CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSIONS
The Sugalis are perhaps a strange and mysterious people who are seeking recognition of their own way of life. It is not easy to make an exact count of the Gypsies who wander about seasonally and it has been suggested that the official figures given are generally on the low side. If a reliable census were to be conducted of these nomads, it would be an expensive business and would cut across national frontiers. Again, nomads distrust of non-tribals is so deep, that they would not be likely to co-operate with any census. Those nomads who have been settled for sometime and have been assimilated into sedentary life would be possible to identify and count. They are found throughout India and they are even isolated bands in many states. Their love of nature and liberty is unraveled in history. These gay, colourful, unique and somewhat mysterious people wander about the world in small groups never demonstrating a definite pattern of movement. Romanticised for their performing skills, music, dancing and folklore, they are a people with an identity but no political rights or freedoms, written history, art or science and no powerful international organization, agency or movement to plead for them. They are an almost rejected people today, certainly in India. They are ill-treated and are objects of prejudice and suspicion. They are given hardly any opportunities for work or education. Often they are even denied a place to live.

Gail Omvedt, a sociologist says, "if tribals were to start writing their own Discovery of India, it would be some thing
like this: There are those who talk of India's "5000 year-old culture," there are those who talk of its "timeless traditions". If India has a timeless tradition, it is of tribals. The cultures running back for tens of thousands of years are the cultures of the many tribal communities in the subcontinent.

The Sugali community is a colourful tribe with rich potentialities of their traditions and customs and still retain their cultural identity. They are syncretising their north Indian origin and its world view with the south Indian culture, and still retaining their age-old social institutions despite living in the midst of other cultural groups. They bear even today the marks of our democratic forms of government-panchayat, collective traditions, clan solidarity and so on. But in accepting Brahmanism they accepted a tyranny of the mind, a poison of superiority and inferiority, purity and pollution. Their religion and culture are inextricably linked to each other and most discussions on their culture tend to dwell mostly on customs, traditions, dress, dance, music and exotic rituals. Their values are what make their lifestyle the only truly sustainable one in the world. The whole of Sugali society is built on a rock solid foundation of equality. People are given respect and status according to their contribution to society but only where they are performing that particular function.

They characteristically adorn themselves with many silver, white metal or brass ornaments ranging from hair clips and combs to necklaces, shirt rings, armlets, bangles, waist belts
and anklets. Their finely embroidered caps, mirror work embroideries and distinctive free styles consisting of innumerable tiny braids and ornamental hair clips have offered ideas for the designs of the “ethnic chic” style of urban fashions.

Close knit communities like the Sugalis interweave their forms of cultural expression, weaving, colourful dressing, songs, festivals, birth, death, cattle and forests are components of a cycle which metamorphose together to give their philosophy and understanding of the cosmos a holistic dimension. Their artifacts, jewellery, totems, garments and votive articles have the unmistakable imprint of community identification.

Durkheim frequent use of the ‘organic analogy’ elaborated by Comte and Spencer, exemplify the systematic qualities of social life. The function of each organ within the body is the contribution it makes to sustaining the life of the organism and in Sugali social life, the function of each institution is the contribution it makes to the survival of the society.

Collective consciousness is the characteristic feature of Sugali social life. Collective consciousness otherwise known as conscience collective is the shared feelings and impulses which are experienced in their simplest form within an excited crowd. Transformation of Sugali society from simple to compound social system did not come about through the actions of individuals, but rather through collective processes. Inhabitation
of the whole community in a separate territory called 'Thanda,' itself denotes the collective consciousness of the Sugalis. As the territorial segments of their compound society expand, so they come into competition for resources and resolve this competition by means of complementary economic specializations.

Every custom is interconnected with all others in the community, so that each conditions the state of others. Malinowski says, "the function of customs is to satisfy the individual’s primary biological needs through the medium of culture." The Sugali community which possess a rich and colourful culture, satisfies the individual’s biological needs. Each custom’s function is the part it plays in maintaining the integrity of the social system. Their customs made contributions to the continued life of their society.

Sigmund Freud linked totemism firmly with exogamy or rather with incest taboos and his concern with totemism is incidental to his concern with incest.

