CHAPTER - VIII

CONCLUSION

The Fringe Village and the Changing Position of Woman

The present study was conducted in an Indian fringe village Siddapur (a pseudonym) situated at a distance of 6 kilometers from Gulbarga, a fast developing city. The position of woman is examined in the wake of continuous urban contacts and the impinging forces of modernisation during the past three and a half decades. The processes such as urbanisation, industrialization and modernization have brought forth numerous changes and adjustments in the traditional life ways of the people.

The problem under investigation is examined and analysed with reference to the various sub-structures - social, economic, religious, juridical and educational - of the rural society. It is a micro-level study intended to understand the position of woman in a fringe village as resulting from the modernising forces occurring in Siddapur since independence.

The fringe village, Siddapur, forms the universe of the present study. This village consists of 203 families with a population of 1,179, belonging to 14 castes. People of the village have to commute to the nearby city every day.
in order to earn something. The drought relief works and the establishment of a post-graduate centre and its subsequent upgrading into a University opened many new avenues of work. The developmental activities in the city and the increasing transportation facilities have brought the villagers close to the city life and its values.

An examination of the position of woman in Siddapur has brought out some important conclusions which are of significance for anthropologists and sociologists interested in women's studies. The generally held view is that fringe villages are more change-prone and imbibe urban values and reflect these in their day-to-day life. The study reveals that though the people of the village are very close to the city, they have not absorbed urban values and the process of absorbing new values has been very gradual. The study provides some insights into the dynamics of the rural living. These insights bring home the fact, that the traditional values persist, keeping the change at a minimum level, despite the impinging forces of modernization on rural living. The position of woman has been examined in terms of her roles in different sub-structures of rural society.

The kinship sub-structure of the rural social system is understood in terms of family, marriage and kinship.
Family as a basic unit of the social order is organised around the statuses and roles. It is kinship structure that provides specific kinds of opportunities to the members to interact with each other.

Extended families were more in number in the earlier period; however, increase in the nuclear families is the present trend. In the extended families, woman as a young wife, has very little or no authority or power until she becomes old and herself becomes mother-in-law. Even then woman has less power and authority compared to men in the family. As woman becomes old, the restrictions on her behaviour are relaxed.

The change is understood in terms of accepting new occupations and services other than agriculture. The job opportunities have increased due to the establishment of a post-graduate centre near the village; besides, the drought situation since the seventies compelled men and women to take up new occupations other than their traditional tasks. This made them feel more free, weakening their sense of responsibilities and obligations towards their kinsmen. Individualistic feelings strengthened, resulting in the breaking up of extended families and increase in nuclear families. The family composition of the village at present
reveals that 61% of the families are nuclear and 39% are extended. The state of affairs is one of transition from extended to a nuclear family organization. However, people in the nuclear families have not completely abandoned the values of the extended family. Women in the nuclear families enjoy more authority and power and decision-making, as compared to those in the extended families. The consultation of husband with his wife in a majority of the activities concerning family is a common feature in the nuclear families today.

To understand woman's role in kinship and marriage, she is viewed as a daughter, wife, mother, mother-in-law and grand-mother. To know her position the performance of various life-cycle rituals connected with birth, puberty/initiation, marriage and death are studied. The study reveals that the performance of these on various occasions is marked by differential treatment for men and women. Also it is noticed that the rituals performed on various occasions have been condensed to suit their present economic conditions. A few cases described in the study show that earning women participate more in the decision-making process in household affairs. Though people are becoming relatively more individualistic, the practice of dowry in recent times sets limits to the choosing of the mates in marriage in as much as people in
the village are now interested in arranging kin marriages. At present 45% of the marriages are of kin type.

The changing position of woman is understood in terms of economic activities and economic organization. The economic sub-structure is examined in terms of economic roles of women, decision-making in economic activities of the family, new economic opportunities and awareness of women about social legislation intended to safeguard their property rights.

The study of the position of woman in economic sub-structure reveals that new occupations have been taken up to supplement family income. Wage-labour, class IV service, masonry, stone breaking, petty business are some of the new occupations taken up by women. Still agriculture is considered as prestigious. The earning women enjoy more freedom in the sense that they can visit the city for various domestic needs. Earning woman's contribution to the family income has elevated her position. She is given more importance in the decision-making process in the affairs of the family. The study reveals that women belonging to lower and middle income group enjoy freedom of movement, decision-making and spending their earnings when compared to women of higher income groups. Women belonging to higher income group form only 19%.
Most of the women, however, are ignorant of the legal provisions related to property holding and succession. No case has been discovered wherein women have resorted to legal measures to secure their share in the ancestral property. Her ability to supplement the family income has brought out some change in her position in the sense, that her views are sought on family matters. But this, however, should not be taken to mean that women get equal status with men. Another very interesting situation is also noticed. Women who have undertaken various other occupations to supplement the family income are overworked when compared to their menfolk. The burden of work on women is continuously increasing. Seventy-eight percent of women are workers and others i.e., 22% are non-workers; but even these non-workers also work for their family as unpaid family workers.

