CHAPTER - 8
CONCLUSION

The concluding observations highlight the holistic pattern of continuity and change along with the associated problems of adaptations and social adjustment among the migrant Tibetans in north India. The processes of continuity and change among the migrant Tibetans may appear contradictory but are in a sense complementary to each other. This has been highlighted in the study.

The study focussed upon five settlements of Tibetans in north India on the basis of empirical observations. It was discerned that though the Tibetans have dispersed virtually all over India they have established their citadel in the northern belt of the country. It is here that His Holiness the Dalai Lama has seated his political office in exile. The socio-economic and political life of the migrant Tibetans is regulated on the basis of instructions issued from this quarter. The process of social change as narrated in the ethnographic account would be viewed in the present context. The nature of social change as observed among the immigrant Tibetans in India highlights the accommodative and adaptive attitude, necessary for their political reckoning. This model defends the notion of tradition as propounded by Shanklin (1981). The emerging trend which is coming up gradually with the incorporation of foreign elements over a long period of time without losing its core elements supports the conceptual model of Redfield which is inevitable in the process of social change in any society (Shanklin, 1981). Singer interprets the context as "cultural metabolism" and "cultural protoplasm". He talks about gradual imbibing of foreign cultural elements which breaks into finer molecules to be utilised, in the sustained struggle for survival. However, the present study does not support another interpretation whereby he
comments that the imbibed foreign elements get transformed into incigenous form during the process of adaptation and the end product of this is called "cultural protoplasm" (Singer, 1972). The distinctive nature of foreign elements is not so easily absorbed by the indigenous cultural elements nor do they acquire the attributes of indigenous cultural traits, yet they offer ready reckoning, easy acceptance and at times, make them appear a part of the indigenous cultural complex.

The above mentioned viewpoint may be pertinent in supporting that the Tibetan youth are accommodating themselves to modern ideologies with little psychological or cultural adjustment. The explanation for the smooth adjustment with the foreign ecological, cultural and social atmosphere in the host country is primarily due to their desire to change, adjust and accommodate themselves with the changing environs. The cultural heritage of India and the social structure with its flexible properties enables them to modernise without renouncing their cultural heritage. They are compelled to take up new occupations because their traditional occupations and ideologies would not be rewarding in the host country. Apparently the acceptance of new values with a conscious preservation of traditional social and cultural identities may not fit into the classic framework of modernism but represent which for the lack of better expression may be called a transitional phase.

This historical diachronic view of processes of social change as experienced by immigrant Tibetans in India can be correlated with Kroeber's interpretation emphasising that the total transformation of cultural pattern and styles can take place with the incorporation of new cultural elements (Kroeber, 1963). Empirical observations made in preceding chapters suggest that the traditional institutions of family, kinship, marriage and religion have undergone significant changes in
India. These changes have come about not necessarily of choice but have often been forced due to economic and socio-political compulsion of adjustment. The traditional Tibetan households used to comprise of a large joint family sharing hearth and common economic resources. But in contemporary situation the migrant Tibetans are unable to sustain the native pattern of households. The family now became a nuclear household comprising of parent and their siblings. The frequently discussed practice of Tibetan polyandry has almost disappeared from amongst the migrant populations. In native homeland Tibetans practised polyandry to keep agricultural holdings intact or to avert division of property in a patriarchal society. In India Tibetans are marginal farmers hardly ever owning more than one acre of land. Thus the issues of inheritance and division of property are of little consequence. In addition to this, the migrated Tibetans are often moving from place to place looking for additional income or new jobs. Under these circumstances they can neither maintain joint households nor could practice fraternal polyandry in India.

The intimate emotional bonds prevalent in traditional Tibetan households are gradually becoming less cohesive. Family, being the primary unit of every social structure when subjected to immense pressure of change, becomes a motivation for bringing about changes in the other spheres of social life. It was observed that in the refugee communities the percentage of nuclear family units was large than the joint-type ones.

It is, of course, understandable that the situation could not have been different. Firstly, it was in very rare cases that whole families were able to make their way out of Tibet. In the early stages of refugeehood many desperate men formed new marital alliances and in most of the cases without any religious or social formalisation. It could
be said that in a large majority of cases the family cycle started afresh after migration into India. Secondly, the economic basis of the joint family could not be recreated in India even in the agricultural settlements because the size of land holding allotted to individual families was too small to support large a families. Thirdly, the dwelling space provided to a household was sufficient only for a small family. Fourthly, the increased mobility common to people of non-agricultural occupations, who also came over to India along with the others, acted as a strong deterrent against formation of large joint families. The economic forces of the family rooted in joint inheritance have drastically weakened in the new set-up. The polyandrous family has become very rare and there is greater freedom of choice in contracting matrimonial relationships. Simultaneously the family has lost many of the traditional functions. Another remarkable feature observed was that to offset and fully absorb the decreasing role of the family, the community has created a whole range of welfare institutions.

