CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS
Looking at the foregoing process of adaptation of the three refugee communities viz., Tibetans, Panjabis and Bengalis, a pertinent question arises as to what are the important societal factors which promote the process of adaptation and others hinder it. To what extent the inherent structural strength of the society and culture from which the refugees hail, inject in them a capacity for coping with unforeseen calamities? or should we attribute the dominant role to situational specificites for success or failure in the refugees adaptation to the alien society which plays host to them.

To what extent the social structure of the host society and the political processes within it contribute to the process of refugee rehabilitation. It is possible, I believe, to provide at least some tentative answers to the above questions on the basis of the research reported here.

Let us first take up the case of the Tibetan refugees. When the Tibetans came into India, both the national and international political situation were favourable to them. Although the Government of India at that time was adopting a friendly posture
to China, it did not come in the way of the warm receipt of the Dalai Lama and his followers and offer them shelter within the country. Further the Government of India allowed the Dalai Lama to establish his autonomous administrative set up to look after the interests of Tibetan refugees and to receive funds from abroad for their rehabilitation. The fact that the Government of India has allowed the traditional spiritual and temporal links between the Dalai Lama and his followers to continue, perhaps also account for the Tibetans strong belief in Rang-zen. The Tibetans still nurture the hope of returning to Tibet and have refused to accept Indian citizenship, but this has not prevented them from searching for new avenues to earn a living by learning new skills and by taking to new economic activities. The active role of Dalai Lama's administration in the rehabilitation process of the Tibetan refugees went a long way in nurturing their traditional sentiments of solidarity. The establishment of separate settlements for the refugees and their supervision by the Dalai Lama's administration sheltered the Tibetans from the alien culture and climate. For the more enterprising of the Tibetan
refugees who stayed outside the settlements, the Dalai Lama's administration gave a sense of protection. They knew that they could always go to the settlements if things did not go well with them.

Regarding life in the settlement a detailed field study is already available. This study conducted by Palakshappa of Mundgod Tibetans in Karnataka highlights how the Tibetans have retained their traditional customs and language while at the same time making suitable adaptations to new social environment. To be sure, this study points to the developing cleavage between the younger generation and the elders but the generation gap is not eroding the Tibetan identity. These findings should be viewed in the light of recent demonstrations and agitations organised by the Tibetan Youth Congress and its posture towards, the Dalai Lama's softening attitude towards China.

From these recent events it can be inferred that living in India has not only strengthened the self-confidence of Tibetan youth but it has also changed the contents of Tibetan identity.
the Tibetan identity has acquired the characteristics of a national identity and has transcended the cultural and religious sentiments that were dominant in the earlier generation.

The focus in this research has deliberately been on the Tibetans living outside the settlements. This was done in order to study the adaptation process in the raw, as it were. Our study reveals that even among the Tibetans living outside the settlements the bonds of communal solidarity continue to be strong. Our study also highlights that the interaction between the Tibetans and the members of host society has on the whole sharpened the ethnic consciousness of the Tibetans. The manner in which the members of host society have evolved a certain negative stereotype of the Tibetan and the way in which this stereotype moulds their interaction with the Tibetans not only strengthens the stereotype itself but it also reinforces the community sentiments among Tibetans which helps them cope with the derision and ridicule to which they are subjected by members of the host society. That even under these circumstances, the Tibetans have
been able to carve out a niche in the structure of economic opportunities prevalent in Rajpur road speaks volumes for their tenacity and capacity for survival. But, living at the level of barest subsistence, their adaptation to the local society always remains precarious. The pariah status to which these Tibetans have been reduced can be accounted for in terms of their social background in Tibetan society prior to migration. They were mostly agricestic labourers, serfs and palace servants and were illiterate. To improve their skills and provide them employment opportunities, the Tibetan administration has set up a training centre near Rajpur road in carpet weaving. Even those Tibetans who have learnt carpet weaving eke out a bare existence working as casual wage labourers.

From the above depiction, it cannot however be concluded that all the Tibetans in Rajpur road have settled down to a low level of existence. There are some successful cases of entrepreneurship. Thus, for instance, Phatki, who manufacturers Tibetan knives, has acquired a big reputation among the Tibetans as well as Indians who regard him with
respect. Phatki, however, has gone to school in Dehradun and it is said that he has been able to amass a fortune through his involvement in gold smuggling across the Indo-Tibet border. This case highlights the importance of access to education and skills to ensure upward mobility. Phatki has used his wealth to build social networks among politically influential and wealthy residents of Dehra Dun. These networks have helped Phatki consolidate his success by emerging as a patron and a leader of the Tibetans of Rajpur Road.

