CHAPTER IX
CONCLUSION

I

The basic framework of the study can be broadly seen in terms of two
c paradigms- one of indigenous knowledge and the other refers to new
knowledge. The former refers to the approach used by the ‘insiders’, whereas
the latter refers to the ‘outsiders’ approach. The outsider’s approach refers to
the modern mainstream knowledge paradigm. Social scientists, development
experts, intellectuals and policy-makers are studying and working for
livelihood development of the indigenous communities under the emphasis
of the new paradigm. The conventional way of knowing the livelihood
problems of the indigenous populations is considered as outdated. They
consider the new knowledge as ‘paramount and superior for the welfare of
adivasis. This ‘top-down’ approach alienates people’s agency and promotes
appropriation of indigenous knowledge by non-local agents. The fact is that
indigenous knowledge institutions, mechanisms, cultures and traditions are
based on the idea of equity, sustainability and self-determination.

We have also critically analysed the role and importance of indigenous
knowledge management by indigenous communities for sustainable
livelihood. The study intends to examine the practical life experiences and
wisdom of the indigenous community to see how the people find solution to
their major livelihood problems. Indigenous knowledge is not only a
philosophy of life of a given community; it is also a mechanism at the local
level for solving basic problems. The two major advantages of the indigenous
knowledge approach are: (i) it involves little or no cost and (ii) it is readily
available to the people. Hence, we have analysed indigenous knowledge,
skills, institutions and agencies which contribute to sustainable development of the people.

We have observed that to reject completely the role of the ‘outside’ agencies would not serve any purpose as the modern medicine is extensively used by the people. In the changing situation the modern medicine becomes at times more beneficial than the indigenous. On other side, lots of changes have been observed in the indigenous knowledge systems as well and socio-economic and cultural life of the indigenous people has also changed considerably. During the transition, the indigenous knowledge has lost its original character and efficacy. To face the challenges of the crisis of livelihood people have accepted outside agencies as an alternative to the weak local system. In such a situation, dependence on one of the two becomes impossible. Thus we have argued that people act and eclectically appropriating elements of the systems of knowledge to find out a sustainable solution for their problems.

Some related concepts such as sustainable development and livelihood have also been discussed to understand the livelihood problems of indigenous people. We have accepted the concept of sustainable development given by Brundtland as discussed earlier.

II

Now we would have a brief sketch of the society and culture among the Hill Saoras. The basic aim is to present an overall understanding of different aspects of the Saora society including their ethnic and cultural identity, settlement pattern, social organisations, institutions, rites de passage, political, economic and religious activities, division of labour, women, food
pattern, aesthetics, everyday life, relations with non-"adivasis", social change, etc.

Change is underway in each and every aspect of life among the Hill Saoras. The major factors of change are: Christianity, modern education, Panchayat Raj institutions, market economy and contact with outside world.

The institution of lineage (birinda) has undergone a noticeable change. *Birinda* is the most vital social institution of the Hill Saora society. The converted Saoras are highly motivated towards the modern world. They see their traditional society as superstitious and inferior. They don't participate in their traditional activities and also do not share and participate in the traditional sacrificial feasts.

The name giving ceremony among the Christianised Saoras is today different from the traditional pattern. They do not observe the rules of *Birinda* and traditional naming ceremony (*Aanyimun*). Unlike the past, today the name given to a child is biblical. No names of grand parents are given to a child among the converted Saoras.

The institution of marriage has already undergone a dynamic change. This is due to the fact that most of younger people are converted to Christianity and they prefer to marry according to the Christian tradition. The traditional customs relating to elaborate negotiations through offering of wine are also looked down upon by the educated and the converted youth. We have not come across a customary form of marriage.

*Garboisirung* is a common form of marriage found among the converts. *Garboisirung* is the combination of the *Garbiran* which means prayer, and the *boi* refers to a woman or bride, and the *sirung* means marriage, which etymologically implies marriage through prayer or accepting a woman as
bride by faith. Participation by birinda members in marriage ceremony and community feasts reflects cooperation irrespective of their religious background. Expenditure on marriage is shared by all. However, the ceremonial food at the place of the converts is shared by the traditional Saoras, and not vice versa. Today, Daribio sirung (love marriage or marriage by elopement) and Dindingboi sirung (another form of love marriage initiated or volunteered by girl) are being widely practised among all the Saoras.

