SAVARA LIFE STYLE, SCHOOL AND FORMAL EDUCATION

Against the background of the Savara cultural life style presented in Chapter 3, the socialization process of the Savara boys and girls discussed in Chapter 4 and the account of structure and functioning of the formal educational institutions in the Savara hamlets in Chapter 5, it is now possible to explain the poor response to formal education from the Savara boys and girls, in terms of attendance, performance, stagnation and drop-out rates in Chapter 2.

The life style of the Savara society, and its values, perceptions and attitudes seem to be in dishormony with the culture of the schools attended by the Savara boys and girls on many points. However, it is difficult to pinpoint any one particular aspect of their life as the determining factor impeding their school education. The academic failures of the boys and girls could only be understood as a result of the interplay of several factors. An attempt is made in this chapter, to identify some of these factors and discuss the interplay of such factors.

The childhood of the Savara is a phase in which the children prepare themselves for their adult roles in
future. The adult members of the community have a limited objective, in sending their children to the school. They think that school education is a means to acquire `knowledge', that is, a knowledge to become `wise' enough to deal with the members of the outside world. The school education, therefore, does not help in the preparation of children to assume adult roles and responsibilities relevant to the community life. On the other hand, the socialization of children within the community would help them to play their roles successfully in future. The boys and girls are recognised as adult members, only when they acquire knowledge and skills and appreciate the values that help them to play the roles of `husband/wife' and `responsible' members of the community. Such an acquisition of `adult' status is important for the boys and the girls, as it leads to marriage, which is considered an important phase of an adult life of the Savara.

The knowledge and skills to be acquired are related to their life style. The knowledge concerns about the nature in which they live - about the characteristics of the soil, hill (konda), plants, trees, wild animals, seasons, consumable foods, medicinal plants, cattle, etc. The skills required are mainly: (1) those relating to agricultural activities, which include both preparation of tools required for agricultural operations and also those required to undertake agricultural tasks like ploughing, sowing, digging, cutting with axe, knife etc. (2) those
relating to other economic activities like hunting, fishing and collection of forest produce and (3) those relating to management of household activities, including house building.

The adult status also presupposes one's preparedness to appreciate values like, hard work, slow but steady approach, obedience to adults, simple living, mutual help, honesty, integrity, etc.

The values taught in the school, as revealed in the observations and the interviews with teachers, are not quite congruous with the values appreciated in the Savara community. The academic success of the students as per the teacher, depends on how clever he or she is, but not how much hard work one puts in. The hard work put in by the boys and the girls, rarely receives appreciation by the teachers. In fact, on many occasions, the teachers ridicule by comparing them with oxen or bullocks. Further, the teacher's make open statements that the Savara boys and girls cannot be 'clever' because of their life style in general and the food habits in particular. This influences the aptitude and the learning process of the children which in turn influences the quality of the teaching in the school.

In this context, three other features of the Savara socialization need a special mention for their negative influence on the school education. For the Savara, 'seeing
is **believing**' and *learning* is by **doing**'. As such, learning of skills and acquisition of knowledge takes place only during the day time, right in the forest. Taking cattle for grazing serves the purpose of both the children and the adult members of the family. The children learn from their peer group and the aged who join them in cattle rearing. The school hours being 9 AM to 4 PM do not suit the Savara boys and the girls. **Unfortunately,** when the Savara is free from cattle rearing in summer, the school remains closed. During April-May, the Savaras leave the cattle free, as no crop is grown during that time and so no fear of cattle grazing the crops grown in their podu fields. The Savaras leave the cattle free in summer which go longer distances for grazing and would return on their own. As taking cattle involves covering longer distances, the Savara refrains from going into forest in summer with the cattle.

