CHAPTER I

THE SCOPE AND METHOD OF STUDY

A society, like an individual, reveals the secrets of its inner life only to those who bring to its study not merely scientific curiosity and a mastery of technique, but respect and affection.

— R.H. Tawney

The Problem:

The aim of this study is to describe the changes that have taken place in the economic organization of the Lamani community (who are also called Banjara) over the last hundred years, and to analyse the effects of these economic changes upon the traditional institutions, customs, beliefs and value systems of the community (Bailey 1958; Epstein 1962; Gough 1952; Lange 1953; Sharp 1952). Since a complex relationship exists between the economic and the non-economic aspects of a society, I have discussed this relationship within the framework of economic motives and dispositions on the one hand, and the socio-cultural contexts and meanings of the Lamani ways of life, on the other. Such a study, I believe, would not only be in keeping
with the traditions of economic anthropological studies (Malinowski, 1922, 1944; Forde, 1934; Radcliffe-Brown 1964; Firth 1929, 1939, 1946; Tax 1953) but may also be of some use in planned economic development and change among other similar Indian communities.

About a century ago the Lamani were nomadic transporters and petty traders but today they lead mostly a sedentary life because of the changes that have taken place in their traditional economy since their nomadic days. As a result, other aspects of their life have also undergone a change. Thus, the present study also deals with the problems which an erstwhile nomadic group, like the Lamani, has to face when it takes to a settled life.

In addition, the study concerns itself with the problem of maintenance of a separate cultural identity by the Lamani despite their continuous contact with other settled communities of the region. When the Lamani migrated from the Marwar region of North-central India, they brought some Marwari cultural traits with them to their present area of habitation in Karnataka (ex-Mysore State). This process of cultural adjustment is also examined. Their settling down brought the Lamani into closer and continuous contact with their non-Lamani
neighbours. Thus, they had to face the problems of maintaining a separate cultural identity unprecedented in their long wandering career when they did not have closer contact. Different migrating groups of the Lamani (or Banjara) were exposed to different regional cultures. They borrowed many a cultural trait from others but they still retained their cultural identity in the midst of other cultural groups in whose areas they settled. But, today they are experiencing rapid changes and their traditional culture and institutions are undergoing far-reaching transformation. With reference to the Lamani of North Karnataka, one of my aims has been to study the cultural mechanisms that have caused, and helped the Lamani to maintain their cultural identity, and to discover whether they still retain anything of it today. In order to accomplish this task one has to examine the non-Lamani neighbours of this community, focussing one's attention on those elements of their culture that can bring maximum pressure on the traditional Lamani way of life. In brief, the acculturative as well as contra-acculturative processes in the emerging life of the Lamani have to be examined.

It would not, perhaps, be out of order here to point out the utility of the present study in the sponsored programmes of socio-economic development. It is a truism
that changes in any one social or cultural realm affect other areas and this should be kept in mind by those who are in charge of sponsored, planned socio-economic change in the country. Certain organizational principles and/or aspects of the value system of a society may either facilitate or hinder such programmes; and hence a knowledge of different communities involved in such a process of planned change is imperative. It would not be incorrect to say that any effort at planned change would be fruitless unless different social groups are studied in keeping these factors and problems in mind.

In addition to the over-all development programmes for the whole Indian society, the Central and State Governments have also formulated some special measures to bring certain meaningful changes toward a better life for the backward sections of society. Today, the backward communities are subject to greater interference in their affairs as they are subjected not only to the usual processive but also the induced changes — all these operating simultaneously. The Lamani are recognized by the State Government as one of the backward (denotified) communities in the area of study, and are exposed to various welfare programmes e.g. special educational incentives, provision for sanitary and public health facilities, and grant of lands for cultivation and
house-sites etc. So, I have tried to assess the success of the implementation of these constitutional and statutory provisions as well as the impact of the welfare programmes on the Lamani. In understanding the psycho-social and cultural problems of an 'underdog' community, I have benefitted much from the 'culture of poverty' concept of Oscar Lewis which he has elaborated in his various writings (1959, 1964, 1966, 1968) and from Holmberg's account of the Siriono of Eastern Bolivia (1950).

Almost all the communities that the anthropologists study, are now experiencing some degree of economic, social, cultural or technological change as parts of newly independent nation states bent on modernization and economic development (Dalton 1971a: 72). Our interest in such change is, of course, recent and the problems of its study are complex. The older focus of interest in understanding the organization and functioning of an indigenous economy in relation to its social milieu (whether from a synchronic or diachronic point of view) had to grapple with the culture-contact situation under colonialism. The new focus of interest is modernization in new nation states, and their governments' explicit intention to create and develop viable national societies and economies. This
new focus is somewhat different from the older culturecontact studies. Now one has to view villages or communities which are experiencing new opportunities for income growth, new modes of production and new cultural achievement provided by impersonal agencies and facilities, as the units of observation and study linked to the region and nation through new sets of economic and cultural relationships, practices and facilities. In brief, one can say that, now the development comes from above.