There is a growing trend among the Tibetan youth to set themselves up in independent professions and occupations, which has led to the loss of parental authority over their children, calling the parents old-fashioned, ignorant and uneducated persons unable to guide, is another ominous sign of change. This is one of the aspects of change about which the older generation is greatly apprehensive; and for which they frequently express their feelings of emotional insecurity. Another areas where the Tibetan respondents perceived a marked change was the status of women in Tibetan refugee community. The stock reply was that women now tended to treat themselves as equal to men although there was no overt social movement for equality of women with the menfolk. The emerging Tibetan elite now attaches much value to the upliftment of women. The new Constitution of Tibet
promulgated by His Holiness the Dalai Lama, proclaims equality between sexes. In addition to these formal changes, at the people’s level, several factors have been identified, which signal changes in the status of women. First and foremost, at present almost every Tibetan woman is a working woman and only very few families have the level of income at which women could become labour surplus. Educated women in exile are given opportunities to work in the Tibetan Administration and the various service institutions controlled by it. Whatever be the attitude of the older generation, the new generation that has grown up in India share the modern attitude towards women’s status. So it may be justifiably presumed that the working and educated women enjoy a relatively high status in the uprooted Tibetan community. In spite of regional differences in the position and privileges of Tibetan women, as reported by the respondents, it is a fact that in their new setting, with an increased participation in economic activities, higher level of literacy and social mobility, and with the loosening of the traditional hierarchy, the Tibetan woman has come to acquire a higher status and rights. On her part she has become more conscious of her rights. She is set upon to acquire a higher position than before and even to brush shoulders with the educated Tibetan males. The rising Tibetan woman now views the problem of her status from the liberal value-frame and fully articulates the need for equality of sexes.

The empirical investigation, also revealed a positive attitude among the migrant Tibetans to preserve their institutionalised education through the establishment of schools, monasteries in the rehabilitated centres where the authority provides various incentives including food and healthcare. Moreover, they accommodate the children of destitutes and the orphans too by providing all the facilities
including medicine leading to rising trend of literacy among the immigrant Tibetans belonging to new generation than the older one. Tibetan youth are gradually taking to higher learning and are constantly seeking change in the traditional occupational structure. The farm holdings having become meagre are only suitable to serve as kitchen gardens. Therefore, majority of the Tibetan youth are looking for worthy opportunities in the sphere of trading and marketing. While analysing the structural conditions for the change which the Tibetan refugee community is undergoing, it is necessary to highlight the role of the new generation that has grown up outside Tibet. The study has revealed some rapidly emerging inter-generational differences among the Tibetans, which is a well known, universal phenomenon faced by almost all rapidly modernising industrial societies. Though the traditional Tibetan society barely had any concept of youth as a social category, there is now a distinct youth sub-culture emerging in the new setting. The emerging Tibetan youth, as can be clearly seen, are foremost and most vocal in questioning the relevance of the traditional structure and set-up. One may call them the dissidents both in thought and action. The younger generation Tibetans exhibit attitudes and values different from those manifested by their elders with regard to family and marriage, religion and politics. There is also a perceptible divergence in their life styles.

The economic constraints of the migrant Tibetans also support the mobile business with no requirement of formal licence or permission, income tax and establishment cost. The study also highlights that traditional monastic authority structure which had enormous powers. Having lost their land holdings, the monastery administration has also lost its dommative economic and political power over the Tibetans. They are now sustaining their administrative...
Among the Tibetan refugees income rather than wealth has become the main criterion for defining one’s class or social position. The members of the old aristocracy who thrived on incomes from land and property have suffered a sharp fall in their economic and social status, whereas those from the commoner’s rank, who have now acquired professional skills, have substantially raised their income. Admittedly, power in the community, to some extent, is still derived from the exercise of political – administrative authority through the Dalai Lama’s Administration, which is, by and large, still monopolised by the members of the old nobility who continue to enjoy a superior status. Yet there is no denying that they have lost much of the traditional force and their authority is no longer uncritically accepted.