Formal learning, as it occurs in the schools does not involve the two strategies of *seeing is believing* and *learning is by doing* which are part of their life-style, successfully used in the sphere of informal learning situations. The use of teaching aids is almost nil in the schools functioning in the Savara hamlets. The teaching-learning activity, as seen by the students is monotonous and mechanical.
Further, the learning by experimentation, and experience in the informal sector creates indirectly another hurdle for school education. In the process of acquiring skills without any supervision of the senior members of the community, the children very often meet with accidents. The physical injuries thus caused during this process are neglected initially, which turn into major health problems later, disallowing participation of them in any activity, including schooling. The data on children's absenteeism to school revealed that ‘problems of health’ is one of the major causes.

The second notable feature of the Savara childhood socialization is that the males and females are segregated very early and are prepared for their respective adult roles. Children are not trained by setting time limitations for learning of different skills and knowledge, by the senior members. The children enjoy considerable freedom during the childhood. The participation of children in household activities is not expected. Such a participation, however, gives a great satisfaction to their parents, for they conceive that their children are getting ‘matured’ fast. The Savara believe that children exhibit responsible behaviour only when they are ready, that is, when God prepares them for that. This results in a ‘pampering’ attitude towards their children. They also believe that the childhood is taken care of by God and the ancestors. Hence, any action to control the child makes
the child `cry' which leads to punishment to parents by God. The punishment caused by God and the ancestors is mostly in the form of disease or injury to the child affecting the reproduction of the society itself.

The Savara conceptions of childhood and their treatment of children is thus, incongruent with the children's life in school. The freedom that the child enjoys during his childhood does not comply with the values of `discipline' and `order' that are heavily emphasized within the school. The Savara children find it difficult in following such norms as `sticking to seats although', punctuality, taking permission to leave the class room, maintaining silence etc. Violation of such norms in the schools, hence, invite punishment. The school education further suffers, when the teachers become unacceptable to the adult members of the community too. The Savara adults blame the teachers as "arrogant" and do not teach the Savara children as per their norms and beliefs.

The third feature of the Savara socialization is that of learning from members of their own sex and age-group which allows for a greater freedom for interaction between the learner and the learned. The learning in the school is by an interaction with the `senior' person. The children while interacting with the "teacher" adopt the culturally prescribed speech styles and modes of expressing respect to age. Such an approach curtails their interaction with the teacher. The teaching-learning
process in school thus becomes 'teacher oriented' than the much preferred 'child-oriented' approach. Further, as observed earlier, the culturally valued behaviour patterns adopted by children often create a communication gap between the teacher and the student.

The academic failure of the Savara boys and girls, particularly the incidence of drop out from the school may also be partially attributed to the nature of the institution of marriage, family and social organization among the Savara.

The family among the Savara is not stable. It continuously undergoes changes and demands its members to continuously readjust to these changing familial environments. While adjusting and redefining their relations with other members of the family, the children's attention on education is diluted and this has a negative influence on their performance. The institution of marriage does not unite man and woman permanently among the Savara. Marriage is more or less a contract which can be dissolved at any time. The data presented earlier revealed the fragility of the marital relationship and the incidence of divorce and remarriage rates. Similarly, the adult mortality rate also is high, resulting into remarriages in view of death of their spouse.

The events such as death, divorce and remarriage of the parents create serious emotional setbacks for the
children and demand very drastic adjustment to the social situations that follow such incidents. The emotional problems of the children vary according to the different familial situations in which they are placed. But more serious problems arise when one or both of the parents die or divorce while living in a nuclear family.

Though the child belongs to the father, no obligation is felt by the kin to look after the needs of the children when the father is dead due to absence of birinda organisation. Similarly, when woman remarry, leaves her children and the children are left with no guardian. The children, if young may be invited by their near kin such as, father's brothers, mother's brothers', sisters etc. to join their birinda. Such children settle themselves early and establish their own households soon. The status of the children in the birinda in which they join is very marginal. As such, they suffer from economic dependence and develop strained relations with some members of that family soon. This also compels them to make decisions for early settlement, which means a decision to acquire the skills and knowledge required to perform their economic roles fast.