Totemism as a system of exogamous clans, is interesting in so far as it is an extreme example of the renunciation of women for sexual purposes. Speaking of the arrangement of phratries (moieties), sub-phratries and totem clans, he says, "The result of these arrangements cannot be doubted; they bring about a still further restriction on the choice of marriage and sexual liberty."
The prohibitions as incest, rules of exogamy, unilineal descent, totemic classification, the ritual attitude to the totemic plants, the food taboos ceremonially broken and all the paraphernalia of Sugali totemism were seen as necessarily connected. Some totems are hereditary and not changed by marriage, and is easy to follow the consequences of the prohibition. The totem regulations will therefore make it impossible for a son after his marriage to have incestuous intercourse with his mother or sisters.

The essential function of religion is in the regulation, maintenance and transmission of sentiments on which the constitution of a society depends express an important general principle.

The customs of the Sugali society are also community customs, as they bind the community as a whole. Their customary laws are a part of their social customs and are not made by any law-making authority but are handed over by one generation to the succeeding generation through the social mechanism of cultural transmission. Their customary law is composed of a large body of rules observed by communities, evidenced by long usages and found on pre-existing rules sanctioned by the will of the community. These rules of conduct may have been based on utility or may have arisen from social or communal necessity. They do not have any written law but they are orally conversant with these. It seems that the basis which determine the nature of Sugali law, principles, which
guide in imparting justice and related basis of punishment, all are directed towards one aim of preservation of the age-old customs, practices, traditions and usages. Accordingly, to them to follow a custom is to follow a law and to deviate from it is to effect a breach of law. Any deviance of the customary law results in the punishment imposed by Gor panchayat. The customary laws of the Sugalis can be defined as the precedences and conventions laid down by their past ancestors with the sole objective of maintaining internal unity and peaceful living and preserving their social as well as religious ceremonies, rites and practices based on their concept of ethics and interpretation of the supernatural belief. They are conscious that these traditions have passed down from generation to generation without any alterations or amendments. Breach of these traditions is neither contemplated nor tolerated by one as it is regarded as a crime against the society itself. The sole aim of the Gor Panchayat is to preserve their customary laws intact. Despite the changes in their way of living, they are not devoid of their customary laws. Hence it is this adherence, that preserved their culture irrespective of time and space. The Sugali customary laws have been instrumental in maintaining their social and cultural identity. Since the Sugali heritage of laws and customs was transmitted orally its origin is naturally somewhat blurred. Yet many of them can be identified with ancient Indian practices.

It is to be noted that Sugalis interact with the Hindu peasantry in many ways and yet retain their exclusiveness, a central feature of the Indian caste system. This point would
suggest that they have to participate in a three-tier legal system, namely their own, the norms laid down by the dominant group and the norms of the state.

One of the tasks of the Gor Panchayat indeed has been to give expression to a public opinion reflecting both the moral and legal values. The existence of the Gor Panchayat manifest the innate and intense desire of the people to maintain effective social control and jural order as also to resolve all kinds of conflicts in the society by peaceful means. The Sugalis now become aware of the problems arising out of modernization. Rules of exogamy and endogamy are therefore even more rigidly interpreted and jurally implemented. It is thus observed that in this relatively homogeneous tribal society, the people continue to handle effectively the disputes arising out of claims of land and other compulsions in a difficult physical environment by adhering firmly to pre-existing principles and rules of agnation, descent, locality and tribal law.

The institution of jangad and the admission of outsiders through marriage, purchase and adoption reveals the fact that the Sugali society is in open society, in which, the rules are flexible to the admission of outsiders.

They are very conscious of their separate cultural identity as well as of the need to preserve and protect it from being engulfed by the regional dominant castes, though because of the changing circumstances, they are forced to borrow a few items, while some times have been borrowed voluntarily. The custom
of dowry-giving is borrowed from the non-Sugalis, and it has its evil effect on the parents of the girl child, who are unable to get their daughter married.

The government has to take all necessary steps to stop the selling of girl child and as a minimum measure, has to improve the educational facilities in the thandas and to facilitate the integration of Sugali children into government schools. The developmental programmes launched by the government have to reach the doorsteps of the thandas and to ensure that nomadic Sugali have the same rights as the rest of the population enjoy with regard to social security provisions and medical care.