Chapter 8

Summary and Conclusion

The quest to know the life and times of the Masan Jogi community emerged from my field experiences with several unorganised queries and questions about their origin, culture, family, marriage and kinship system, their traditional as well as newly acquired occupations and their Jat Panchayat. Except for the few sporadic references, no scholarly literature could be found on the community. Realising that the scholarly world was largely unaware of this marginalised community, it was decided to undertake an ethnographic study of the community. Those initial and random questions formed the basis for specifying the objective of the study and for formulating the research questions. As an exploratory research that is based on long-drawn fieldwork and first-hand experience from within the qualitative research paradigm, the study was undertaken.

To start with, an extensive pilot visit to Masan Jogi settlements in various districts of Marathwada and Western Maharashtra regions was made to assess the overall situation of the community. This provided a broad perspective to the study; this also suggested the methodological strategy to be adopted.

This being an ethnographic research, a formal period of fieldwork was undertaken, using participant observation as a major tool of research. As required by this research method, emphasis was laid on exploration and unstructured way of data collection (O’Reilly: 2005/2008) and interpretation of meaning and functions of human actions (Atkinson and Hammersley 1998: 110). Ethnographic interview, informal conversation and solicited and unsolicited conversations were used as other tools of data collection. From the experiential and interview data, I could ‘construct’ the origin of the community; understand their traditional and newly acquired occupations; analyse their religion in terms of myths, beliefs and ritual practices; describe their social organisation in terms of family organisation, marriage patterns and the kinship system; and elucidate their cultural elements; and examine the nature and functioning of their juridical institution called the
Jat Panchayat. The data gathered from the fieldwork refer to ‘the ideas, beliefs, and knowledge that characterizes a particular group of people’ (Fetterman 1989: 27). These data were thematically organised under six chapters, whose main findings are presented below.

**Summary of the Main Findings**

The Masan Jogis are an itinerant community, whose members traditionally stayed in graveyards or cremation grounds, attending to funerals and guarding the area. They received a donation from the grieving family members when someone in the village of their sojourn died. At other times, they went around begging in adjacent villages and this was their main source of livelihood. As a community, Masan Jogis trace their origin to the Talangana region of Andhra Pradesh. They lived and moved in the former Kingdom of Hyderabad under the Nizam, which now stands divided among Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Maharashtra.

The Masan Jogi community is not mentioned in any gazetteer or census report. Since there is very limited documentary material available on the community, I had to rely mainly on oral sources to construct their past. From the analysis of the etymology of the community’s name, namely, ‘Masan Jogis’, its strong connection to graveyard or cremation ground is revealed. They are known as *katikapala* (*katkapla* in Telugu) meaning the guardians of the graveyards. The analysis also shows that the name of the community contains two appellations: ‘masan’ and ‘jogi’. Therefore, the community may have evolved by contracting intermarriages among the two different occupational communities.

The two written myths found in books are short and do not shed much light on the community’s past. However, they do refer to graveyard and death, which emphasises the community’s connection with cemetery. A version of the myth of Raja Harishchandra mentioned in the Aitreya Brahmana, is very popular among Masan Jogis. In their oral version of this myth, a man from Domb community was attending at the cremation ground in Varanasi prior to the arrival of Raja Hairshchandra. Masan Jogis fondly remember this Domb and consider him as their *guru*. They feel honoured to inherit the noble legacy of Raja Harishchandra, whose path of
truthfulness the community continues to tread. Following Masan Jogis resemblance to Kapalikas and Kalmukhas, I have also tried to trace the community’s ascetic roots to the Sidh Siddha school of Shaivism.

As associated with cemetery or cremation ground, the traditional occupation of Masan Jogis was either guarding it or attending at the funerals and begging. They lived an austere life; they did not believe in accumulating wealth in any form. Some of those from the community who took up to treating illnesses and performing kirtans on the eve of the tenth day ritual of the dead came to be known as Pisan Jogi and Kuruba Jungam respectively; they became independent communities. Later, due to draughts and their growing population, the community was forced to move out of the Marathwada region and spread across the districts in Western Maharashatra.