The different situations in which the children are placed on the event of death or divorce of their parents are presented below.
Case 1: - Lakkai got married to Sumbari at the age of about 20 years. Soon after his marriage he separated from his parents and established his birinda. Lakkai and Sumbari were blessed with three children - Somaih, Padma and India in the next five years. However, Padma died just after attaining two years. The family, however, experienced a major tragedy when Lakkai died in the year 1980. By that time, Somaih and India were aged about six years and ten years, and were studying first and second standard, respectively. Sumbari, though was invited by her brother to join his family with her children, refused to do so, as, she decided to continue to live separately with her two sons. She earned bread for her family by working as a wage labourer. Of course, her two brothers supported her financially at times.

When everything seemed working better, the two brothers – India and Somiah had to face another serious tragedy, in the death of the mother. The two who were then aged about eight and twelve years, respectively, were literally on the streets because of this.

Considering that they were too young to make a living on their own, the father's brothers of the children, as well as mother's brother asked them to join their respective birindas. Somiah, being the eldest made the decision to move into his father's brothers' family (Mangulu), along with his younger brother.
Somaih was particularly upset psychologically. He dropped out of the school immediately. India, however, continued his studies with encouragement from the local school teacher.

While living with their father's brother, Somiah and India did not feel quite happy. They developed strained relations with their cousins, when they were blamed of laziness and theft. Soon they had decided to leave that house and join their father's other younger brother. There also, they faced 'illtreatment' and discriminatory treatment. Just after six months of joining that family, again they returned to join the family of their uncle with whom they lived earlier.

Somaih and India realised that their position in any family other than their own is only very marginal and would not be able to enjoy love, affection and freedom. They found themselves helpless when they suffered from disease. It was in these circumstances, they decided that they should soon become independent and that they should plan for an early settlement, meaning an early marriage. This attitude compelled India to drop-out of the school to acquire the skills and knowledge required for undertaking the traditional occupations.

Mangulu with whose family Somaih and India lived for a long time also remarked: "I brought these boys because they are too young to make a living on their own."
But I cannot afford to keep them long. They should realise that they need to leave my house as early as possible. They should settle down. How can they afford to go to the school and waste their time there? First, they should participate in all activities relating to podu cultivation, acquire skills, earn money for their marriage and settle in the life. Education is secondary. They cannot earn... make a living on that........."

Case 2 : Addai of Mandaguda married Budamma of the same village at the age of about 20 years. A daughter, Ramamma was born to them about a year after their marriage. Ramamma was admitted to the school with encouragement of the school teacher at the age of about six years.

Problems of schooling began very early for Ramamma with her father's second marriage. Addai's second wife joined them when Ramamma was studying second standard. Budamma, the first wife of Addai was unhappy with her husband's second marriage, divorced him, a few months later and joined her parents living in the same village. Ramamma continued to live with her father and step mother, for a few days, but later joined her mother in her grand father's house. A few months later, when Ramamma was about eight years old, her mother eloped with Sannai of the neighbouring village. Ramamma, after a few days of living with her grandfather again returned to her father, Addai. However, she could not quite cope up with her step mother's
temperament. She ran away to her grand father's place once again, as she was beaten up by her step mother when she dropped, causing a head injury to her step sister.

Meanwhile her mother and her husband migrated to their village. So, Ramamma preferred to join the family of her mother and her husband after her grand mother's death. Ramamma's attendance in the school suffered in view of her shuttling from one place to the other and also due to emotional setbacks of the divorce and remarriages of her father and mother. However, she did not completely withdraw from the school. More serious problems began for her when she approached puberty. Her father Addai wanted her to return to his home, for it is his responsibility to settle her marriage. Ramamma's mother declined to send her for fear of illtreatment by Addai's second wife. Ramamma had to suffer from mental strain as her father visited them frequently to ask Ramamma to return to his home. When she refused to do so, he used to abuse her and even threatened to kill her. Her mental agony reached a maximum when her step father asked Ramamma to leave his home in view of the nuisance from her father.