And my study of the Lamani falls within this new area of inquiry. It is my hope that the study would be a small step in that direction.

There is an additional justification for the present community-study. Because of rapid and pervasive changes experienced by the traditional, tribal communities like the Lamani these days, they are likely to lose much of their traditional life-ways. So the retrieval of the fast-disappearing data on such vanishing cultures and peoples deserves our urgent attention.

The Location of the Study:

The setting for this study is the north-western part of Karnataka which covers four revenue administrative
districts of Belgaum, Dharwar, North Kanara and Bijapur. These four districts formed the Kannada-speaking zone of the former multi-lingual Bombay Presidency until the reorganization of states in 1956. On 1st November 1956, a unified and enlarged (Kannada speaking) Mysore State came into being consisting of 19 districts. It comprised these four districts of Bombay Presidency and other Kannada-speaking areas from four other political units, viz., Hyderabad (3 districts), Madras (2 districts), princely Mysore (9 districts) and Coorg (1 district). With effect from 1st November 1973 the state has been renamed as Karnataka.

Two Lamani settlements in Kalghatgi taluka of Dharwar district have been the main focus of study of the Lamani life. They have been given the pseudonyms of Savana and Havana (see the location map). Most of the data for this report has been obtained from these two tāndās (settlements). (The literal meaning of the word tāndā is 'a horde' or 'a large caravan of laden bullocks'). These settlements are notable for their contrast and this was one of the reasons for selecting them for detailed study. Savana is a relatively isolated community in the interior of the region. Havana, on the other hand, is a Lamani settlement directly under the urban influence of
a closeby town, Kalghatgi. Since the purpose of the study is concerned with the traditional culture of a recently settled nomadic group, Savana was the main focus of attention. But the data from Havana have also been used to present a rounded picture of Lamani life. I set up field camps in these two settlements for six and two months in 1967 and 1971 respectively. But visits were made also to other Lamani settlements of the region for brief duration, for without these visits the study would have been somewhat incomplete. Long stay in the two settlements and trips to several others in the four districts have reinforced my belief that the Lamani of North Karnataka display an uniform cultural pattern throughout the region. The details given in the subsequent chapters will establish this point.

Though some minor variations may exist between one Lamani settlement and another, I feel that the detailed study of the two settlements in Kalghatgi taluka should constitute an adequate basis for a discussion of Lamani life in the entire North Karnataka region. If the people belonging to a community are spread over a wide geographic area, the anthropologist feels constrained by time factor to delimit the area of his detailed investigation, and forgoes the desire to cover every settlement in favour of his primary interest in an intensive study rather than an extensive coverage of a large geographic region.
The present study also covers the main features and the underlying integral ideas and beliefs of the Lamani. These two settlements are "typical" and therefore the data from them should also speak for the other settlements which have not been covered in the same detailed manner as these "typical" settlements have been covered (Firth 1959: 138-40).

Field Work and Methodology

Besides the participant- and non-participant observation, I used detailed structured schedules, genealogies, case studies, study of documents and other relevant textual material on Lamani history and their economic and social life, for the collection of data.

Today, land is the main form of individual property among the Lamani and so the detailed investigation of the possession of lands by some of the Lamani becomes a necessity. But methodologically the investigator faces initially certain problems in investigations on land and such problems could only be solved by cross-checking and continuous verification. The illiterate Lamani do not know the exact amount of land either owned or cultivated on lease. Even the heads of the families who know for certain would not like to divulge the information fearing
the imposition of additional taxes on lands. The only other source of information on land holdings and land tenures for cross-checking interview-information are the records of the village accountant and of the Land Revenue Department. But these records do not always contain the actual landholding patterns and relationships, because of the prevalence of some unofficial arrangements as between coparceners on the one hand, and between the land owner and the tenant on the other. Secondly, there is a time lag between the local contracts and their entry in the official records because of delays in reporting of such deeds to the concerned offices, on the part of the people as well as lower officials. Necessarily, therefore, the data from such official sources need cross-checking and improvement by painstaking personal enquiries later in the fieldwork as the investigator is accepted by the people as a harmless person. I have scanned through the official records relating to a period of 70 years in order to study the process of land acquisition and the various tenurial practices among the Savana Lamani.