The family is in transition. The polygynous family is being replaced by monogamous nuclear family. However, the traditional principle of lineage to maintain kinship ties still exists. Of course, status of a lineage of a woman changes among the converts. A woman becomes a member of her husband’s birinda. It is interesting to note that most of the elderly members believe in traditional norms, whereas the younger members have converted to Christian way of life. Despite dual and opposite normative organisations, conflicts and quarrels are completely absent. The rules of inheritance have not shown any noticeable change. Joint family is not a common phenomenon.

A number of rituals are practised among the traditional groups. Rites de passage, rituals relating to healing, sacrifices are considered most essential, although the number of sacrifices has decreased. It has been observed that death rites, healing rituals, and sacrifice of buffaloes are common among the Hill Saoras. These rituals have caused impoverishment. The convert Saoras do not observe any traditional rituals as they find them superstitious and degrading. And as such the converts save a lot which they otherwise would spend on. Such a change has brought about better economic and educational standing for the converts.

The influence of the Christianisation, Panchayati Raj institutions and modern legal system are some of the major factors which have changed some
of the traditional institutions and decision-making system. The converts attach more importance to Church than to the Panchayat or the birinda head. The converts have their own judicial and management mechanism to maintain order and peace. They do not adhere to the traditional system of decision-making and Gamangism. They rather go to church where the matters are settled peacefully. Participants in their decision-making are senior Mandali members and office bearers of the village church. The non-converts are not allowed by the converts in their socio-cultural activities.

Panchayat Raj has become an effective institution. Ward members and Sarapanch resolve disputes at the village level. Of course, the senior birinda member of Gamang is invited even today to participate in decision-making as a symbol of respect to the Gamang family.

Despite noticeable impact of several factors and agencies, the fundamental principles of birinda still hold the Hill Saora society together with a bond of reciprocity and cooperation. Exogamy still exists both among the non-converts as well as the converts. Some changes have occurred in the organisation and functioning of birinda among the converts. Among the converts, today a fundamental change found in the status of a woman is considered as a part of her husband's birinda.

Cooperative labour (Ansir) has still there among both the converts and the non-converts Saoras. Besides the Ansir, the converted Saoras have also a separate organisation which is managed by the village Mandali.

The interface between the Hill Saoras and their non-‐adivasi neighbours is symbiotic as well as exploitative. A lot of people depend upon traders to dispose of their produces and also for purchase of goods for daily requirements, including sacrificial animals. They are marketed in the Saora villages or at a local market. The Hill Saoras suffer exploitation by the non-
adivasi communities. The extent of exploitation is especially severe when some one is seriously unwell and a family borrows money from the Doms. In such a situation a Saora has to accept unreasonable terms and conditions to sell his produces at a meagre price. The converts are free from such a trap being better off and also due to their higher level of awakening.

III

Our study focuses on two vital points, namely, economy and health. For a self-sustained life, these two aspects refer to management of livelihood. Tribal economy is communitarian, subsistence and need based. It is mainly dependent upon forests and family labour. The cooperative labour organisation (Ansir) is still prevailing among the Hill Saoras and some other indigenous communities in India. This system reflects fellow-feeling among the Saoras. Dependence on forests despite of large-scale deforestation is quite strong. Minor and major forests produces are main sources of livelihood among the Hill Saoras.

The patterns of livelihood among the indigenous communities have changed considerably. Widening of market, individual ownership of land, individualised inheritance of the community property, professional diversification, differentiation of roles and economic activities are conspicuously present in the tribal society.