The above observation is also substantially applicable to the religious hierarchy which was also to a large extent based on the control of landed estates enmeshed with political offices. It was relatively rare to see the religious hierarchs drawing their strength from spiritual or charismatic powers or scholarship. The powerful monastic order was sustained mainly by a system of religious feudatories which controlled nearly one-third of the land in the country. Though the monastic order outwardly appears to be intact, the very fact that it has lost much of its economic and political power over the people, and has now to depend on the people for its sustenance, has produced far-reaching changes, the two important symptoms of which are that while recruitment to the monasteries has dwindled, participation in religious practices has begun to be viewed from the pragmatic view-point and the notions of economic viability are being applied to the traditional religious beliefs and institutions.
In Tibet the role of religion was uncommonly important. Monasteries were the centres of the social life and used to attract a large part of the man-power and wealth of the country. Religion was the core of Tibetan society and the whole national life revolved round religion which attracted and absorbed the best human talent. Naturally, in the refugee set-up changes in the core sphere have also forced many ideological perceptions specially in the younger generations.

Happily the established religious order has recognised the need for reorientation and reforms. This has, to a great extent, reduced the sharply critical tendencies. Nonetheless it was noticed that the forces of resistance and change were quite active.

Perceptively the old religious order is also ‘reforming’ itself in many ways. It has even publicly recognised the need to shed off the anachronistic elements. Alongwith this it may also be observed that a majority of the Tibetans still nurse deep feelings of reverence for their native religious order, though at least a part of the traditional ritualistic activities has either lost its old appeal or been scrapped owing to the constraints of refugee situation. It cannot also be missed that Tibetan Buddhism in the contemporary refugee situation has become a kind of psychological catalyst to bring together many diverse sectorial elements and is actively helping to build up a new and stirring kind of nationalism among the refugees.

Even in the midst of all setbacks and hostile currents the Tibetan institutionalised religion still continues to be a major social force. In India full-fledged monastic institutions are gradually developing, though on a reduced scale, for the purpose of preserving the religious order from destruction and ensuring the rehabilitation of the monastic groups. This has been one of the positive steps of the refugee community towards preservation of the theological and spiritual
traditions of all the major sects of Tibetan Buddhism.

It was observed in studied area that a section of migrant Tibetans carve out Thankas (traditional painting) and make carpets, having popularised traditional Tibetan art and craft and produce replicas of popular portraits, ornaments and items of decoration for consumption in the local market. It is also believed that a small section of immigrant Tibetans have accumulated a substantial amount of wealth as a consequence of these occupational changes. In some of the Tibetan households expensive electrical gadgets and items of luxury were observed which they could not afford without this newfound affluence. The immigrant Tibetans in the process of social change are mingling tradition with modernity which is producing nodes of intermittent cohesion and confusion amongst them. Apparently the acceptance of new values with a conscious preservation of traditional social and cultural identity, may not fit into the classic framework of modernism but for the lack of a better expression it may be called a transitional phase.

Symbolic representation of their ethnicity has persisted among the migrant Tibetans irrespective of their socio-economic status. The consumption of traditional palatable dishes during their festivals and marriage alongwith drinking habit of homemade alcoholic drink, Chang, is maintained by them as part of their cultural heritage. Tibetans were accustomed to cold and dry climate and living at high altitude. Though most of the Tibetan settlements in India are at high altitude, the climatic conditions are not akin to the conditions that prevailed in Tibet. In their native country, they could easily consume, dehydrated meat and meat products which under the changed climatic conditions are not advisable.
For the same reason, traditional customary habit of drinking Tibetan tea is gradually changing towards the acceptance of Indian tea. In most of the cases, the use of milk powder instead of milk for the children and the consumption of boiled vegetables with minimum spices exhibit their relative economic status. Clothing in Tibet had to be much more warmer than is required here. The older generation has had difficulties in comprehending the necessity for reorganising their day to day living in accordance with needs of changed socio-climatic conditions.

In contrast, the younger generation who are born and brought up in India have hardly any sense of attachment to their pristine cultural values. Even the migrants who had left their native country during childhood possess poor memory of Tibet. Having a superficial adherence to Tibetan culture they have adopted to Western style of dressing easily. But during festive and ritualistic ceremonies the migrant Tibetans still prefer to dress themselves according to ethnic style. The observation supports that even in the midst climatic variation and under enormous pressure exerted by the host country the married women strictly maintain traditional dress style, being one of the characteristics of community adherence. Traditional structure of the Tibetan society is governed by the normative construct of religion. The study reveals that in spite of political turmoil and hostility the traditional institutionalised religion is still popular and is ceremonially passed on from one generation to the other as a cohesive aspect of the Tibetans. In India the migrant Tibetans are strongly striving for the preservation of their theological and spiritual traditions. Traditionally two distinctive strains of religion, Bon and Buddhism, having two opposite ideologies have accommodated themselves as political refugees in the foreign cultural milieu in which they are rehabilitating.
themselves as one ethnic group. To preserve their traditional philosophy and religious heritage full-fledged monastic institutions, nunneries are developing in the rehabilitated centres of India. But of the remarkable changing attributes can be projected from the study which include the manifestation of traditionality in the sphere of religion also in a symbolic manner.

