Major Findings and concluding remarks

In the foregoing chapters we presented relevant (to our study) secondary data available from various sources and from our own survey data and documented the profiles related to the ethnographic as well as socio-economic and cultural status and moorings of Saraks, a little-known community. Saraks made their mark not only in the works of the anthropologists and administrators of yester-years but also earned the pride of place in the works of writers, poets and the ballad singers.

Poet Mukundaram traced the origin of Saraks in Gujarat (Western India) in his Chandimangal. Dalton treated them as the early Aryan settlers in the eastern India whereas Risley held that the dwelling place of the Saraks were in north-western regions of India. West-Bengal District Gazetteers (1985) claimed that Saraks of Purulia were Jain in faith and practice. Recorded history also shows that they lived in Manbazar area of Bihar for several centuries where from they migrated during the Mughal invasion under the commandship of Raja Mansingh. The controversies regarding Saraks' original dwelling place notwithstanding, the fact remain that the Saraks happened to be a distinct community and can not be wished away from the list of the thousands of ethnic communities in the vast country of ours.

Regarding their religious faith there are some controversial views. Saraks themselves also seem to be divided among themselves. They are practising Jaina rites in their day to day living but trying to take advantage of
prevailing reservation policy of Government in their bid to promote their economic interests. To a participant observer, it is apparent that the Sarak community is a community undergoing transition in order to adjust themselves with the present commercialised environment.

The data-reserve which we built up both from secondary sources and also from our own survey give us an impression of consistent and logical struggle for existence of the Saraks as a distinct ethnic and social identity.

The data showed that Saraks were found in various parts of the country and there might have been large scale migration in search of livelihood in the earlier centuries. The commonness of Saraks of various regions in the country can be found in their faith in Jainism even though there might have been some mixture of different religious rites in their day to day life-style. We have detailed those in chapter II entitled land and people.

In course of discussion we have shown that there was substantial development of skills among Saraks as a result of their migration from one part of the country to the other. Their innovations like using iron-ore and copper showed that they could pursue their primary economic activity, namely agriculture, under different stresses and strains. A Sarak in alluvial region of Gujarat might not require iron plough and was able to cultivate their land without tillage. But they needed iron plough in the lateritic tracts of Chotanagpur region. They may not require copper utensil where earthen utensils were in abandon, but certainly needed durable utensils elsewhere. So, the development of skills among Saraks grew out of necessity in different agro-climatic set-up. There is no point in treating Saraks or for that matter any other community-behaviour as static. It is this dynamism which keeps a community alive under stress-conditions.

Why Saraks are little known? Is it because they are surrounded by numerically greater other different communities? Is it because they are tolerant
of others' views and culture? Or is it because they are in the struggle for integrating themselves with the Animist as well as Hindus? All these lead to the question of their identity as a distinct community by themselves.

We have discussed at length this question of identity earlier in previous chapters. It was revealed from the ethnographic characteristics, (viz. clan, surname, rituals, way of life etc.) that their clan names (e.g. Adidev, Rishavadev, Anantadev, Dharmadev, Sandilya or Santidev, etc.) are in accordance with the names of the ancient Jain Tirthankars.

It is intriguing that there are similarities of the surnames of Saraks to those of Tribals (e.g. Majee, Layek, Singh) as well as high and low caste Hindu (e.g. Acharya, Mondal, Khan) communities. One might be confused regarding this similarity. Is this also correlated with their bid of integrating themselves with other neighbouring communities? We presume not. In order to maintain their own boundary and purity, Saraks do not entertain any inter-community marriage. For example, a Majee Sarak would never allow a marriage with a Majhe Tribal. So, for all practical purposes, surnames do not serve any boundary-mark.

We observed that rituals and festivals of Animist and Hindu have became common to the Sarak also. But all these are being observed simply as a social practice rather than as a matter of belief.

It is worth-mentioning that in order to make a distinct identity of their own as well as to relink themselves with the Jain community, inhabiting in different parts of the country, the Saraks of Purulia recently built up a Jain Temple in their locality with the help of Jain community as a whole.

