CHAPTER – VIII
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The present study is an attempt to examine the traditional and transitional modes of life of the Sugalis in Rayalaseema region, which is one of the largest scheduled tribes residing in Andhra Pradesh in order to understand the processes and directions of change, by using historical and ecological approach. Sporadic distribution of Sugali tribe is to be seen all over the country. They are known by different names in different parts of India as the Lamani, Labhani, Lambadi and Sugali in Maharashtra, Karnataka, Gujarat and South India and as Banjara in North India.

Andhra Pradesh in south India has the highest tribal concentration with a population of 50.24 lakh (2001 census) and there are 35 notified Tribes in the state. The Sugalis are concentrated in Anantapur, Chittoor, Kadapa, and Kurnool districts of Rayalaseema region in the state of Andhra Pradesh. The Sugalis, the most important segment of the Scheduled Tribes, constitute about 6.59 per cent of total population as against the national average of 8.2 per cent. The Sugalis live in countless settlements called ‘Thanda’. The culture and dialect of the Sugalis indicate that they had come from Northern-India as they speak a language similar to Gujarati. Their folklore depicts them to be the descendents of the Rajputs. They strongly believe that their blood is that of Rajputs. They strongly believe that their blood is that of Rajputs and cite their clans as being related to them. The Sugali men are muscular, of medium height with generally
a Rajput-like countenance. They are a strong and virile race with fair skin and often with light eyes. They are strong and energetic and capable of enduring long and fatiguing marches. The women wear a skirt of coars cotton prints, rich in embroidery work and hung from the waist in sample folds. A bodice or choli with long sleeves and tastefully embroidered infront and on the shoulders, covers the bosom and is tied at the back by bands, the ends of which are ornamented with cowries, beads and gaudy coloured fassels of cotton.

According to history of Sugalis, they were nomadic mercantile traders and traded with Marwaris, Armenians, Beluchis and Bhils. They not only supplied food grains to the armies of Afghans and Moghuls during their war in South India but also served other South India rulers including the British and French. They have become semi-nomadic, gradually settling down with the assistance given by the State and Central Governments by preserving their original traits.

At present Sugalis in Rayalaseema region follow varied modes of living such as pastoralism, agriculture labour and fire-wood selling. In spite of wide differences in the past, community life between Sugali and other agricultural Hindu communities, now they share many common features viz., celebration of festivals, worship of Gods and goddesses pursuing agricultural practices etc.

The present study sought to understand the historical process not only the socio-economic change in the Sugali tribe but also their political and religious life. To study this objective, the researcher has depended on both the primary and secondary sources. Documentary evidences pertaining to the early culture of the Sugali tribe together with the primary sources obtained from the Sugali settlements (thandas) gives an evidence of change in this tribe. In order to identify the tradition and transition of Sugalis in Rayalaseema region a careful observation and interview has been carried out in all the settlements in the region and has found that people in some of the settlement are
semi-nomadic pastorals and the rest show a tendency to become agrarian. From the two diversified economic groups, the researcher carefully selected purposively eight settlements representing each group for an intensive study. The settlements which are selected for the study are representative settlements of all the Sugali settlements in Rayalaseema region.

The present study has been a general description of the Sugali tribe mainly based on participant observation and interview the method. Since the Sugalis lead a semi-nomadic and semi-agrarian life, the sophisticated methods of study were found to be unsuitable. Important aspects of the Sugali social structure and process cannot be known completely through a questionnaire or survey research method, but will be understood only by close observation and careful scrutiny.

