CHAPTER VII
CONCLUSION

The social mobility trends observed in Puducherry can be divided into three phases:
The first phase of colonial administration brought the emergence of intermediary servicing caste groups like the Mudhalis, Pillais, Chettis, Komtis and others to the ranks of merchant class. The mobility during this period is basically economic mobility coupled with sanskitization process.

The second phase of mobility trend is observed between 1815-1954, when the French returned to Puducherry with socio-political reforms such as adoption of French citizenship and establishment of educational institutions that resulted in social mobility of various caste groups including the Dalits. A new class of upwardly educationally and occupationally mobile French citizens emerged who claimed a better social status with the process of westernization.

The third phase is observed during the present post-colonial period, which has introduced universal compulsory education, industrialism and market oriented capitalism. Although mobility trends in terms of education, political participation and income has increased across various social categories, the two important traditional occupational caste groups of farming and fishing have lost relevance in the occupational structure itself. With rise of modern and secular occupations created by industrial and technological advancements, education became the new route of upward social mobility for occupational attainment and status achievement. A large and widening skills-premium separates higher-educated workers from less-educated and less-skilled ones. The shift form manual to non-manual, unskilled/semi skilled to specialised occupations has been marked as the upward trend of social mobility. Although the traditional occupations of fishing and farming have experienced mechanization since 1960s in both the occupations simultaneously, it has failed to sustain its existing labour force which results in diversification. Especially this trend is more pronounced in the farming occupations. The small and medium farmers find it unviable and uneconomical to retain the small portions of agricultural land and the
landless labourers have moved therefore moved to skilled occupations in industrial sector or through education into the salariate class.

In conclusion, it would seem that social mobility in Puducherry is neither particularly fluid, as evidenced by the large class inequalities, nor showing great signs of becoming more so. There have been highly important changes in the shape of the Puducherry class structure, with a contraction of agriculture, increasing urbanization, growth in tertiary sector occupation and both the fishing and farming groups alike have been affected by these changes and the new opportunities for social advancement. There has been a systematic weakening of the links between father’s and son’s class positions, or between caste and class. The signs that sons of agricultural labourers and fishermen have a negative perception about their traditional occupations, and some of them have improved their chances of gaining access to the salariat occupations show the absolute but negative social mobility. Overall, both with father/son class mobility and caste/class mobility, the dominant picture is has become change rather than continuity of the traditional occupation. However, we should also recognise that there might be methodological explanations for our findings. In particular, the broad classification of the agricultural sector may hide underlying changes that we have not observed. While strict comparability between the two communities of fishing and farming is the only practical way of carrying out studies over time, the limitations of such an approach must be borne in mind. The diversification or occupational mobility is much rapid in farming community than the fishing community which has begun its journey. Positive social mobility is assessed in terms of income, education, asset ownership and political participation but the real occupational mobility occurs only when the society is open enough to provide the members to choose occupations which is not observed here as the traditional occupations have declined.