It was also clear that Saraks go by and have the basic and distinct tenets of Jain culture. The nature and the way of life of the Sarak community in respect of occupation, food habit, clothing etc. mark them as distinct from other neighbouring communities.
Due to their faith in Ahimsa (non-violence), the prohibited occupations among the Saraks are butchery, fishing, brewing, wine trading, gun-making, military or police service. They do not also practice poultry farming. Saraks are settled-agriculturist and mainly depend on their family labour. They exchange labour among themselves during peak agricultural period which is an instance of mutual aid. Hardly, one finds wage-labour system among Saraks except as exceptions here and there. Moreover, no one of this community has accepted the profession of maid-servant, porter, daily labour and any such work in spite of their acute poverty. Not only that, they never take alms nor do they steal.

They are pure vegetarians. Even onion, garlic, lentil, carrot, beet-root believed to be stimulant food-items are not taken by them. They avoid taking any food material which would have created further life. For example, fig or mushroom etc. Like any other purist Jains, they drink water only after filtering with the aid a piece of cloth to avoid taking some life-elements. Even now some Sarak families take their super before sun-set to remain on safe-side but they devour any living insects or ants unknowingly. They do not take intoxicant and/or stimulant food or drink.

Even the word cut cannot be uttered by them relating to any food object. Red colour (symbol of blood) is avoided. For example they dont take red-beans.

It is due to their non-violent nature, the Saraks never wear the fur or silk. They also avoid using any leather garments or shoes as those are made of animal-skins. They are also particular about not wearing any dress which might have killed any life.

All these observations lead us to conclude that the nature of Saraks conform to the Jaina traits.
Besides occupational characteristics and food as well as dress habits Saraks can be distinguished from other community by their attitude towards weapons. A Sarak would not keep a lethal weapon even for self-defence. They are mild, docile and honest people and try to avoid confrontation even with their adversaries. This is not only revealed from history but also witnessed in their day to day life.

Their honest nature prevents them from adopting any extravagant lifestyle and they practice utmost thrift in their daily life. They re-cycle their clothes as bedding materials. Such thrift helps them in maintaining very simple and self-reliant lifestyle.

It would be worth-mentioning that within the Sarak community there are apparently three divisions, namely, Atharosika, Mahat and Khan, But these divisions have nothing to do with the caste hierarchy as mentioned in the text. These divisions were created during their migration from Manbazar. The division can at best be linked with the attitude towards property and attachment to their chastity. There is no caste system as such among the Saraks.

The authorities of Jaina religion accept these Saraks (the Sravaks) as their kith. The authorities of Hindu religion do not accept the Saraks as their faith. Again, Hindus do not consider Saraks to be their equal, rather they have a strong 'we' and 'they' towards them. Hindus do not invite Saraks to their social functions. They are treated as Non-Hindus. Because no Hindu would usually worship any mortal-being whereas Jainas worship Mahavir and other Tirthankars who were mortals. Saraks still offer juri to the late Tirthankars. Animist also do not consider Saraks as their religious partner. All these above evidences clearly show that Saraks are Jain by religion.

How then the movements for their inclusion among Scheduled Tribes and later as O.B.C. can be explained? The only valid explanation was
'economism' in terms of taking advantage of reservation policy. They intend to
gain something from the existing political system. Political authority also took
time to decide on this issue and only recently they were declared as O.B.C.

In India, ethnicity has been used as a tool of taking advantage from the political system especially in parliamentary elections. But that does not justify any neglect of the ethnic question. Even in a cosmopolitan set-up, each of the ethnic groups would like to maintain their identities while living a cosmopolitan life. Ethnic and community questions are therefore very important when one attempts at national integrity and solidarity.

Ethnicity may be defined as a synthesis of a number of distinctive features or components of identity, connected with the essential nature of a given group and exerting an axiomatic ascendancy over the minds of its individual members. These features of identity must, however, be conceived as variables likely to develop independently or together as a function of time and place in the representation which is given to them, or which emerges either spontaneously or by mobilization (Yves Besson, 1991). Thus for example the Jain identity produced by recent establishment of a Jaina Temple at Jhapra village may be perceived as ontological by the individual Saraks concerned. Ethnicity, as we have also mentioned earlier is not a static quality that a group does or does not possess, but a set of composite variants whose essence is represented by means of a discourse that is constantly being adopted or readopted. Thus, any threat (real or perceived) to the integrity of the community can set in motion what might be called a mobilization of identity. Since the Sarak community is not living in perfect security and harmony, its identity can not be latent. It therefore seems necessary to consider why and how the Saraks with an identity of their own can be mobilized and move on through a stage of ideological and political awareness to what may be called ethnicity. In our case, we did not find any ranked system of inter ethnic relation
in terms of colour, language, rituals and festivals etc. between Saraks and their neighbours namely Hindus and Tribals, but found them as a borderline case. Arguably, Saraks remain distinct from other communities in their lifestyle and attitude. The present researcher is of the opinion that the sentiment as well as the material conditions of Sarak-livelihood should not be taken casually. Because neglect of such identity question may provoke ethnic conflicts which would be harmful to all communities.

