral politics is the farmer's movement in Karnataka. The Karnataka Rajya Raitha Sangha (KRRS) contested Karnataka assembly election in 1994. It won only one seat out of 90 contested seats, and scored only a low percentage of votes for all the constituencies, though it was the most vibrant farmer's movement in Karnataka. The election created dissension in the movement, which as a result, got considerably weakened. "Since its inception the stand of KRRS towards electoral politics has cost it dearly... Obviously, the rural population prefers KRRS as a representative platform to air their grievances rather than as a formal political party." (Kripa, Economic and Political Weekly, 1995:140-41)

The experience of these movements show the danger of a non-party political movement becoming weakened and even extinct by converting itself into a political party. Its identity gets lost in the process. According to the theory of Antonio Gramsci, it will shift from civil society to state apparatus facing all the limitations of a political party in a democracy.
If the electoral politics adversely affect the non-party political organisations, what should be its relation with established political parties? The non-party political organisations can have cooperation with political parties. In fact, cooperation is good to make the parties aware of the issues of the people, and to persuade them to include the issues in their agenda for legislation. But non-party political organisations should not accept cooptation by getting political position and privileges like membership in committees and commissions, and offer of funds. "Getting so close to the formal sector of power can undermine the integrity and autonomy of the voluntary sector." (Kothari 1990:409) Some non-party organisations "join political parties to get an all India perspective and support. But in the process they lose their identity and originality in working with the people at grass-root level. Others have attempted critical collaboration with parties. But they find unable to influence a stronger partner." (Fernandez 1985:59) Thus there is the danger of a non-party political organisation losing its identity by cooperating with political parties. About the relationship of a social movement with political parties Zachariah (1994:27) said,"Too close an association with one political party may compromise their ability to criticise it when it comes to power." So only with sufficient safeguard and precaution should they seek their collaboration."The non-party political organisations will
probably be most effective if they retain their identity, engage in dialogue with 'party' political formations and yet remain outside their control." (Guha 1989:15)

Instead of joining a political party non-party political organisations can join together to build up a strong solidarity and strength among themselves, so that they can resist opposition from political parties and can work as a real pressure group. It could be one of the support systems for the non-party political organisations. Such attempts are being made at national and even at international level. The National Alliance of People’s Movements is an example of twenty five non-party organisations coming together under a national level forum. From the interview with one of its organisers the researcher has learned that it has yet to function effectively. It is important that such national level organisations keep their non-party character without succumbing to the temptation of becoming political parties.

Conclusion

The question as to what is the role of non-party political organisations for social transformation is discussed in this thesis on the basis of the study on the fishworkers'
movement. The relevance of the question arises from the fact that the political parties do not fulfil the aspirations of the people, especially the subaltern classes. The non-party organisations have emerged as a corrective force for the parties. But when they reach a limit of influencing the government and getting people's demands met, they think of electoral politics as a way out. It is in such a dilemma that the non-party organisations all over the country face the question of their relevance as a non-party organisation. The role of non-party political organisations is to organise the subaltern classes on their basic problems and to exert pressure on the government to meet their demands through collective action. In this process they rely on people's power based on the politics of people. This means that they function as part of civil society and strengthen it by increasing the hegemony of the people, as against the hegemony of the state. 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. Since parties are essential for a democratic set up, the non-party political organisations can cooperate with parties to make them pro-people by influencing their decisions. But they should be on their guard not to be coopted by the parties in the process of cooperation.
To fulfil their role effectively the non-party political organisations need to be strengthened especially since they do not have the support systems of the parties and the government. They have to do this by mutual support and solidarity of various similar organisations and formations. Net-working of such organisations at macro level can strengthen their base to work as a real pressure group for the cause of the subaltern people. This will help the subaltern class to share the socio-economic and political benefits. This can lead to the increasing of hegemony of the civil society and controlling of the hegemony of the state. Thus the non-party political organisations have a great role for social transformation in India.