The economy and the sources of livelihood of the Hill Saoras are divided into two broad categories: (i) the indigenous and (ii) non-indigenous. The indigenous sources which emerged from without any outside interference or inputs includes collection of forest produces, swidden cultivation and terrace paddy cultivation and wetland agriculture. Such an economy is based on forests and the natural eco-system. The second refers to
the role of agencies in generation of livelihood sources. These include horticulture, wage labour (migration) and miscellaneous activities. Petty business, petty contractors or thekedars, service providers, mechanics, etc., are part of the non-indigenous system.

Our study shows that changes in the livelihood patterns of the Hill Saoras have occurred more often due to the pressure of external forces. However, the external forces have weakened the indigenous strength for survival and development.

Changes such as massive deforestation, population pressure, conversion, appropriation of indigenous sources by outsiders, etc., have diluted the traditional mode of livelihood. This is also a fact that the indigenous sources of subsistence are not sufficient for survival of the Hill Saoras. In such a situation, the new sources of livelihood have become inevitable.

Swidden as the main source of livelihood, supported by other sources, has been considerably decreasing. Massive deforestation and increasing pressure of population on productivity and land have seriously reduced the fertility of the swidden lands, due to continuous cultivation. Erosion of soil is another related problem. To check erosion and to discourage swidden cultivation by providing an alternative source of subsistence the development agencies (LSDA, ITDA) have been promoting horticulture. Huge patches of hill slopes are transformed into cashew fields. More than 50 per cent of the swidden lands are covered under cashew plantation. Consequently, the pressure on swidden lands has multiplied and the fallow period has nearly disappeared. The abandonment of recuperative cycle, which is due to the shortage of land and population explosion, has caused damage to the vegetation. Despite all this, the swidden is the main source of livelihood. The
people feel that the swidden cultivation is still providing a good support for their subsistence, especially in producing the staple crops like sorghum and red gram. Multi-varieties of crops which provided a balanced nutrition are seriously degenerated today. However, looking to the present trend, it is presumed that after ten years there will be no land left for cultivation on the hill slopes it would be covered by cashew plantation. Swidden as a way of life and sustainable practice due to its long fallow period with environmental concern is no more a reality. Its character as a sustainable way of life is missing today.

Horticulture has become as the most important substitution for the swidden cultivation. It has been adapted by the people because of its high economic and cash value. Almost 75 per cent of the homestead lands and more than 50 per cent of the hill slopes are being used for cashew cultivation. In comparison to other sources of subsistence the income from cashew-nuts is higher, and therefore, the present trend is to transform most of their land into cashew fields, despite the realisation that it has disastrous effect on fertility of the soil. As per the present trend and expectation of the people cashew plantation is more advantageous. It gives very good economic support to the Hill Saoras. However, no other crop can grow in cashew fields. It is realised that in long run this practice would have disastrous effect on soil, and disturb the natural eco-system as a whole.

The families who possess a very small size of the swidden land and do not have paddy or terrace land are the worst sufferers. They do not take the risk to convert their swidden land into cashew field. If they do it their families would starve. In case, they stop cultivation for last three years minimum out of five years, after two years of growth of a cashew plant there would be no space left. It may help once it starts giving production after five years. The
average families, who own a sizeable piece of paddy land and more swidden and homestead lands, are taking a due advantage of horticulture, because they manage their sustenance from paddy cultivation and surplus swidden and homestead lands. We have seen improvement in the life-style and economic conditions of average households as a result of cashew cultivation.

The government have promoted cultivation of fruit like coconut, pineapple, papaya, orange, lemon, guava, etc., including vegetables through horticulture programmes. The coconut is found to be unsuitable to bear fruit in the given climate. People are not showing much interest in other crops income from cashew-nuts is much more than other crops. However, people are cultivating the above crops in their swidden and homestead lands not for income but for their household consumption. It is observed that the Hill Saoras are today more interested to have better income generating programmes.

After examining horticulture as an alternative source of livelihood and perception of the people three important points emerged: (a) that the species selected for horticulture should give better economic support (b) the selected crops should not adversely affect soil fertility and ecological balance, and (c) there is a need to demonstrate cash value of particular species. Initially there was a lack of interest for cashew cultivation, and there was also resistance against plantation on the swidden land. However, once it started giving production on an experimental basis, the Hill Saoras realised its value and voluntarily accepted this innovation.