The study has revealed some salient features of the changes overtaking the traditional social stratification patterns; the general pattern that is emerging is that the members of the old aristocracy who thrived on rental incomes from land and property have suffered a sharp fall in their economic status, whereas those from the commoners' rank, who have acquired professional skills, have substantially raised their income. This bids fair to a total overhaul of the traditional economic and power structures.

There is also a marked change in the class related value system. Most of the respondents opined that in future, educational and professional competence and self-earned skills should alone help determine the social status of the individuals. In fact, the image of the remnants of the old aristocracy and even that of the monastic order is being seen in the light of the new values. The old structure is criticised as being parasitical and inefficient. The change in the traditional class boundaries is also reflected in the new trends in marital boundaries is also reflected in the new trends in marital alliance which in the past were one of the important means of maintenance of the traditional power structure. At the top of all, the vast changes in the traditional occupational structure have strongly reinforced and accelerated the process of erosion of the old bases of social stratification among the Tibetan refugees.
The pattern of social stratification, formerly based on ascriptive status, has become achievement-oriented. This is a significant change in the Tibetan society which was traditionally divided into well-defined class categories resembling the medieval feudal order, and which was free from the feelings of class hatred due to the effective and universally accepted politico-religious structure. Undoubtedly, members of the old nobility still enjoy a superior social status, but there is an increasingly questioning attitude about the rationale of the old order, and the fact is that with the loss of their landed power, the nobility cannot continue to maintain its traditional power and authority. The same was observed in a large measure, in the religious hierarchy which also derived its status from the control of landed estates. Thus the class system has become more open and achievement-oriented, in which educational achievements, professionals and occupational skills and higher incomes are becoming the main determinants of social status. The vast changes in the traditional occupational structure are also weakening the old bases of social stratification.

Gradual changes in the modes of thinking especially, among the monks who are the torch-bearers of the traditional values and ideologies were observed in the studied areas. The basic reasons are the establishment of monasteries in the heart of the tourist resorts, where exposure and interaction with the non-Tibetans and foreigners are quite common, whereas in Tibet monasteries existed in the secluded regions. Though the introduction of modern subjects in the traditional teaching programme can supplement the job opportunities in exile but it has changed the attitudes of the monks towards modernity which has increased the incidence of both psychological depression and nostalgic attitude among the monks in India. Most remarkable and pathetic facts, as revealed from the study, shows an
emerging trend which is coming up among the young monks in exile towards the preference of self supportive independent professions and occupations which has led to the loss of their socialised commitment over the parental monastic authority. The latent devaluation of the monastic ideologies in the uprooted situation manifests an ominous sign of change among the young monks about which the monastic authority is greatly apprehensive. It can be concluded that the contemporary status of the migrant Tibetans has weakened their traditionally socialised values and attitudes in the domain of religion. Most of the migrant Tibetans have confessed that they can devote less time to their religion owing to the constraints of economic activities. The migrant population being uprooted from its traditional sanctuary is unable to practise elaborate rituals and the exhorbitant cost of carrying out those rituals in India compelled the migrant population to dispense with a great number of these practices yet this did not necessarily distance each one of them from their traditional enslavement to rituals and the prowess of the supernatural. They continue to uphold the superiority of their beliefs, practices and myths pertaining to spiritualistic norms. This has been viewed by many social scientists as a deterrent to total transformation of traditional culture in alien surroundings. Most of the Tibetan immigrant in India are no longer spending either time or money on various ceremonies accompanying marriage and death. The first generation of immigrants are resenting their inability and constantly expressing their helplessness. They are also making a conscious effort to enforce those rituals on the younger generation. The younger generation in its desire to adjust is quickly dissociating itself from these elaborate ceremonies though retaining asymbolic adherence to the same.
Another very important area of the Tibetan society and culture, which is in the process of change is religion. In the original Tibetan society the monastic establishment was the most important structural feature of Tibetan ‘polity’; it was the main pillar of the unique religio-political structure of Tibet. But in the context of the exiled Tibetan community it is facing the threat of instability because recruitment to the monasteries has dwindled, and participation in religious practices is now viewed from a pragmatic point of view. The notion of economic rationality is being applied to the religious beliefs and institutions, which is something unique as far as the Tibetan society is concerned.

