Chapter X

Conclusion

I

The Orthodox Syrian Christians of St. Mary's Parish Church, Manarcudu are a community distinct from other castes and communities settled in the village. For religious organisation and in religious activities it is the concept of Orthodox Syrian Christian community rather than descent or kinship groups which provides the integrating factor. At the Sacraments which are socio-religious ceremonial occasions, the basis of kinship is clearly visible in the collection of people. The seven days long Lent and the associated Parish festival, on the other hand, is a kind of village fair with special shops and unusual facilities for marketing.

Many of the activities of Orthodox Syrian Christians of the village are centred round the Parish. The influence of the Parish in the life of the people is significant. It provides an association for the members for various purposes, religious as well as social. Its role as a socializing agent is unique. The Sunday school and the Sunday sermons are important from this point of view. At home reading of the Bible and corporate prayers for all the members of the household before going to bed are a part of the routine of daily life.
The church ceremonies, sacraments, and Lents have a significant place in the life of the Parishioners. Even though elaborate rituals are absent, the events in the life cycle of an Orthodox Syrian Christian are closely associated with the Parish. In short, the role of the Parish in maintaining the distinctive culture of the Orthodox Syrian Christians of Manarcadu is remarkable. Educational and welfare institutions run by the Parish and the weekly meetings of men and women also contribute to the sense of oneness of the community.

The Parish is a part of the larger Church (Sobha) organization. The priests of the Parish church, although rooted in the village, have had their religious training in the seminary at Kottayam. There are periodical visits and inspections by highpriests or Church officials.

In the basic economic areas of production, marketing involving both sale and purchase, and so on, the Orthodox Syrian Christians do not act on communal basis. They interact with other castes and groups of the village. Nor is there any communal basis in obtaining assistance in medical and legal fields; efficiency, quality, and reputation are the guiding factors in their choices. However, at the social level such as entertaining and inviting on socio-religious occasions they largely confine themselves to their own community.

In the Panchayat, the Orthodox Syrian Christians work as office bearers along with other Christians, the Nayer and the Isha. Primordial loyalties like religion and ethnicity have
an important place in the political arena at the local, state, and national levels. Although the constituency of Kottayam in which the village falls under, is supposed to be a stronghold of the communists, by and large the Orthodox Syrian Christians of Manarcadu have manifested themselves as supporters of the Congress (N). Only a few poor among them are inclined towards the communist party. In their voting behaviour the Orthodox Syrian Christians have been more or less a compact group. The priests have also tried to advise people in this respect.

The domestic and social fields provides the main scope for kinship among the Orthodox Syrian Christians. It must be noted that kinship links, however haphazardly, are certainly used for securing admission to schools and colleges, for obtaining freeships and for getting jobs and promotions, etc.

One of the distinguishing features of the community is the unusually high rate of literacy. However, in the village there are a few illiterate Orthodox Syrian Christians, men fewer than women. Being a predominantly agricultural community, land is the most valuable asset of the people and an important source of income for all, either exclusive or additional. In addition to cultivation people pursue trade and business, and engage themselves in salaried occupations or professions. As the village does not provide much opportunity for employment people go to distant places in search of job. There are many commuters who live in the village and work in neighbouring places. People belonging to families in Manarcadu are found in the various States of the country and even outside the country.
This trend of migrations appears to be on the increase. But many such people tend to return to the village, buy land—sometimes to supplement that which they already have as their share—and building a house settle down in the village.

II

Arranged marriage serves the requirement of marriage within the Orthodox Syrian Christian community. In some instances if the ancestry is Syrian Christian, there is an overriding of denomination or specific Church affiliation. Socio-economic considerations are also important in matrimonial connections. Payment of dowry by the girl's father to the boy's father is an important feature of marriage. The girl also receives some ornaments from her parents. The dowry is viewed as the girl's share in the father's property, and in moral and conventional terms a married daughter has no claims over her father's property.

A few significant features of marriage among the Orthodox Syrian Christians which have an important bearing on the family and kinship relations may be noted. Church marriage is the only accepted form of marriage and is indissoluble. Marriage between close relatives, including cross-cousin marriage, is forbidden. Marital connections between the same sets of kin-groups are also not appreciated. A marriage proposal may be initiated from either the boy's side or the girl's side. There is no status difference between the bride's party and the bridegroom's party. During or after the wedding there is no
giving or exchange of gifts between the two sets of affines. There are very few special roles assigned to particular relatives. At the wedding feast men and women are served food at the same time.

In the consciousness of the people a man acquires control and authority over the woman he marries. The tie between the two is very strong and independent of the families of the two. It is as the wife of the groom that the bride is ceremonially ushered into his house. Marriage is virilocal, and since the son does not establish an independent household on marriage, is patrilocal. The core of a coresidential unit is a group of males linked by ties of kinship traced through the father. The norms of household formation generate only a limited joint family household. In each generation there is an establishment of separate domestic groups by the sons one after another; only one son, usually the youngest continues to live with the parents along with his wife and children.