The Masan Jogi community at Shevgaon is one of the largest clusters that developed in the early 1980s. There are 495 people in 76 households, working out to an average of 6.5 persons per household. As all community members could not be employed at the cemetery and cremation ground, the majority of Masan Jogis had to take up non-traditional occupations for their livelihood. Women too were constrained to engage in earning livelihood for the family by joining their husbands in the new occupations. Many women began selling ‘stationery’ to the womenfolk in the villages, a unique enterprise by women and for women. The Masan Jogi women engaged in this occupation display remarkable entrepreneurial skills. Though, a small step into the macro economy, the resulting occupational mobility has opened a vista of livelihood options for Masan Jogis. The community that once was austere began accumulating assets: televisions sets, motorbikes and construction houses on the plots of land allotted by the village panchayat. The community has remained united despite the diversity of occupation among its members. It is evident that the community has grown from the original subsistence economy to owning small business enterprises and accumulating assets. This shows that the community is on a progressive trend. In terms of occupational mobility, the community at large, has moved away from the traditional occupation to diverse occupations, namely, scrap collection, scrap vending, small shop, selling goggles, trading etc. Traditionally, women stayed at home. With the change in
occupation, women joined their husbands in the work or began selling ‘stationery’ in the villages. This is a significant change in the community.

Being basically Shaivite in orientation, Masan Jogis adore Lord Shiva and celebrate Mahashivaratri, the birth night of Shiva. They also revere Shiva as Mahadeva and Vetal, the lord of dead and ghosts. They also honour Poshamma and Yellamma, the folk goddesses of Andhra Pradesh. Masan Jogis have added Rama Mama, a god-man belonging to Nandiwale community, into their pantheon. As a political stance, they have formally converted to Buddhism to avail certain benefits from the government. Therefore, they adore Buddha. Those who feel their boons to have been granted by Sailani Baba, a *pir* located in Buldhana district in Maharashtra, are his ardent followers; those who feel their prayers have been heard, go to nearby church to adore Jesus Christ. In fact, adoring any deity is no aversion to Masan Jogis as long as the deity provides them succour. Thus, by adoring gods or god-men from different religious traditions, Masan Jogis have become syncretic in their orientation to ‘religion’: they indeed appear to be a model community in times of ever growing religious intolerance.

Clad in the attire of Vetal, the lord of the dead and ghosts, Masan Jogis appear ferocious. They may display unfathomable courage as they move in cemeteries and deal with dead; nevertheless, they are mortally afraid of evil spirits. Masan Jogis believe that the unsatisfied dead spirits haunt families and create menace by causing illness and death. This has made the community superstitious. As soon as someone falls sick, the family first makes a vow to a deity before they approach any doctor. Soon after the illness is cured, they feel compelled to fulfil the vow. Thus, the whole family then travels long distances to the shrine to offer a goat to the deity in gratitude. In order to protect themselves from evil spirits or ghosts, Masan Jogis take the ashes (in the earlier days, mud from the grave) to a unknown place in a forest in Andhra Pradesh and tie it to a tree. A forest dwelling sage helps them in this ritual; the details of this sage and the ritual could not be gathered as both were shrouded in mystery.

Except celebrating the Mahashivaratri to mark the birth of Lord Shiva, Masan Jogis do not display any other form of devotion in the Shaivite tradition. As Shaivites, they do not join any
other Shaivite sect in their celebration. In fact, the community does not have a temple of Shiva in the area of their habitation. They have constructed a huge temple of Rama Mama, who actually is god-man from another itinerant community. Masan Jogis’ understanding of god is as the one who comes to their aid instantly, be it Buddha, Christ, Pir or any other. They do not understand god as an ultimate reality, or as a creator, sustainer and destroyer. The community does not have the concept of kuldaivat, the ancestral or community deity. Anyone can follow the deity of her/his choice. Therefore, within the community, even within a family there are different gods adored from diverse religious traditions without any inhibition. From the point of view of growing religious intolerance, such disposition of faith in diverse gods is remarkable.