The Sugali during their nomadic days, were completely dependent on trade and transportation of food-grains and other essential commodities transporting them from one place to another places on the oxen and bullock carts, considered it as their primary occupation upto 1850 when the British India introduced mechanized transportation in 1850's which gave a set back to the traditional transporters of Indian sub-continent. With the breakdown of the traditional occupation of Sugali the trade and transportation have no longer provided them with the basic necessities. With the passage of time there are a number of factors such as deforestation, resulting in insufficient cattle fodder for the cattle, implementation of reserved forest rules, death of cattle due to drought and fatal diseases and occasional visits the peasant communities forced the pastoral Sugali further to adopt agriculture for their livelihood. After Independence, the Republic of India implemented various welfare programmes in order to bring the Sugali tribe into the mainstream of national life which played an effective role in bringing some changes in their social and economic life.
The Sugali life in an amalgamation of practices of North Indian origin and later South Indian influences seem quite a plausible explanation of the different changes in their life style. It can be seen in respect of kinship pattern, women’s dress, folk-lore, moral codes and religious beliefs as mainly indigenous while most of the Sugali variants of South Indian culture, linguistic borrowing into their dialect from the regional languages, economic pursuits, modification in the dress can be traced to the local South Indian influences. But the acculturative influence of the South is seen less clearly in the social organization of Sugali.

Now-a-days the social life of Sugali is typical neither of North Indian nor of South Indian. Elements from both the primary and secondary sources have been integrated in line with their chequered history. The final form that now prevails differs considerably from either, even in respect where the origins were similar. From this is follows that on simple replacement model of acculturation revealed in the changes of Sugali kinship system. The social interaction and economic co-operation of the Sugali with the neighbouring peasant Hindu-communities forged a few bonds which exist still between Sugali settlements and multi-caste Hindu villages. Though the social organization of the Sugali and the non-Sugali of the region have certain differences, the marriage system, the levirate, the custom of wailing, the bride price, bride-service and a district kinship terminology remains intact and unaffected by the multi-caste kinship terminology. After settling down in South India, the Sugali adopted few South Indian kinship terms. They have developed an increasing dependence on the local non-Sugali communities by taking up non-Sugali as share croppers, tenants, wage labourers and attached agricultural labourers. This is characterized by the Sugali’s desire to maintain ‘Jajmani’ relationships with different artisan and service castes living in the neighbouring caste villages.
The introduction of mechanized transportation by the British in India and this brought changes in their economic life, further brought some other changes in their social life of Sugalis. The changes which occurred in the institution of marriage is clear in evidence of the adoption of new cultural traits. The Sugali have not lost some of their age-old customs and traditions but still preserved their own regulations in selection of their marriage partners such as tribal endogamy, sub-tribe endogamy, surname exogamy, payment of bridge price, now, slowly they have developed preferences for cross-cousin marriages. To-day the educated and moderate Sugali have started celebrating their marriages in a more or less similar ways as that of agricultural communities characterized by tying of 'Tali', sanskritic rituals and presence of Brahmin priest and taking dowry which has a customary practice in the agricultural caste Hindus.

Of all the changes which have been brought out in the Sugali life, the changes in their economic organization are remarkable. It has to be admitted that the Sugali had travelled a long way from mercantile nomadism to pastoralism which, in turn, is followed by agriculture as their main and subsidiary sources of livelihood. Those Sugali who failed to adopt themselves to a settled way of life and peasant mode of living have been forced to dispose of their pastoral property. Acquisition of agricultural land and adoption of cultivation by the Sugali families is undoubtedly a major stride in their life ways. Now the Sugali has been practicing agriculture either as main or secondary occupation, considering themselves as full-fledged peasant caste groups. Acceptance of agriculture as their means of subsistence has forced them from suppliers of food-grains and pastoralists to rural peasants.

During their nomadism, the Sugali accepted the over-all suzerainty of native kings, though most of their day-to-day life was ordered by themselves under the control and guidance of their chief of the settlement called Naik, assisted by the Gor-Panchayat. When they
were nomadic transporters, the Naik of the settlement was all powerful politically and directed the economic activities of the ‘thanda’ (a moving camp). The Naik will decide when to shift a camp and undertake transport work not only for the armies but also for the civilians and he also orders when to set out on banditry, hunting and so on. In short, it was an economy controlled by the community through the Naik and his council of elders (Panch). After the breakdown of their traditional nomadic economy into settled life the hold of Naik and his council of elders over the community have slackened. The introduction of the three-tier Panchayat Raj system in 1950’s and the development of increasing economic and political contacts with other advanced castes have given room for non-Sugali leaders to influence the traditional Panchayat.