Ramamma had realized that the solution for her problems is an early marriage. As she attained puberty at the age of about 13 years, she approached her father's sister's son and proposed her marriage with him, which was accepted by him. Soon they eloped and got married. Thus,
Ramamma's school education came to an end even before completing IV standard.

Case 3: Bugadu aged about 45 years by April 1985 is head of an extended family in Gadidapai. His family consisted of a married son, his spouse and children, two unmarried sons, one unmarried daughter, besides his wife and one Mangadu, son of his deceased son.

Bugadu's deceased son married his mother's brother's daughter, Varalu. Mangadu was born to them a year after their marriage. Papanna, father of Mangadu died in an accident. At the time of his father's death Mangadu was only four years old.

After the death of Papanna, his wife, Varalu, was requested to marry Papanna's younger brother, Sannai. She obliged this proposal and continued to live with the same family along with her son, Mangadu. Mangadu was admitted to school, in the same year.

About two years after her marriage with Sannai, Varalu divorced him, when he married again a distant relative on his father's side. Varalu left his son Mangadu and joined her parents in the neighbouring village. Mangadu was then six years old. The developments at home gave rise to serious psychological problems. He became very irregular to the school. None of his family members advised him to attend the school. Mangadu, who was
particularly close to his grandparents, used to follow them whenever they went out.

**Infact, Mangadu's** grandfather Bugadu believed that
the boy needed a different treatment altogether. He
quoted: "**Mangadu** had lost both father and mother. Who will
take care of him after my death? Definitely he can not
trust his uncles and their wives to give him a place in
their **family**, when their own children are born. He better
grow to live on his own as early as possible. I wish he
gets married before my death".

As the above case reveals, Mangadu is looked as one
who cannot lose his time attending to the school and
neglect learning skills and knowledge essential for early
settlement by taking up the traditional economic
activities.

The migrations of the Savara families from one
village to another, too, cause dislocation and serious
adjustment problems for the children. In case of
migration, the children are removed to a different social
environment which necessitates the child to establish
relations with other children of his own age-group and sex.
This takes a long time. During this process of
readjustment, the child's attendance to the school suffers
and this negatively influences his or her performance.

The migrations of the Savara families are common.
Migrations take place due to several reasons. The
important factor for migration is scarcity of `good' land for podu cultivation.

In recording the culture-school incongruence, we have to emphasize the cultural values cherished by the Savara. As it has been observed earlier, Savaras place a great emphasis on the value of cooperation in all the aspects of their life. All the members of the household join hands and organise themselves as team to undertake the economic activities relating to podu cultivation, collection of forest produce, etc. Joint living of the brothers together till the youngest of their brothers gets married and disapproval for the division of parental property as long as the father is alive, are the basic cultural norms of the Savara, which recreate and emphasize the spirit of cooperation. This spirit of cooperation is conspicuous in the life of a Savara. For example, when the labour force available within the family is inadequate for podu cultivation, help is sought from members outside the family. Activities like fishing, hunting etc are group activities with participation of members from all the households of a guda. Many rituals and ceremonies concern the whole village and hence participation of all members in the village. At the time of marriage or death of any member in the village, members of all households volunteer to contribute necessary help. In the case of negotiations relating to amount paid/recieved as moganalu (marriage payment) at least one member from each household in the
village will join the group. All decisions whether relating to festivals in agriculture, collection of forest produce or presentation of petition to the authorities for grant of a loan, bare well, for patta lands or imposing of fine for bad conduct of any member in the village or allowing a family to migrate or settlement of dispute and the like, are all" collectively taken with the participation of at least one adult member from each household in the village.

Throughout one’s childhood, the Savara learns and deeply internalizes the value of cooperation. The folk tales and the events of the past, where in a group activity leads to success are narrated to children often. The games the children play will all help to pick up the values of cooperation and also to internalise it deeply.