Managing their livelihood in difficult hilly terrains, the Hill Saoras have developed a suitable technology with continuous and age-old interaction relating to work and eco-system. Their technologies look very simple to the outsiders, but they are effective and sustainable in terms of the local
conditions and topography. When we carefully observe and analyse the use of technology and instruments in their agricultural practices in swidden and terrace lands we would not find a better alternative. Take, for instance, the swidden cultivation on rocky soil and slopes. Neither heavy implements for modern cultivation nor the ploughing methods would be of any use.

Secondly, the terrace lands are made in contour-bonding on the hill slopes. Even, on the terrace lands, the tractors and power tillers cannot be made reachable because the hill slopes with long height layers from top to bottom make it impossible.

The Hill Saoras have sustainable water management. The uniqueness of the Hill Saoras terrace technology is that though water flows from higher terraces to the lower ones, there have been no landslides or damage to the terraces. They are constructed in such a way that water beyond the capacity of the land and its embankment is released without any damage to the terrace. Terrace technology not only creates new lands and gives good production of staple crops, but it also checks erosion of soil. This is one method of innovation by the Hill Saoras, in due course of time, to check soil erosion with their continuous interaction and development of techno-cultural efficiency. It is also a way of making the balance between the increasing need of the population in the given natural eco-system.

The technology of terrace could be adopted in other hilly areas as well where massive deforestation has created soil erosion. It is advantageous for multiple crops and retention of soil fertility.

The Hill Saoras are still deriving their subsistence from the collection of forest produces-both minor and major produces. They have also realised the value of new crops for better economic support. The trees that are providing
better economic support from collection of minor forest produces are preserved with care.

Although there is a very close relationship between forests and livelihood of the people, they do not realise the importance of trees for their survival. For short-term financial gain tress are felled by the people with the support of local Mafias and petty traders. Awareness about preservation and conservation of trees and natural eco-system can put a check on environmental degradation. The Saora converts being educated are some extent united can play a positive role in this context.

The demand for cultivation of paddy became essential and increasing. Two crops of paddy are raised. With their surplus income from horticulture many of the Hill Saoras have purchased paddy land in plains. Two factors are important for this trend: (a) the fast diminishing of the swidden cultivation due to increasing plantation of cashew nuts, and (b) a shift in the food habits from sorghum and millets to rice eating.

Wage labour is divided into two categories: migrant or emigrant labour and native labour. The migration of Hill Saoras first began to Assam tea estate before Independence (1920), and later on to other places such as industrial and construction sites. The factors responsible for migration are massive deforestation, poverty, and better opportunities for livelihood. It is observed that the migrant families are better off both educationally and economically. Our case studies show that many of the well-educated Saoras belong to the first generation of migrants to Assam. The children belonging to theses families have got education beyond matriculation and few of them are educated up to masters are holding government jobs. The impact of the lifestyle of the migrants on others can be seen in steady migration of the notices to these areas.
Some opportunities for wage-earning are available locally as well. The construction of road is the main source for wage earning. The Saoras do not prefer to go to work in the mainstream Gunupur locality; however, they prefer to go outside the States. Income from labour locally does not give any substantial support for their survival.

The sources of income include petty shop-keeping, petty thekedari, service, mechanical jobs, etc. A very few people are engaged in such activities. Except some petty thekedars other jobs do not receive any visible attention.