In the olden days the status of Naik was hereditary and was based on tribal egalitarianism, in the sense that he was like any other Sugali in the settlement and did not belong to a separate higher ruling class. But today, the position of the Naik is same but the efficiency of the Naik is linked to his economic position. Hence whenever a Naik is from the poor family, he does not enjoy real power and he is recognized as a Naik dejure. In case of a Naik from the rich family it is different and he enjoys defacto powers over the settlement and its people. From the days of their closely directed economic, political and religious life in the pre-British period, it is a great change for the Sugali to settle down and adopt agriculture and wage labour which in turn, have necessitated modifications in their social organization, polity and religion. The changes in their economy which necessitated increased contact with others have together greatly modified the Sugali belief and rituals. As a result, the community celebrations and rituals are becoming lesser, while family level observances are increasing. The role of religion in the Sugali life is not limited to the religious belief, but it is related to other aspects of their life as well. When the Sugali and its associated social practices changed the
supporting religious beliefs, the value system also underwent modifications. While many traditional ceremonies emphasizing rains, fertility and protection against ravages of epidemics have lost much of their former significance owing to economic changes, culture contact and widening worldview, nevertheless, it is also true that these same ceremonials still retain their old charm.

A close observation of these ceremonials indicates several levels of persistence of some of the past ceremonies and beliefs, as well as acculturation borrowings. While the Sugali peasantisation and the consequent increased impact of their earlier largely animistic religion, it is also true that, by tolerating the merger of certain rites of the Hindu festival calendar, these same animistic rites are being perpetuated. Thus, rather than further reducing the traditional rituals and beliefs, it is apparent that the influence from the Hindu high castes on the Sugali has been to further Hinduise them and to widen their ceremonials and belief systems. The borrowing of myth, rituals and ceremonies by an erstwhile animistic group seems to have been more rapid only in the last hundred years. And their settling down is itself a reflection of the gradual lessening of the rigour of Hindu castes hierarchy because of overall changes in the expanding economic system of the country. The emulation of high caste behaviour as a mechanism of sanskritization was far more difficult in the past, when the norms of caste-hierarchy were more rigid.

Since 1950 when India became Republic, the Government has started to introduce welfare scheme to uplift the tribes and bring them into the mainstream of life. This induced many changes in the life styles of the Sugali tribe. Even though the voluntary factors such as acculturation, prestige, status evaluation, a variety of endogenic forces are responsible in bringing remarkable changes in the Sugali life. Induced factors such as various welfare programmes, democratic elections, means of communication, education etc., are aimed at bringing changes in the Sugali community.
The efforts of the democratic governments in bringing the Sugali tribe into the main stream of national life have helped them in a number of ways. The Government agencies have implemented welfare schemes in constructing pucca-houses, distribution of plough bullocks and bullock-carts, cross-breed bulls, sheep, milch animals, digging of irrigation wells, bore-wells, for purchasing of oil engines, electric motor engines and arrangement of crop loan etc., the Sugali welcomed all these benefits to adopt themselves to the changing pattern of life. And other developmental programmes such as education, health and sanitation were enthusiastically received. The Sugali have developed an interest in education which is a key factor towards their modernization.

The implementation of welfare programmes suffered for want of committed Government officials and the exploitation by their own community leaders who impeded to the overall development of the more and more advantages of the welfare schemes, whereas the illiterate and poorer section of the Sugali are afraid of even approaching the officials concerned. If some of the Sugalis, when approached the officials were often ignored which, in turn, developed in them a sense of distrust and aversion for the government. However, developmental programmes are being implemented to raise their standard of living and accelerated their empathic ability. Even so the welfare schemes also help them to come into contact with outside world. The Sugali also have showed a promising sign of progressive outlook with a receptive attitude for new economic traits, such as agriculture, agriculture labour. Now they are as prompt as those in agricultural castes and have proved themselves and since that they are comparatively less tradition-bound.