The opportunism reflected in the attitude of some Saraks towards their inclusion in the list of Tribals or O.B.C's should be interpreted as a technique of self-preservation or living. The general misconception or false notion of the reality coupled with political manoeuvre have resulted in such 'opportunism'.

History taught us that the ethnic or religious identity question, if not properly perceived, leads to ethnic conflagration. Ethnic violence in erstwhile Soviet Union and Yugoslavia are the glaring examples. Politicians and Statesmen should not forget the historical roots of the conflicts and try to respect the identity questions while attempting 'unity in diversities'.

In India, the ethnic and identity questions as well as regional questions are gaining importance especially after independence. In colonial days, these identity questions were not addressed as those did not seem important or urgent. But after independence, the latent aspirations of different communities gradually gained ground and gave rise to conflict-situations. Unfortunately, politicians of our country did not show much foresight and could not act up to the situation when the question of languages, religions and community distinctions came to the fore. They not only failed to comprehend the situation from a nationalist perspective but also attempted to manipulate caste and community questions etc. to strengthen their selfish interest in building 'vote banks'.

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It is this deplorable fact that makes us confused. The diverse periods of development of a nation cannot just be lumped together and one should not fail to understand the changes in the character and aims of the national questions and the policy pertaining to the national questions in different stages of development. Because, national question is a part of the general question of development. Significant change can be possible in each given historical moment. In our kind of system, their is possibly one solution of the national question insofar as a solution is possible at all. In our kind of political system: that solution is 'consistent democracy'.

By consistent democracy we would mean the respectability of all the religion, language, caste and community in the matter of asserting their rights. Due to uneven development of the characteristics of different ethnic groups and communities the advantage of democracy can not be reaped by the communities especially who were backward. It is therefore the duty of the relatively forward communities to help the backward in promoting them. This is like helping a toddler to walk properly by their olders. Only by doing this the democracy can be consistent (and not mechanistic as it is now).

Apart from these there is another important aspect of identity question in our class-ridden society. Here, both the question the class and community should be addressed simultaneously although the nationality and community questions in the ultimate analysis prove to be a class-question. The identity question as a community however cuts across the classes within a particular community. The present researcher found the class question among Saraks was similar to the other religious communities.

Whatever insight we gained from the study of Sarak identity is that, there is a lack of clearly defined state policy towards identity question. Various other researcher also found the same lack of policy in case of different communities. A community however small or however weak cannot be ignored.
in a democracy if it is to be consistent. The ethos and aspirations of different communities may remain dormant for sometime, but it becomes explicit at a certain stage of socio-economic or cultural development.

In India, the movements of early fifties took the shape of linguistic movements as a step towards state-formation. The reorganisation of states on linguistic basis had to be accepted by the Indian rulers because there were mighty movements of the people in different states. Little did the rulers think at that time that there could be other kinds of movements in course of time which betrayed the rulers' ignorance of historical process of development. In the recent times states are being demanded by different communities (not on the basis of language) namely Bodoland, Uttarakhand, Jharkhand, Kamtapuri and these movements may have serious future implications.

To conclude we would try to make an analogy of familial relationship. A family consists of members of different sex and age-group. Each has his or her importance or recognition within a family. If the family management does not respect the individuals' importance within the family and mechanically club them the cohesion and unity within the family can not be established. The family is one in the eyes of others if the cohesion exist. Similarly in case of the country or a nation there should be respectability of each and every community, backward or forward, rich or poor. Saving a democracy depends on such kind of respectability of each of the sections and communities of the total population. Without this ideological premise unity can never be established. This is the way in which identity questions of the Indian communities should be tackled, even in case of a little-known community like ours subject Sarak. This is like allowing hundred flowers to blossom. They may have different colours, shapes, sizes and fragrance the totality of which is a garden of Eden.