Legally and theoretically, women are recognised as social equals to men, but even after 38 years of Independence rural women are not free from male dominance. They are still under the grip of traditional role performance in domestic chores, child rearing and bearing. The study reveals that women are not aware of legal provisions.

The religious sub-structure is understood in terms of
rites of passage, fairs and festivals that are spread over a calendar year. The practice of religion here is the observance of rituals. While the rituals are observed in family environment, fairs and festivals involve inter-caste relations. Women are more religious and orthodox; they believe that proper observance of rites and rituals would ensure prosperity and the well-being of the family. Though woman has some role to play at family level observances, she has no role in the village level celebrations. Again, the observance of rituals has an economic base. The simplification of their performance is due to poverty and lack of leisure and not for its rejection in preference to new values. The urban contacts have helped the people to improve their economic conditions. The economically well-off families are more inclined towards the observance of rituals elaborately, than do the poor. However, the position of woman in the performance of rituals has remained more or less the same. Only in some cases she may influence the decisions of males regarding the ritual performances. And then the distinction between male and female is more pronounced in the observance of various rituals on different occasions. The several taboos on women's participation in these is an evidence of such a discrimination which still persists.

Women have very little role in the religious order.
At family level rituals women cook, make arrangements and assist the men, but they themselves cannot undertake the performance of rituals independently; however, their presence is essential as religious partners. Their role is only secondary. At the village or community-level celebrations, women do not have even the secondary roles. Everything is done by men including cooking. Due to their orthodox nature, they are not demanding participation in religious rituals; though they have started participating in other fields of activities like economic, political and educational.

The political and juridical position of women has been analysed in terms of their awareness about the political situation in the country, their participation in elections, their decision-making on political issues and the impact of the political forces emanating from the nearby city. Women of Siddapur are ignorant about the constitutional provisions relating to women’s welfare, despite their being very near to the city. They do not consider voting as their political duty. The percentages of women who exercised their franchise in the 1983 assembly, and the 1984 parliamentary election are, 10% and 40% respectively. This is a testimony to their indifference and non-involvement in political affairs.

The juridical position of women in Siddapur is understood
in terms of their awareness of various social legislation concerning marriage, succession, divorce, dowry, etc. The study reveals that women of Siddapur have not made use of various legislations intended to improve their position in society. As Chafe (1972:47) states for American women that "as long as women were expected to follow the lead of their fathers or husbands in the activities outside the home, it was hardly likely that they could act as a separate and autonomous segment of the electorate," it is also true in case of Siddapur women.

The educational sub-structure is studied in its two broad categories, namely, informal and formal education. Though educational facility was available in the village since 1952, a majority of the villagers has not made use of it. And then the role of woman is still essentially defined as wife and mother. These roles do not require any formal schooling. On the contrary, villagers feel that education comes in the way of girl's marriage, as it delays marriage and demands the payment of dowry. The constant access to urban area has not changed their attitudes towards the education of women. This is evident from the fact that only 10% of the women are literate in the village. In Siddapur, at present, only 19 men have some higher education and 6 are graduates. As for women, only one girl has joined
the college in 1984. This is because, what is still important in the rural milieu is informal education imparted in the homes and in informal social settings.

People of Siddapur have a mixed feeling, a sort of ambivalence, towards formal education; while they realise that formal education generates greater job opportunities and thereby better earnings and standard of living, their present experience is that only a few of the educated have been employed; and then the formal education is expensive, which they cannot afford. On the other hand, the relatively uneducated have been employed. The right to equality in education has been thus rendered a formal right; in reality social and traditional norms deep rooted in the social structure deny all opportunities of equality to women. This explains why women have not been able to take full advantage of educational opportunities.

It is, therefore, not necessary that a fringe village be more change-prone than the interior one. A fringe village may be equally tradition-bound with a semblance of some superficial changes. In regard to the change in the position of women in Siddapur, it may be said, following Firth's distinction between structural and organizational change, that some changes at the level of organization have taken
place*, and not at the level of structure.

On the whole it may be said that the women of Siddapur are exposed to urban values and they are exercising a greater role in decision-making due to compulsive forces. By and large, the women of Siddapur are ignorant of the legal and constitutional provisions and hence, they have to go a long way in elevating their position and exercise equality with men. They are still under the dominance of men.