In the historical perspective it may be said that the Sugali tribe have moved a full circle. They were said to be descended from the Rajputs and so they must have had a caste. When they left their homes after the fall of Chittoragarh, to the Mohammedan rulers, they
became nomadic traders and suppliers to armies in the South and followed animism. Now, with sedentarisation they have again acquired a caste status by adapting the economic characteristics of agricultural castes in South India.

CONCLUSIONS

The socio-economic life of the Sugali has undergone a major change. The economic change has been the primary, though not the only factor in bringing socio-cultural change and the economic factor has been influenced by cultural factors. Even the factors like increased cultural contact with advanced communities and the adoption of sedentary way of living, were results of historical processes and economic necessities. Of all changes the economic change is the very significant factor in total change of the Sugali. The changes from their habitat from Marwar in Rajasthan to South of Andhra Pradesh, their mode of residence from nomadism to settled living, their strong communal solidarity, increasing contacts with the non-Sugali cultivators resulting in changes in their socio-economic activities, values, aspirations and developmental programmes have played a significant role in bringing about the socio-cultural change in this tribe.

During their nomadism, they were practicing transportation as their occupation, had an integrated culture at a tribal, animistic level, although they were exposed to economic contact with the political subjugation to the advanced non-Sugali in the pre-colonial and colonial rule. The breakdown of the traditional economy of the Sugali began around in 1850's when they lost their only avocation and as they could not find alternative occupation immediately, they came to experience acute poverty which forced them to imbibe criminal propensities, illicit distillation of liquor, firewood selling etc.
The Sugali, when they were nomadic traders and transporters, were resourceful, well-organized and hard-working people. But after sedentarization, they have lost some of these qualities. These changes led to the disorganization of their social system, which made them frustrated and discontented. Once a proud community, they have now become disheartened and demoralized, consequent upon transition in their economic life. From the beginning of the 20th century, the Sugali have been adapting themselves to new and somewhat satisfying occupations such as agriculture, labour and to some extent government services. With the introduction of the formal education system by the government the schools which were introduced and managed by the non-Sugali teachers, did not care for the culture and problems of Sugali. Those Sugali who began to leave the settlements in search of the economic traits were completely freed from the domination of the traditional Naik, Gor-Panchayat and the religious leaders of the community. And those who stayed back in the settlements adopted agriculture and wage labour, and proceeded to claim their independence from the local community opinion that had functioned as a reinforcing agent of traditional mores. When the power of the Gor-Panchayat lost, the influence of traditional economy and social sanctions also declined.

The change in their traditional occupation and the waning influence of Naik and religious syncretism do not seem to have changed other features of their culture, such as their clannishness, kinship system, strong awareness of their separate cultural identity. After settling down especially after adoption of agriculture and labour represents an advanced level in the sequential process of socio-cultural development, characterized by peasant economy and peasant culture and semi-autonomous polity. The problem of maintenance of social and cultural identity forms an integral part of the social process, because when a society changes, owing to induced or voluntary factors and specially when it is thrown into increased
contact with others, it has to change some of its elements while preserving others from social and cultural identity.

Since medieval times the maintenance of social and cultural identity became a conscious and a real problem for the Sugali as a result of change in their original habitat from Marwad region in the North-West Rajasthan to the South of Andhra Pradesh in South India. It is because of the necessitated by the change of occupation, and the need of the rulers of the Delhi who invaded the Deccan with the services of the Sugali. After sometime though the invaders returned to the North India but some of the Sugali did not go back to the North but continued to carry on their pretty trade and transport, business on their own. Subsequently they were also employed to render their transport services to the rulers of the Deccan. With the advent of British and implementation of mechanized transportation started the breakdown of their traditional occupation and they were forced to change their mode of residence from nomadism to a settled one, thereby making contacts with the non-Sugali peasant communities more frequently. This historical association explains the far-reaching effect of the South Indian socio-cultural environment on the manners, customs, practices and beliefs of Sugalis. Inspite of all these interactions the Sugali have not completely lost their cultural identity. Whether as a nomadic tribe in the past, or as recently settled peasants and wage labourers, the Sugali distinguish themselves as a separate community in the settled region. The Sugali have been preserving ethnic exclusiveness and socio-cultural identity in terms of manners, the dress and ornaments of their women, a common dialect of their own, a stronger feeling of communal solidarity and identity bordering on clannishness, though they have frequent interactions with the neighbouring Hindu peasants. To sum up, the Sugali tribe, though they have frequent interactions with the caste Hindus, still maintain their unique identity despite so many changes which were
affected in their economy and in the society by acculturation and induced factors.