For the analysis and presentation of data, I had to use several concepts. For example, the concept of social structure in viewing the Lamani society as an integrated whole of inter-related, person-to-person, group
to group, repetitive, social relationships as well as
the relationship that exists between the various social
institutions of the Lamani. The concept of function was
used mainly to study the meaning and the role a custom,
belief, pattern of relationship, or an institution plays
in sustaining or maintaining the cultural identity of
the Lamani community. But, as the Lamani form also a
part of the wider social-cultural-economic set-up, I have
also used the concepts of peasant (Wolf 1966), rural-urban
continuum, part-whole dilemma (which subsumes great and
little traditions) and media and channels of cultural
transmission (Redfield, 1941, 1956; Singer, 1955,
Marriott, 1955). These concepts were helpful to me in
understanding and analysing the forces of cultural continuity
and the traditional institutions and values of this part-
society. However, the main thrust of this study is the
analysis of the economic forces that have caused the Lamani
to change their institutions, values, and traditional
life-style; and for the analysis of these economic factors
or processes I have borrowed ideas from Weber (1947),
Herskovits (1952), Polanyi (1957), Dalton (1961, 1967,
1971a, 1971b), Nash (1966), Belshaw (1965), LeClair (1962,
1968), and Firth (with Yamey 1964, 1967). The influence
of their views and ideas can be discerned from the following
chapters.
Even though it may be possible to make a distinction between the concepts of 'society' and 'culture', for the purposes of this study, however, these two terms have been used interchangeably. Therefore, the term 'social' in the title of the thesis should be taken to mean 'socio-cultural' rather than merely 'social' in a limited sense.

To some extent the historical past of the Lamani can be gleaned from the historian Fertishta's work dating back to 1612; from the travelogues (Dubois 1936; Buchanan 1807) and narratives (Craufurd 1742; Risley 1915; Briggs 1877), the Census of India Reports dating from 1872, the District and Imperial Gazetteers dating from 1880's (Campbell 1883, 1884a and b; Palande 1959), Tribes and Castes series (Enthoven 1922; Nanjundayya and Iyer 1928; Thurston 1909) and accounts in anthropological journals (Rao 1950; Malhotra and Bose 1963). These provide some information about Lamani life of yester years but none of them pays full attention to the past society or economy of the Lamani. On account of this paucity of data, I have attempted to reconstruct the past of the Lamani of North Karnataka as of the seventies of the last century. Some information in the District Gazetteers was useful in this regard, but they did not provide sufficient information that
could serve as a dependable single 'bench-mark'. Such information on the 'base-line' lies scattered over a span of thirty years (1870-1900). Thus the bench-mark of the study is merely an approximate past and does not refer to a definite year in the nineteenth century. The Census Reports of the period were also helpful in forming an idea of the Lamani life in the last three decades of the 19th century. The present state of Lamani life has been compared with this reconstructed, recent historical past. But this comparison is not a comparison of two "stills". Hence, the concern for processes of change also can be discerned from the processual accounts of the Lamani life as they unfold at the relevant places in the discussion.

Since the Lamani as a cultural unit form part of a wider cultural (regional and national) whole, and since the Lamani life is dependent upon the other regional communities, these also figure in the discussions even though they are not the central objects of the study.

I started the study in 1965. The first piece of fieldwork was done in the Savana settlement from March to October, 1967. The Havana settlement was studied in the months of May and June, 1971. Contact with both the settlements has been maintained through occasional brief
visits. These visits have been very useful in filling in the gaps and, particularly in viewing change over a period of time. The Lamani usually live in settlements which are located somewhat at a distance from the nucleated multi-caste villages. On account of lack of accommodation in the settlements, I stayed in the multi-caste villages which were closest to these Lamani settlements. Through my own efforts and with the help of some non-Lamani who were friendly to the Lamani, I succeeded in establishing rapport and in gaining their confidence. By nature, the Lamani are suspicious of the outsiders but I am grateful that I was accepted by them.

Most of the information in this investigation was obtained by talking to the Lamani themselves. For cross-checking the data collected, I also talked to a few selected persons from other communities who were knowledgeable about the Lamani and those who had contacts with them. The government officials, social workers, neighbours of the Lamani and people who had some kind of economic dealings with them come under this category.

Amongst themselves the Lamani speak Banjari, their mother dialect, but they know Kannada very well. Kannada is their contact language with the outside world,
in Karnataka. There is no doubt that learning the Banjari dialect would have enabled me to understand the subtler aspects of their thoughts, feelings, and emotions better. But I was not much handicapped in my fieldwork because of the proficiency of the Lamani in Kannada which is my mother-tongue.

In a study of economic change many things need quantitative treatment. But collecting quantitative data is difficult because the semi-literate Lamani do not keep precise accounts of their economic activities. One cannot talk of resources, income, expenditure, wages, prices, savings and investment, etc., except in quantitative terms. Therefore, one is left with no choice but to quantify only where it is possible to do so. Another difficulty is posed because the Lamani, not having precise labels for many things which could be easily understood. In some cases I had to convert Lamani fold measure into standard measures that were in use in the local markets. I have estimated most quantities in terms of their value in rupees, the standard currency of the country.

It is also hard to convert working days, things produced and consumed, services utilized, articles exchanged, etc., into a common medium of exchange. The
difficulty is further aggravated because, quite often, the Lamani themselves do not think in terms of a common medium of exchange or a standard currency in all situations. One has to estimate if one is studying economy but even the best of estimates remain only approximations.

Before I take up the discussion of the Lamani economy, I shall deal with the background and setting of the study in the second chapter.