The Savara discourages competition as undesirable. The children are discouraged to compete with each other both within in the members in the family and with the members outside the family. The lands for podu cultivation, the trees whose produce is of commercial value or whose produce is delicious food item are no one’s property. Every member has access to them. Yet, competition to generate more incomes from such resources of earning is avoided by following the ‘conventions’. On the other hand, the ‘competitive spirit’ expressed by the
members attract sanctions like ridicule, social boycott etc.

Within the school, the Savara children encounter new set of value system in which, ‘dependency’ and team work deserves discouragement in preference to individualism. The school environment emphasizes the values of individualism, competitive spirit in which the student is made to complete his grades with better score than the others.

The values of cooperation result into a network of reciprocal relationships in which each Savara finds himself dependant on the other and his group at large. As such they always desire to be in a group, work in a group and cannot think of working alone without company. These groups are formed on the basis of sex, age, and neighbourhood. Men and women form groups whenever they go out, for example, for the collection of forest produce, to visit to shandy, or to go to movie. Many a time, they postpone or cancel such visit due to lack of companions. The children, in general will come to the school in groups. Each of such groups comprise of members belonging to the same ward/quda and persons of the same sex and age group. When one or two members of such a group stay back at home, others also follow them and do not go to the school. Similarly, when one or two boys or girls drop out of the school, all others of his/her age-group and of the same ward/quda drop out gradually.
Another significant feature of the Savara culture, which seems incongruent with the school education is the emphasis placed on value of 'freedom'. The children enjoy considerable freedom during the childhood. There are few controls on the children in their activities like, 'eating', 'sleeping', 'toilt and bathing' habits, and 'roaming around'. The boys and girls enjoy considerable freedom during early adolescent stage. The boys and girls are left free to earn for themselves and enjoy the fruits of their hard-work. The youngsters earn money by collection and sale of different minor forest produce and spend as they desire. Some invest their incomes on cattle to multiply their money. This economic freedom is also further extended in joint family life. The married couple are free to undertake activities of their own for enhancing their economic interests. The boys and girls enjoy considerable freedom in choosing their life partners for marriage. The married men and women are free to divorce when it is necessary. Similarly, the children whose parents are dead or divorced make the decision by themselves as to whose household they should join.

In view of the general appreciation of the value of freedom and self decision making in general, the parental involvement in childrens' education is almost nil. The children are left free to make decisions to withdraw from the school at any time. Such decisions will be generally
accepted by the parents for they believe that one cannot compel their wards to work against their wish or desire.

In general, the Savara adopts an attitude of 'one in hand is better than two in the bush'. They tend to avoid 'risk taking' and look for an early return to an investment which influences the decision-making process of the Savara. As a consequence of this value orientation, the Savara prefers to lease out the kitchen garden or any other tree, at the flowering stage itself, whose produce has a commercial value, to the Sahukarlu (traders), though they are well aware that these lease transactions are profitable to Sahukarulu. The savara would like to play safe and prefer to get early return to his investments of money and labour. Further, such an act ensures him against his fear that he may not get anything if the crop fails at a later stage for some reason or the other. The similar considerations are at work in the decision of the Savara to continue with podu cultivation (inspite of efforts by Government Agencies to convince them to stop such practice), which involves relatively little or no risk.

The Savara believes that a mixed crop cultivation on hill slopes, in podu cultivation, at least one or two varieties of millets, of the four or five mixed in such cultivation, give satisfactory yields and eliminates the possibility of total crop failure. It is even asserted
that they resort to mixed crop-cultivation of millets more than the cultivation of mono crop cultivation, such as ginger, or turmeric as there is a risk of crop failure in the later.