The Masan Jogi family consists of parents and their unmarried children. In some cases, elderly parents of the head of the household may choose to stay with the family. There is no preference for a particular gender at birth; both boys and girls are welcome in the family. There is division of labour in the family: women generally take care of the household chores, look after the children and cook food. Men generally busy themselves with repairs of the house or works related to their occupation. Masan Jogis are patriarchal, patrilineal and patrilocal community; however, the attitude of dominating women or considering women as being low is not seen in the community. Both husband and wife earn livelihood for the family. They jointly take family decisions. Domestic violence, atrocity on women or wife battering or such things are not acceptable in the community. At the same time, girls are not encouraged to go to school; often, if not invariably, they are married off at an early age. The Masan Jogi family life is marked with very limited emotional expression. In the community, neither is there an expression of euphoria over anything good that happens unexpectedly nor expression of prolonged grief over any loss. There is no ritual performed during pregnancy. Children are born at home with the help of a dayeeni, an elderly woman who attends on women in childbirth. Children are branded after the birth. This practice is gradually dying. The child is given a name on the fifth day after its birth in a simple ceremony. Puberty ceremony is performed on three successive month’s beginning with the first menstruation for seven days, five days and three days respectively. There is no initiation
ceremony for the boys. On the occasion of death, a cremation ritual is performed by the sarpanch. The ‘tenth day’ celebration is performed on the third day after the death.

The family pattern has remained the same among Masan Jogis over the decades even though they have taken up non-traditional occupations. Marriage is considered as natural and obvious for all in the Masan Jogi community. Therefore, no one remains unmarried. There is no single parent family, or widows, or the institution of celibacy in the community; neither there are their orphans or illegitimate children. The only girl who has become a sanyasin is treated as an exception. Single state of life dedicated to the service of god is new to the community.

Divorce is possible, after which the man and the woman can marry again. If there are children, they usually go with their mother. One can marry, after the death of a spouse. Masan Jogi community does not accept any sexual promiscuity or any form of aberration in sexual relationship. Therefore, the conjugal relationship in the family is one of trust and fidelity. No induced abortions, infant mortality or maternal death during childbirth are reported. Apparently, such incidents seem to be rare in the community.

As a patrilineal community, Masan Jogis trace ancestors up to the fourth ascending generation on the male line to check if the prospective bride and groom are related as parallel cousins, as such parallel cousins marriage is prohibited in the community. Cross-cousin marriages are prescribed in the community, whereas gotra/clan endogamy is proscribed. Marriage alliance is fixed with the approval of the girl. No marriages are allowed with a person outside the Masan Jogi community. There are three types of marriages in the community: child marriages, youth marriages and elderly marriages. All the marriages are arranged. As a patrilocal community, after the marriage, the bride goes to stay with the groom or with his parents.

Marriage and family life are considered as necessary in the Masan Jogi community. As one needs to be married, one needs to be in the family. Everyone has a family to care for. So, almost invariably, everybody is married as an infant or a child. The main reason for infant/child marriage seem to stem from Masan Jogis’ understanding that life is made up of male and female companionship and no one is individual. The idea of virginity does not appear to be an issue in
the community. However, due to sensitiveness of the matter, these aspects could not be examined in any detail. As grownups, the husband and the wife can decide to separate from each other for any reason. Then, as an adult, the consent of the girl is sought before fixing the alliance. Though married at infanthood or childhood no one is compelled or forced to abide by the same. From my observation, I gathered that any compulsion on marital relationship results in disputes leading one of the parties into perennial debt and in extreme cases to suicide, too. The marriage practices have not undergone any change.