For the Orthodox Syrian Christian family the relationship between husband and wife appears to be basic. Along with this the relationship between the parents and children is also very important but has certain brakes. At this point distinctiveness of the family as a process among the Orthodox Syrian Christians may be understood by noting the following points:

1. It is considered natural for sons to establish separate households. "It is said that when a number of smaller plants grow out from a parental one, all of them will not get
enough sunlight, water, and manure. So the young plants have to be transplanted so that they will grow more healthily" (p.302). In traditional Hindu upper caste patrilineal setting, when a joint family splits it is talked about, and people involved are touchy about it. Not so among the Orthodox Syrian Christians. Formation of a new nuclear household within the same locality is not just a concession to human weakness for averting which situation deliberate efforts may be made to run down the conjugal tie.

2. The parents have the primary responsibility to bring up their children (p.303).

3. Husband-wife bond is primary. It has a religious basis and is clear from what the priest says at the time of wedding. "As they are joined together by God no man shall separate them because, that which is tied on the earth is tied in the heaven also. So a man shall leave his parents and he made one with his wife, and the two shall become one flesh" (p.175). This may be contrasted with the Hindu notion of the father-son tie according to which a son is essential for saving the father from going to hell. Even in a joint family household of the Orthodox Syrian Christians, the husband and wife are viewed as one entity. In the Hindu joint family, there is a continuous running down and suppressing of this relationship by various behavioural norms and distinctions drawn between those related by blood and those related by marriage. The idea, harboured and expressed in a Hindu family that a daughter-in-law is brought into serve the parents-in-law and other members of the family does not seem to operate in the Orthodox Syrian Christian Society.
4. In the family and kinship age, sex, and generation are important determinants of status but there is no specific low status associated with particular kinship statuses for understanding which some other principles have to be invoked. For instance, between a daughter and daughter-in-law who are similar in sex, generation, and also in age there is no disparity of status attached. It appears that the Orthodox Syrian Christian joint family has a distinctive character in terms of roles and relationships.

5. Although there emerge limited joint family households there is no religious significance of the joint family household, or the extended familial entity.

III

The most tangible aspect of the family is the household which can be submitted to concrete analysis and comparison, and the principles of organisation can be discerned. At the risk of repetition, therefore, some points may be enumerated.

The norms of household formation lead to the presence of fairly large percentage of joint family households. But it should be noted that most of them are lineal joint and only a few are lineal collateral family households. There is not a single case of collaterally joint household in the sample. This shows one of the important features of family organisation among these people. The joint living of brothers even after the death of the
father is not at all practiced. The stem family system is well operative and so we find high percentage of joint family households. The composition of families shows that the maximum lateral extension is upto first degree cousins and this indicates the presence of married brothers living together. But it should be noted that this is during the life-time of father and only in one case after the death of father two brothers live together that too with widowed mother.

We have seen that the situation in Manarcadu regarding the proportion of various types of households compares very well with the communities taken up by Kolenda as showing high proportion of joint family households. At any point of time, the existence of joint family households is the result of the operation of the following practices: (a) sons continuing to live with the parents for a few years after marriage; and (b) younger son or the only son or one of the sons settling down with the parents. A sizable number of supplemented nuclear family households are a result of the operation of the norm of care of the aged and the younger siblings.

Three demographic features have been mentioned by Mukherjee, namely, expectation of life, fertility rate, and higher age of effective marriage (1975, p.57). We have seen that expectation of life is relatively high (p.368), and from the average size of the nuclear family households one would say that the fertility rate is certainly not low. The effective age of marriage coincides with the actual marriage age which
is 23.28 for males. The average age at which the first child of a man is born is 27.20 (p.369). All these demographic features are conducive to a larger proportion of joint family households on the basis of the norms enumerated already. One more point which needs to be noted is that it is the youngest son who generally lives with the parents. Ordinarily, the age gap between the parents and the youngest son should be fairly big, and hence not for many years would the parents live in the joint family situation with their youngest son.

The composition of households clearly shows the patrilineal (though of low generation depth) character of the domestic group. Barring the uxorial households except in two cases we do not find any non-agnatic cognates or affinal relatives staying in the households in the sample.

'Family' has also to be considered in the extra-territorial, or in non-commensal, and non-co-residential context. In terms of privileges and obligations, and psychological solidarity, the notion of familial grouping wider than the household is applicable largely to the households of brothers and father. Existence of a joint or supplemented nuclear unit comprising one son and his conjugal family along with parent(s) (and may be younger siblings) provides a kind of main gathering place for other units. This is often referred to as 'our house', for it was here that the men now operating as the heads of separate households have lived in their childhood. Those with salaried occupations outside the village or state are expected
to, and consciously do contribute towards the fulfilment of solid needs like marriage, education of younger siblings, building a house and buying land.

Even at this level sometimes closeness can generate quarrels. Indeed, the texture of kin network and the strength and weakness of various links often depends upon the relative status of husband's and wife's households, their own place in their respective households, and the personalities of the two. Physical distance between maternal and paternal kin from one's own household is also a contributing factor.