The Savara attitude towards risk taking and the tendency to look for an early returns to their investments may be attributed to the failure of coffee plantation scheme and the marginal success achieved in cashew plantations scheme, introduced by the ITDA as a measure of economic development of tribals living in and around the village Donubai in the year 1979. The coffee plantation scheme was a total failure as it is new and involved a high degree of risk for the Savara. The risk involved is based on the following assumptions: 1. the returns in case of cultivation of coffee plantations would come to hands only after five or six years and 2. they cannot allocate their time and labour for podu cultivation, as they are preoccupied with coffee plantations, which results into their failure to produce grain needed for consumption throughout the year. Any shortage of food, the Savara assumes, would lead to more and more indebtedness.

The cashew plantation scheme also was not received with any enthusiasm. The fact that the late returns of the labour invested on growing cashew plantations discouraged the Savara.
This tendency to compromise for lesser but early returns to the investments of labour and money also influences the education of the Savara children. Money and effort put in for education is not first of all considered as investment. When convinced that it is an investment, it is not believed as a wise investment, for such an investment does not guarantee returns, let alone early returns. Another important cultural attribute of the Savara is the tendency to work continuously on a project and complete it. Any break in the working would end up as incomplete. The Savara themselves are aware of this nature of them. They have sited the following cases of works undertaken by them which remained half complete because of the suspension of the work in the middle.

Mangulu of Manapuram village intended to rebuild his house with fire proof arrangement. His being an extended family, had sufficient labour force available at home to undertake construction of the house. However, he decided to involve a large number of persons and complete the construction work in one day, rather than take a weeks time with the participation of the members of his family. He distributed the meat of two buffaloes to all the households in the village and requested for participation of atleast one member from each of the households. The two buffaloes, whose meat he had distributed costed him about Rs. 500/-.
He explained, when asked why he had incurred so much of expenditure, when the task can be undertaken by the participation of his household members themselves as:

"I wanted to see that the work is completed on the same day we begin. It is always wise to do so. If only members at home participate it would take about eight days. If the work gets suspended for one reason or the other......the pending work never gets completed.....".

The local youth association of Manapuram village planned to construct a community hall to organize their meetings. The construction work was commenced in May 1986. The members of the youth organization rendered their services in the construction work. The work was carried out for three days during which time the leveling of the plot as well as foundation for the building was completed. After that, they had to suspend their activity in view of rains which followed the activities related to Podu cultivation. The building could not be completed forever. Addai, the president of the youth association remarked: "I very much guessed on the same day when we decided to suspend the activity that this project will never be completed."

Members in different households similarly cite instances where a work remained incomplete, because of suspension of work in the middle. This tendency of the Savara also influences the attendance of the children to the school. The attendance of the children, is observed
to be thin for a few days after the re-opening of the school after continuous holidays for two to three days. The attendance remains very poor for a long time after re-opening of school after a long vacation such as Dashara and Shankranti holidays and summer vacation. As the school is closed on the Sunday, the attendance on Monday and Tuesday falls down the average attendance of boys and girls in other days.

The problems of culture-school concordance which arise due to the Savara conceptions of 'good' school and 'good teacher' and the teachers' conceptions of the same, also need a serious attention in the explanation of poor response to formal education from the Savara children. The role expectations of the teacher are different for the parents of the Savara children and the teachers working in the Savara hamlets. The teachers' refusal to accept the roles assigned to them in the community results in non-cooperation by the parents of children attending the school. This negatively influences interest evinced by the parents in their children's education, which in-turn also influences their performance in the school.

The teaching-learning process, as it takes place in the school too exhibits the features of culture-school incongruence. The interaction patterns observed in the school reveal a preference by the boys and girls to interact with persons of their own sex, age-group and village/hamlet. In the situations of involuntary
interactions initiated by the teachers, the boys and girls are involved in cross-sex interactions besides being involved in interactions with children of other hamlets/villages. In such interactions, the children turn inattentive, and invite punishment from the teachers. This phenomenon being a recurrent activity, the punishments would have a cumulative effect on children's response to schooling.