IV

We have also analysed the notions and etiology of various illness and therapeutic practices among the Hill Saoras. Different notions of illness and cure are being observed by the Hill Saoras. The traditional notion of illness is associated with supernaturalism. It is believed that all the minor and major diseases and ailments are caused by ancestral and supernatural spirits (Sonnums). Celestial apparition, dead/ancestral spirits and sorcery are considered as the main causes of illness. The study is intended to examine two important objectives. Firstly, we have studied the element of supernaturalism in healing and its effect on livelihood and economy of the Hill Saoras. Secondly, we have tried to understand herbal and other forms of therapeutic knowledge and practices and their effectiveness in health care practices among the Hill Saoras. It is realised that frequent sacrifices of animals for healing have impoverished the people. The sacrifices have not only exerted economic pressure but have resulted into exploitation by the local traders from whom they buy animals for sacrificial purpose. This is found mainly among the non-converted Saoras.
The convert *Saoras* have different notion of illness. They believe in practical and natural line of action. Missionaries have created awareness among the converts regarding physiological causes of illness and practical medicines to cure diseases. Conversion has promoted practical health care services which have been slowly accepted by the people. The idea of modern allopathic medicine is now part of the existence of the converts. The supernatural devices are completely rejected and the converts seek modern allopathic treatment at the time of need. Besides, the traditional methods of herbal, bone and massage therapies are also well received by the convert *Saoras*.

Four indigenous therapeutic practices are prevalent among the non-convert *Saoras*: supernatural methods, witchcraft/sorcery, herbal and natural medicines, and bone and massage therapy. Although the remedies are very often attached with supernatural (magico-religious) methods, many cases have been reported using natural-herbal, bone and massage therapies. The bone setting and massage therapy are found to be most effective methods of treatment. Several famous medicine men have rich knowledge relating to pharmacopoeia.

The natural-herbal, bone and massage therapies have been widely accepted by the Hill *Saoras*. It has been observed that the people visit hospitals for allopathic treatment in cases of malaria, viral fever and cold and cough. The *Saoras* prefer injection (*Passi*) which they believe as the most effective way of getting quick relief. The Hill *Saoras* can be categories into three groups: (i) the purely traditional group having strong faith in supernaturalism and natural-herbal therapy, (ii) the people who rely on traditional cure, bone-setting and massage therapy as well as allopathic medicine, (iii) and the people who rely on allopathic medicine only.
The indigenous knowledge of medicine and healing practices possessed by the Hill Saoras has been found to be quite useful to cure some common as well as serious ailments. The belief in natural cause and cure of illness has slowly been taken into the system of medicine and healing practices. The most noteworthy fact is the acceptance of the natural-herbal and other native techniques of treatment by the convert Saoras. A numbers of converts are practitioners of indigenous healing practices. For instance, Rama Sabar and Jembru Gamang are among the most famous medicine men. They started their learning and practice while they were pursuing traditional faith. Today, some convert Saoras are learning therapeutic practices and pharmacopoeias from the senior medicine men. However, they are not quite enthusiastic like traditional medicine men as they do not wish to take this as a profession. Thus, certainly emphasis is now slowly shifting on naturalistic treatment of diseases than remaining the supernatural sacrificial healing.

Although supernaturalism /Sonnums are the main cause of illness believed by the non-converts, the physiological treatment is having a new perception of illness. Surprisingly, for instance, Ekep Dalbehera is not only a traditional Saora but a shaman as well who performs healing rituals. But as far as bone setting and massage therapy are concerned neither he is associated with any supernatural or ancestral cause nor with any healing ritual. This shows a change in the non-technical aspects of indigenous knowledge due to conversion which mostly relied on physical or technical aspects of therapy.

Some of the ingredients found today in the prescriptions of the medicine men have been taken from herbal medicines. For instance, a few regamars have prescribed black piper in their medicine which is not usually found among the Hill Saoras.
The pharmacopoeia knowledge among the Hill Saoras is transmitted from their forefathers and from the Hill Saoras of the neighbouring villages like Guma, Atarsing, and Jungjung. Some of the practitioners certainly acknowledge their learning from others, but not from those who are outside of their own community. Whatever may be the original source of knowledge of medicine, the Hill Saoras have so many numbers of medicine men. The medicinal plants are identified in the name of diseases and not by proper names. Some elderly medicine men even do not know the names of the plants. For example, Anjibore means Anji + boi + regam= barren+ woman+ medicine. Besides, the herbs and shrubs used for medicinal purposes are sufficiently available in this area and the practitioners have developed good mastery over them.