Beyond the groups of close patrilineal, patrilineal links are recognized, but concrete relations are dependent on factors like vicinity, and interpersonal relations, greater flexibility characterizing the relations. Being an agricultural community, locality does give a certain identity to patrilineal. The term Purvika refers to patrilineal ancestors but patrilineage as such is not clearly recognized nor is it operative. It does not incur any common death or birth pollution, and there is no religious reiteration of common descent.

The patterns of visiting and attending weddings and other ceremonies clearly shows the importance of the maternal side and of the female agnates. A daughter goes back to her parents for confinement. The kinship terminology and kinship behaviour also indicates that the maternal kin are not considered inferior or less close.

For the Orthodox Syrian Christians, kinship provides a source of support, guidance, recognition of individual
achievement, and gives a certain sense of belongingness, while and security. While acting as a buffer between an individual and household and the outside world, it evinces considerable flexibility. In household formation and in the relationship between brothers and father and son, a certain patrilineal emphasis is operative but there is no strong emphasis on the patrilineage and patriline as such. Further, there is no distinction between bride-givers and bride-takers, nor is there a custom of preferential marriage between certain types of relatives. These are some of the important features which make their kinship system much less oppressive.

IV

We need comparative data regarding family organization and kinship relationship among the Orthodox Syrian Christians of the urban areas of Kerala. Kurien's (1961) comparison of rural and urban family among the Orthodox Syrian Christians is based on the data for a rural population in Kerala and urban population in Bombay city. This perhaps explains the contrast between the two in terms of family composition. In Bombay the sample population must have been largely of those who were recent migrants, migrating as individuals and then establishing a nuclear family or migrating along with their nuclear family members. It is observed that in urban areas of Kerala, the same norm of household formation as of the rural areas is operative; but the substitution by another son for the youngest son may be more; and in some situations all the sons may go away,
for the problem of unemployment within the State is very acute. In such a situation the parents prefer to remain in their own house. In the village cultivation and some other occupations like salaried job, professional practice, or trade and commerce function as complementary to one another and hence can sustain a joint family household, generally of father and son. But in the town there may be only a little garden cultivation and that too only as a secondary activity. The Orthodox Syrian Christian values—essential middle class values—and a house and a garden, besides other valuables and cash, along with the strength of the norm of care of the parents in old age can be powerful incentives to maintain a joint family household. The church in the urban areas too has an important role to play in the maintenance of the distinctive culture of the Orthodox Syrian Christians. It is, however, likely that there is greater substitution of the youngest son by some other son for living with the parents. Indeed this trend is visible in the village also. The youngest son is more likely to go in for higher and specialized education and subsequently to take up a job away from the village.

It is also seen that in urban areas, the father is generally not as authoritarian as in rural areas. Further, since the patrilineal kin are not localized, there is a greater opportunity to exert one's choice in relationships on both the paternal and maternal sides.

It is difficult to assess the degree of change in the family organization of the Orthodox Syrian Christians of Manarcaudu. It is often argued that absorption into market
oriented occupations and salaried occupations, and diversity of occupations among the family members tend to take the family towards nuclear pattern. But it is found that cultivation and other occupations often become complementary, one bringing in food and the other bringing in cash. All the members have a stake in land. Often the asset of the younger and older people are complementary to each other, especially among those who are poor but are not completely propertyless. A father has some economic power in the form of land property, house etc., and often expertise also. The son who lives with the parents gets the advantage of a house and extra land but has to look after the parent(s) till death.

The elders in the village often say that the new boys try to separate from the parents too soon after marriage, and that in their times it was not so. It is difficult to assess this statement, unless generation-wise data on the number of years of joint living for a sizeable population is obtained for the village. It has been found out that cultivator sons tend to separate from their cultivator fathers earlier than those sons who are engaged in other occupations. As indicated earlier, such a person find it a more convenient arrangement that the father looks after the land and he earns cash. Even after separation such a son's wet land is often cultivated by the father.

Although not much change is manifest in the compositional aspects of the household, some cannot be said about the ethos, the interpersonal relations, and behavioural patterns. The
old image of the father as a patriarch and an authoritarian figure has changed considerably, particularly in relation to earning sons. There seems to have come about some change in man-woman relationship. It is recognized that a woman can earn independently; it is not regarded as against a man's prestige that his wife should work. A woman's position improves in the family if she is earning. This is so in relation with her in-laws also.

Malaradu is still away from industrialization. Education, communication facilities, commuters, and the migrants who work in towns within the State or outside the State constitute some of the urban influences over the villages people. But it is doubtful if these influences can turn them away from kinship obligations in general and from the limited joint family household in particular. Perhaps because the oppressive character of the Hindu joint family does not manifest itself among the Orthodox Syrian Christians, the reactions of the new generation cannot be very strong. Moreover, land still retains its value as the most important source of income.