The code of conduct imposed on the lamas, which was the product of exclusiveness from the work-a-day life and absolute security provided by the community (through monastic establishments), has much slackened in practice. At the layman’s level also the time consumed by religious activities has drastically decreased. Life in Tibet, as already discussed, was regulated through religion which was the core of life. But as said above while in exile religion has come to be evaluated from the new view-glasses of pragmatic reasoning. It can be reasonably concluded that the new ‘worldview’ of the Tibetan refugees has brought about glaring changes in their institutions, values and attitudes. In comparison to their traditional society Tibetan refugees now have less time to devote to religion owing either to the pressure of hard economic necessities or to voluntary choice. At the same time the primacy of religious roles has sharply declined.

Leighton (1959) has made a significant observation in this regard. He suggests that the effect of rapid and extensive acculturation damages the mental health of the people. The study reveals that the first generation of migrant Tibetans made efforts at maintaining the regional contiguity and traditional form of arranged marriage. But in the
host country the migrant Tibetans are living together for more than decades and the proximity tends to dissolve the regional differentiation amongst them. The study highlights that in India the practice of self-marriage is preferred to traditional arranged marriage. But to retain the cultural contiguity the younger generation prefer to marry within the same sect. The study highlights that in most of the cases whole families could not migrate from Tibet to India. Many respondents declared about the formation of new marital alliances without any socio-religious or formal ceremony. It can be mentioned that new family set up has emerged in many cases due to the remarital alliances in India. It deserves-mention that the death ceremonies which were prolonged affair in Tibet, have become minimised owing to the constraints of refugee situation though deep feelings of reverence continue to prevail. For the disposal of the dead, traditional astrological consideration is strictly maintained by all of them. Death ceremony and death anniversary is also observed amongst them, though in a low key, as a symbolic representation of the tradition. It is significant to mention that they have accepted one of the traditional mode of disposal of the corpse which will be befitting in the context of Indians, basically Hindus.

It can be added that some radical changes were, observed in the traditional political structure as well as in the political values and attitudes among the immigrant Tibetans in India. It was observed that the consolidated reformed political structure is the symbolic representation of the traditional Tibetan administration. Contemporary Tibetan administration is striving hard to maintain cultural integrity not only with the rehabilitated centres in India through the respective representatives of the settlements but with the migrant Tibetans in abroad also. In addition, the active participation for the freedom and
independent Tibetan nationality by the Tibetan youth in India also supports the same connotation.

Most of the respondents were constantly complaining about the loss of their valuable cultural heritage. They were afraid that the rapid rate at which the younger generation was adopting modern values would lead to total destruction of ancient Tibetan civilisation. They were constantly rebuking the young ones for neglecting their cultural heritage. The traditional system of Tibetan medicine remains the pivotal point of Tibetan socio-cultural and political survival.

Most of the respondents argued that though it was difficult for them to preserve the traditional glory of their rich religious and cultural traditions they believed in its supremacy and regarded the efficacy of traditional system of Tibetan medicine more than that of any other system of medicine popular in the world. It was highlighted again and again that modern allopathic medicine mostly offers quick relief for a temporary period. In their opinion the modern system of medicine is incapable of locating the root cause of any ailment. The Tibetan youth, as a representative of second generation of immigrant Tibetans, reflects the desire of the developing mind to accept the new values without rejecting the old tradition. The cultural configuration evolved by them bear a semblance of harmonious coexistence between the old and the new.

The conclusion thus is inevitable that on the whole the Tibetan refugees in India have shown a remarkable capacity of synthesis and adaptability between their pristine cultural traditions and modernity. Along with the special control factors which have still held together this large refugee community through sun and shower, the best explanation for the lack of the disruption. The traditional social pattern will be found in the Tibetan culture itself. Within a dualistic frame, it
permitted a large degree of pluralistic pattern. Dualism is a characteristic feature of the most of the oriental cultures. Particularly the Buddhist accent on the spirit of synthesis; the ‘middle path’ has permitted the co-existence of apparently irreconcilable values and practices. It is probably for this reason that the Tibetans so far have not experienced any serious conflict or ‘culture shocks’ despite virtual invasion of western cultural traits. This has been achieved particularly through the second generation Tibetan refugees and their self-imposed goal of conserving the traditional culture-patterns.