From the above remarks, it will be evident that the class differentiations are emerging among the Tibetan refugees. Apart from class, generational differences are also becoming marked. The younger generation of Tibetans are wearing westernised clothes and their tastes in music, food, and drink are veering sharply towards westernised and Indian styles. They are also more fluent in Hindi and English. Yet, despite their apparent conformity to the dominant culture/the host society, the younger generation of Tibetans prefer the company of their Tibetan friends and they keep a distance from young
Indians both men and women. The young Tibetans express no desire to marry Indians and show a strong preference for marrying Tibetan girls. This demonstrates that successful adaptation need not mean total cultural assimilation. Adaptation is itself a selective process, and the Tibetans have, given their constraints, selectively responded to the changed social milieu in India.

It is imperative, however, to consider the adaptation of Tibetans as an ongoing process. From my study of Tibetan settlers in Rajpur Road, I could make out that their presence has not only created a negative stereotype of the Tibetan refugee but the local Hindus do treat them in ways reminiscent of the treatment meted out to untouchables. But by and large, have so far adopted a tolerant attitude towards what they regard as their dirty and obnoxious customs and practices. The situation may, in the years to come, gradually deteriorate from one of condescending tolerance to that of open hostility. Already many Hindu residents of Rajpur Road have complained about the preferential treatment given to both the refugees and to Dalai
Lama's administration. Several of them are giving vent to their feelings that the local Indians are being discriminated against vis-a-vis the Tibetans. The local Indians feel that the Tibetan presence in Rajpur road is the cause of the spread of gambling, alcholism, drug addiction and sexual promiscuity among the Indian Youth of the area. They allege that the Tibetan dhabas have become vice dens. In such a situation therefore, future communal clashes cannot be ruled out.

In the case of the Punjabi and Bengali refugees, the protective cover provided by an organization committed to their welfare as was the case among the Tibetans, did not obtain. To be sure, the Government of India did set up a Rehabilitation ministry to look after the interests of the refugees but the government's role was only to channelise money and other resources to the refugees. The role of rehabilitation administration was over once the refugees were given land and other resources.

There was no commitment on the part of the Government to ensure that the refugees utilised the resources properly. Nor did the Government take any interest in ensuring that the refugees' cultural identity
was preserved. Hence the Punjabi and the Bengali refugees had to literally depend on their own skills and accumen to survive in a social milieu which often turned out to be unfriendly and hostile. The Government's aid was only available to set them up with a small piece of land and some shelter.

It is now a well-documented fact that the Punjabi refugees have on the whole successfully adapted themselves in India that they have not only merged into the mainstream of Indian society but they have attained upward mobility and spectacular success. As has already been mentioned earlier, this success is attributed to the Government's rehabilitation policy which gave the Panjabi refugees ample finances to settle down in India. This is a naive interpretation of the success of Punjabi refugees because economic resources alone do not guarantee upward mobility. There have been cases of several communities within India who have acquired windfall gains but have only frittered away their new found wealth in drinking and gambling. Hence, Keller's argument of the sense of invulnerability of the Punjabi refugees seems to provide a convincing,
explanation of the successful adaptation of the Punjabi refugees. An indirect support for Keller is provided by Hazelhurst who finds the Punjabi refugees to be (deviant and prepared to innovate as compared to the non-refugee Punjabis.) While this may indeed be true, (it should be kept in mind that the Punjabi success and upward mobility is older than India's partition.) (The Punjabis have shown inclination towards for geographical mobility and have spread themselves all over the world demonstrating their keenness to look for opportunities and utilise them to their own advantage.) Some scholars point out that the willingness to move on the part of the Punjabis is rooted in the history of the Punjab region. The region has always had a turbulent history because it has attracted waves of new immigrants who have settled down after conquering or driving out the local rulers. Further, it is asserted that (in the Punjab, the legitimacy of the state was continuously being eroded by rival chieftains who were contesting for power. As a result the politics of Punjab favoured adventures who would challenge authority and grab power for themselves.) It is only one short step from this line of analysis.
to point to the ("aggressiveness" of the Punjabis and to conclude that the Punjabi refugees succeeded because they were aggressively entrepreneurial.)

My study of Punjabi settlers in Rudrapur, on the face of it, upholds the above position. I have quoted several cases of aggressive trait of the Punjabis vis-a-vis the Bengali refugees as well as the Buxas. but the point I am however making is that (this aggressive trait of the Punjabis was supported by the local administration.) In other words, the Punjabi refugees were able to get the local officials and courts to sanction and legitimise their land grabbing from the hapless Buxas and the Bengali refugees. The support of the local administration was (forthcoming partly because the Punjabi refugees who had already acquired enough capital by selling the land allotted to them in Punjab could bribe the local officials. But it should also be kept in mind that the Punjabi refugees were no strangers to the bureaucracy. As traders and independent farmers they had already become familiar with the ways of the bureaucracy and the law courts even during the pre-partition period.)
This and the fact that they did not face any language barrier in dealing with local officials in Rudrapur gave them a decided advantage vis-a-vis the Buxas and the Bengali refugees.