The Masan Jogi community is divided into various clans that go by surnames. Kinship roles are usually assigned according to the status or prestige hierarchy. Some kinship positions gain importance because of the rule of inheritance or succession is attached to them. There is no inheritance of ancestral property among Masan Jogis as they did not own any property. Except the sarpanch, who is the head of the community, there is no hierarchy or status in the Masan Jogi community. Therefore, there is no tradition of status inheritance. Due to this, there are no roles assigned to any one for performance of rituals or in the ceremonies such marriage, naming ceremony or death rituals. The kinship ties are strong among close relatives. The Masan Jogi life has undergone change in socio-economic spheres. However, the family, marriage and the kinship system has remained more or less unchanged over the decades.

Though, their origin is traced to Andhra Pradesh, Masan Jogis have lived in Marathwada region of Maharashtra for many decades. Since their migration, Masan Jogis have retained many a cultural element of the land of their origin. They still have some names bearing the mark of Andhra Pradesh. Recent trends reveal that more and more children are given names that have roots in the Sanskrit language. Most of the Masan Jogi surnames are from cultural background of Andhra Pradesh. Marking the body with tattoos was adopted by Masan Jogi women to counter a particular situation, a practice they still continue. It is now becoming popular among both boys and girls. The language that Masan Jogis speak is mixture of Telugu, Kannada, Urdu, Hindi and Marathi. Since the young generation is more acquainted with Marathi, the language has more Marathi words. The practice of growing long hair and flowing beard has changed; very few are
now found flaunting long hair and flowing beard. Similarly, the traditional ornaments have now
been replaced with those of popular designs worn by the local women. Many of these cultural
elements appear to have changed. They still retain some aspects of the Masan Jogi cultural
heritage reminding them of their socio-cultural roots.

The Jat panchayat is an important institution that maintains law and order in the community,
resolves disputes among the community members and maintains identity of the community by
preventing marriages with other communities. The sarpanch is the head of the Jat panchayat; he
conducts its proceedings and finally delivers a judgment. Besides, the sarpanch officiates at every
ceremony in the community. There is no fixed membership in the panchayat. However, all the
heads of the lineage groups residing in the area are expected to be present at the panchayat sitting.
As a procedure, the sarpanch, after receiving the information of the dispute, may inform the
accused party and wait for both the parties to come to terms by themselves. He may do the same
for two or three times, after which the issue will be taken up into the panchayat meeting. When
the panchayat sits to resolve a dispute, the place where sarpanch sits is usually at the centre. There
is a person who always encourages anyone who speaks by repeating the last part of the sentences
uttered. The jat panchayat has kept the community together by insisting on the observance of
certain norms of conduct and prohibiting marriage with persons from outside the community.
Without jat panchayat, the community would have by now lost its identity and existence. The
structure and functioning of the jat panchayat has remained the same for decades.

Emerging Masan Jogi Identity: Continuity and Change

Two dimensions clearly stand out from the foregoing ethnographic account of the Masan Jogi
community at Shevgaon: continuity and change. Masan Jogi occupation and religion have
undergone tremendous change while marriage, family and kinship and the jat panchayat have
remained more or less unchanged.

From the traditional occupations, that is attending at the cemetery or guarding it and begging,
the community members have entered diverse occupations, namely, scrap collection, scrap
vending, trading, selling goggles, selling ‘stationery’, etc. As a Shaivite group, Masan Jogis adored mainly Shiva. Now they are the devotees of god and goddesses from diverse religious traditions, which include Buddhism, Christianity and Islam.

Taking up non-traditional occupations and adoring gods other than Shiva, the community has still remained as Masan Jogis. Their identification goes now with cultural traits and no more with occupation. Their social organisation in terms of marriage, family and the kinship system has held them together and the institution of jat panchayat has provided a perfect foil to the community, both determining and reinforcing its identity. This is indeed remarkable considering the forces of change that are at work.