Religion and culture of Sugalis are linked to each other and most discussions on their culture tend to dwell mostly on customs, traditions, dress, dance, music and exotic rituals. Their values are what make their lifestyle the only truly sustainable one in the world. The whole of Sugali society is built on a rock solid foundation of equality. People are given respect and status according to their contribution to society but only where they are performing that particular function.

Sugalis characteristically adorn themselves with many silver, white metals or brass ornaments ranging from hair clips and combs to necklaces, shirt rings, armlets, bangles, waist belts and anklets. Their finely embroidered caps, mirror work embroideries and distinctive free styles consisting of innumerable tiny braids and ornamental hair clips have offered ideas for the designs of the “ethnic chic” style of urban fashions.

Collective consciousness is the characteristic feature of Sugali social life. Collective consciousness otherwise known as conscience collective is the shared feelings and impulses which are experienced in their simplest form within an excited crowd. Transformation of Sugali society from simple to compound social system did not come about through the actions of individuals, but rather through collective processes. Inhabitation of the whole community in a separate territory called ‘Thanda,’ itself denotes the collective consciousness of the Sugalis. As the territorial segments of their compound society expand, so they come into competition for resources and resolve this competition by means of complementary economic specializations. They are very conscious of their separate cultural identity as well as of the need to preserve and protect it from being engulfed by the regional dominant castes, though because of the changing circumstances, they
are forced to borrow a few items, while some times have been borrowed voluntarily. The custom of dowry-giving is borrowed from the non-Sugalis, and it has its evil effect on the parents of the girl child, who are unable to get their daughter married. The system of jangad and the admission of outsiders through marriage, purchase and adoption reveal the fact that the Sugali society is in open society, in which, the rules are flexible to the admission of outsiders.

With the passage of time, Sugalis have changed their beliefs and practices related to magic and medicine. Now-a-days they do not resort to magic as often as they used it. This may be due to better exposure to the outside world and frequent use of modern medicine. Sugalis at present do not consider divination as a universal remedy to their ailments. Now, they think that modern medicine is far more effective than the traditional one. The limited number of patients who utilize the services of the traditional practitioners indicates the waning influence of magico-religious practices.

One of the tasks of the Gwor Panchayat indeed has been to give expression to a public opinion reflecting both the moral and legal values. The existence of the Gwor Panchayat manifest the innate and intense desire of the people to maintain effective social control and jural order as also to resolve all kinds of conflicts in the society by peaceful means. The Sugalis now become aware of the problems arising out of modernization. Rules of exogamy and endogamy are therefore even more rigidly interpreted and jurally implemented. It is thus observed that in this relatively homogeneous tribal society, the people continue to handle effectively the disputes arising out of claims of land and other compulsions in a difficult physical environment by adhering firmly to pre-existing principles and rules of agnation, descent, locality and tribal law.

Since the advent of independence, emancipation of the tribal community has become the constitutional responsibility of
Government of India. The government has to take all necessary steps to facilitate the integration of Sugali children into government schools. The developmental programmes launched by the government have to reach the doorsteps of the thandas and to ensure that nomadic Sugali have the same rights as the rest of the population enjoy with regard to social security provisions and medical care. For this, there is need for strengthening the Tribal Welfare Department with high allocation of funds as well as appointing sincere and dedicated officers those who have zeal and commitment to serve. The Government also should recognize the need to protect, promote and preserve the cultural identities of the tribes, instead of simply reducing to dumb uniformity in the name of bringing them to the mainstream of national life.