The Bengali refugees who were settled in Rudrapur could not measure up to the Punjabi refugees' devices and schemes in depriving them of their land. (The Bengali) Namoshudra refugees it can be recalled also had a martial background but in Rudrapur they presented the picture of a faction ridden community. The stereotype of a Bengali in Rudrapur as a person preferring a Babu way of life and unwilling to toil on land may be a misleading one but it could not be countered either by even a single successful case of Bengali adaptation. To state this is not to accept the Bengali stereotype propagated by the non-Bengalis in Rudrapur. The Bengali refugees, it should be pointed out, continued to remain 'vulnerable' in Rudrapur. Partly this is due to language barrier, their lack of knowledge of the ways of the local bureaucracy and law courts. Partly, this is also due to their low caste position and their inability to present a united front vis-
a-vis the Punjabi land usurpers.) Perhaps, if the Bengali refugees had been supported by an organisation similar to the Dalai Lama's administration in the Tibetan case, the Bengalis would have struck roots in Rudrapur as successful agriculturists. Lacking in financial resources, and in suitable skills and access to the local bureaucracy. The Bengali refugees tended to become nostalgic for "Sonar Bangla" and were inclined to go back to West Bengal at the first opportunity.

It is now pertinent, to focus on the developing social milieu in Rudrapur as a result of the migration of Punjabi and Bengali refugees. The Bengalis continue to be in an uprooted state and are still identified as "refugees". The Punjabis have now become wealthy entrepreneurs in the area diversifying their investments in real estate, road transport and rice mills. They have also become prominent in the local politics of the region and have become a strong power base in the Tarai region of Uttar Pradesh. Their success has been at the expense of the Buxas and the Bengali refugees. The Buxas who were the local inhabitants of the area have effectively lost their lands. It is true
that the Government has brought in legislation to prevent the land alienation of Buxas but that has nor prevented the Buxas from mortgaging land to the Punjabis. After all, it must be remembered that the Buxas were never settled agriculturists. They were living in the jungles of the Tarai region. Now that the jungles have been cleared by agriculturists they have nowhere to go in their own lands. They have developed a deep resentment towards the Punjabis. The area may witness communal tensions between the Buxas and the Punjabis in the near future. Just as in the case of Tibetans on Rajpur road, in Rudrapur also the presence of refugees and their social visibility as a community develops a feeling of hostility towards them among the local inhabitants. This type of hostility was reported by Palakshappa in his Mundgod study as well. Hence, the presence of refugees is likely to generate a 'we' versus 'them' attitude which can crystallise subsequently into ethnic tensions and conflicts.

Another important finding which emerges from my study is the role played by the ubiquitous
and unique system in India - the caste which has affected the process of adaptation of the three communities to a considerable extent. Take for instance, Tibetans who have been treated and looked upon by the local residents in Rajpur as untouchables. This prevents them from forging any friendly or community link with the Tibetans. The notion of purity and pollution have almost segregated the Tibetans from mixing with the Indians. In the case of Bengalis too, it must be pointed out that they belonged to bottom rung in the hierarchical structure of our caste system. This explains their being exploited at the hands of upper caste Khatris and Aroras who have inherited the skill of manipulations by virtue of their belonging to higher status in the hierarchy. The fact that this is historically conditioned i.e. upper castes always having an upper hand in comparison to the low castes speaks itself for the success of Panjabi refugees. The same equation also seems to be working for the Buxas - a scheduled tribe who before the arrival of Panjabis were unfamiliar with the machinations and tricks of the higher castes.
Thus my study shows how it is necessary to go beyond a superficial analysis of traits to understand the process of adaptation of the refugees to the social milieu in the host society.

I have tried to demonstrate that successful adaptation depends on the structure of opportunities available in the host society. To make use of these opportunities and to look for new opportunities the social background of the refugees before their migration needs to be considered as well.

It can be said that those refugees who had learnt to interact with diverse institutions, government agencies and persons are likely to adapt themselves better to an alien social milieu more easily than those whose interaction was confined to a narrow social and cultural universe. In the case of the latter, a protective organization which is committed to their long term welfare and is capable of extending protection till the refugees gradually acquire the skills to cope with their new environment is required. This is the lesson that can be gained from the experience of the Dalai Lama's administration in rehabilitating Tibetan refugees in India.