Those medicine men who are now converts have acquired traditional knowledge when they were non-converts. This is the reason that they understand the importance of the traditional knowledge in the field of medicine and health care. They are also promoting the knowledge they inherited from their forefathers by way of its application to the modern medicine. For instance, black pepper (the Saoras call Golmarisa), pimpali, etc., are mixed with other medicines. However, a very few medicine men are available in the Saora territory. Hence, the promotion and documentation of this knowledge is essential to save it from disappearance. After some time it would be a situation like 'after death comes doctor'.

Some advantages of indigenous natural-herbal medicine and bone and massage therapy of the Hill Saoras are as follows:

First, it gives a 'spirit of assurance' and faith as the practitioner is from his own community or family. No language and communication barrier exists. From convert or non-convert the patient gets a psychological support.
and assurance from the medicine man (regamar) who is from his own community. Interaction between the patient and the healers remains very cordial in such a situation in contrast to the modern hospitals.

Second, there is no demand of money by the traditional healer/medicine man. For the poor Saoras the traditional herbalist is a great advantage. Only token gift is given.

Third, medicines are available in the nearby forests. No money is required.

Fourth, help of the medicine man is easily available at a close-by place at any time.

The presence of convert Saoras with the non-converts is gradually reducing the tendency of ritual sacrifices. However, some sacrifices are still observed by the non-converts. This is evident from the visits of non-converts Saoras to hospitals or village practitioners due to realisation of positive results of modern medicine. For fever they consult the health worker or allopathic practitioner available in the village. The non-converts take medicines, but their preference is for injection (Passi) for any kind of illness whether it is stomach pain, fever, headache, or physical injury.

The elderly people are a rich source and stock of indigenous knowledge. However, there is an impending threat to this knowledge. Most of the younger people have converted to Christianity and they prefer have a modern way of life. As far as the transformation of indigenous knowledge of medicine is concerned the younger ones are not taking much interest to learn because they feel that they would not get substantial income from this for their livelihood. Among the Hill Saoras the traditional medicine men are not paid for their services. And the younger people are not quite comfortable to
interact with the older people due to generation gap. The mind-set of the young *Saora* converts is not conducive for continuity of the traditional healing system. The older people are non-converts. The converts feel reluctant to interact with the older people with regard to learning and acquiring of therapeutic and medicinal knowledge. It is observed and anticipated that after a few years the old generation medicine men would be quite rare and the knowledge may vanish. However, some enthusiastic convert young men are learning the herbal and medicinal practices with a view to provide services to their fellow community members.

V

Our study also shows perceptions of a good life and development in the context of supernaturalism, pragmatic and material aspects of life and development based on some case studies. We have analysed perceptions of individuals relating to self-sustained and happy life in the present circumstances. Philosophically, the perceptions of good life can be divided into two categories: traditional and modern which also refers to non-convert and convert *Saoras*. Although both the groups mentioned about a strict observation of supernatural and ethical guidance to lead a happy and good life, the non-convert *Saoras* are more rigid and vigorously follow religious and supernatural principles and ethics compared the converts. It is observed that the concept of a good and happy life and well-being is not the same among the *Saoras* and the non-*Saoras*. As an indigenous community the *Saoras* are still having a traditional mode of life and ancestral practices of cult. The Hill *Saora*’s concept of good life, happiness and prosperity is mainly revolves round the supernatural and ancestral spirits, which they call *Sonnums*. Both the *Saoras* - the non-converts and converts have some common perceptions relating to existential concerns.
The case studies of the convert Saoras indicate that good harvesting and sufficient food for the family, sufficient land for cultivation of paddy, good income, education and wisdom, are the main attributes of a good life. A son to take care of the parents in the old age and of course the mercy and blessings of the Prabhu (God) are other aspects of a good life. A convert refers to the Jesus Christ. A good communication and facility of roads, wisdom and awareness help to check exploitation.

We have also analysed the role of technical and non-technical aspects of indigenous knowledge in self-sustained life and community well-being. It has observed that the non-technical aspects are weakening with the influence of the practical aspects induced by the external as well as internal forces of change. To lead a good and prosperous life the emphasis is now shifting towards the material and practical achievements in place of supernatural and non-technical values.