CHAPTER - VII

CONCLUSION

In the foregoing chapters, an attempt has been made to reveal the historical perspective; socio-economic and religious life, and material culture of the Killekyathas. In this chapter a summary and an overall view of the process of change is taken and discussed in the light of the observed facts.

For a long time the Killekyathas were a semi-nomadic tribe living on the river banks and forest areas. Performing leather puppet plays by males and tattooing by females were only ostensible occupation. When they settled in the plains villages they had to fit themselves into the larger social and economic structure and accordingly they took to certain occupations such as farming, buffalo rearing, government services etc.

Etymologically the word "Killekyatha" is derived from the kannada word "Kille" which means mischievous and "Kyatha" a crooked fellow. As already explained by Nanjundayya and Iyer (1930:518) the community derived its name by "Killekyatha" play. Killekyathas are said to have existed since the ancient period. As stated earlier, the followers
of Rama cultivated the leather puppet play as their profession according to the suggestion of Rama. After Rama, his followers started wandering from place to place, their life was as good as the nomads. This might be during the Mahabharat period, the art of leather puppet play might have also got transferred to the Pandavas, who were also wandering from place to place after the loss of their kingdom.

So in this way the origin and background of Killekyathas has been found in the ancient period. Killekyathas are found in other parts of the country also, but with different local names. However, they are identified as one through their common dialect. They are akin to other Maratha allied castes but are a distinct community. As cited instances earlier it is clear that in the medieval period, this community played dominant role as spies of both Karnataka and Maharashtra to scare away the Mahumudhans. They helped to destroy many Mahumudhan military camps enabling Maratha warriors to attack the camps. By disposing leather puppet play they were getting secret information regarding enemies kingdom.

There are difference of opinion with regard to the basic unit of social structure of Killekyathas because the customs and manners of the Killekyathas are not uniform throughout Karnataka due to geographical and cultural variations. According to 1972 Census the Population was
around 18,513 i.e. 0.06% of the Karnataka State population. Marathas are a community consisting of a number of sub-castes. In some places, they do not go by their sectional names but by a common name as either 'Maratha' or 'Gujre Maratha' etc. Therefore it is not possible to find out the exact population of sub-castes of Marathas.

One more reason is that the Killekyathas have a longer cultural tradition and a more highly organized social structure than migratory labourers, but they are even more invisible. Many among nomadic Killekyathas died out years ago, but the fact is that their number are growing. Although they are often forced to settle down for months at a time and even send their children to schools for short periods, they still spend nomadic life nearly half their time. This mobility increases their invisibility. Therefore, the number of population mentioned in the Census is under-estimated.

Our analysis tells us that among 150 Killekyatha families as many as 116 are settled families. Out of the 34 nomadic families, 24 families are living on nomadic occupations since twenty years or more. The degree of differences in the economic and educational levels has more impact on one's behaviour and attitude. The researcher found that within the same geographical limits and within the same closely knit group such as the Killekyathas, both nomadic
families and settled families exist side by side. Within the same family only a few educated individuals are Government employers and from the same group. Those families who have more land have fewer nomadics. They used to have extended families in earlier days and it was useful in giving cultural programmes. Members of individual families as a unit, movements to villages are made. Due to nuclearisation of the families the authority of elder has owned. The heads of the individual nuclear families take their own decisions, regarding the matter of leading nomadic or settled life, going to new occupations etc. These vital decisions, in earlier days, were generally taken by the heads of the extended families.

In the field of education it is observed that they are backward. The standard of literacy and education are lower. Most of the literates are literates without any educational standard or with only primary or basic standard. In many families, the children are weaned away from school even before they have achieved a particular standard of literacy let alone education.

Marriage ceremonies among these people were very elaborate in the earlier days. Formerly there was a custom of marrying infants in the cradle. This custom has vanished now. The actual marriage rituals are performed by an elderly
man of 'Atak' clan of the caste in Southern Karnataka. Whereas in Northern Karnataka some Killekyathas employ Brahmin or Jangam priests.

They decide all problems concerning their religious, social and economic life among themselves. Most of them seldom go to the court of law. The 'Panchas' or arbitrators of their community, decide these matters. They get signatures of the contending parties to act according to the decision. They impose fines on those who violate the laws. Those who do not pay the fine are ostracised. They have no place in the society. Killekyathas celebrate most of the Hindu festivals. Their important festival is the worship of Durga or Bhavani during Dasara.

Their customs and manners deserve special attention because, they have their own traditional customs and beliefs. In Northern Karnataka, if the married person is dead, he is cremated with due rites. If he is unmarried, they first marry the corpse with the Ekka-plant and then only carry him to the cremation ground. But in Southern Karnataka the dead are buried. In the villages of Amarnathpur and Surdi, with the spread of Bhagatism, the habit of excessive drinking has gradually decreased. Individuals may indulge in it secretly, but outwardly at least they show an abhorrence of liquor. It is no more a community drink, in these villages. The
abhorrence of liquor has affected their economic status. Firstly, it has saved money for many families, and then, it has also brought them nearer to their assimilation with the religious institutions.

In the material as well as cultural spheres of life the Killekyathas have come in contact with alien cultures; this has initiated them to modern aspects of life as well as cultural patterns which are distinctively different from their own, and for these, they consciously as well as unconsciously, have begun to assimilate. But their own social institutions and the body of beliefs and customs of the whole community diverged from their pace of material progress, resulting in an all round cultural lag. They, in general, continue to be deeply attached to their traditions and customs, which are still meticulously observed, particularly by settled families.

In the olden days the profession of leather puppet plays flourished during festivals and harvest seasons, when rural folk would encourage such activities of folk art and entertainment. The Killekyatha artists were suitably rewarded in kind then. The Killekyatha also combined with the art another profession, that of the fastening selvage of blankets as an all season occupation. With these two occupation by men and tattooing by women, enabled the
Killekyathas to depend upon these occupations for their livelihood. But during the last three decades or so, the leather puppet plays has been adversely affected owing to the popularisation of the cinema in urban cities. The art has lost the kind of appeal it had even in the villages and as such there is not much demand from the villagers for such shows. Though the artist has also combined with this, the occupation of fastening selvege of blankets the latter does not provide much scope for earning in plenty. The leather puppet play is an art wherein capacity of singing and proper narration of humorous anecdotes is necessary. Because of this, many a Killekyatha are not able to take to it, may be, for want of talent. At present, except Amarnathpur, only some members belonging to four families are pursuing the profession of leather puppet plays, of course, combined with the occupation of fastening selvege of blankets. Those who preferred to settle down have taken to cultivation, agricultural labour etc.

The method of cultivation is indigenous and there have been no improvements. If a field requires two or three ploughings, he usually satisfied with one ploughing only. Then most of them do not bother much about manuring the field. Nor they fence the field, with the result that stray cattle enter and destroy the crop. Most of them do not store
grains for seed, and at sowing time, approach the trader and obtains whatever quality of seed is available at a high price. In Southern Karnataka most of them do not have irrigation facilities and depend entirely on the monsoons. Except for a few months during the rainy season and during winter, they remain free and employed with other petty jobs.

Amarnathpur and Surdi are the villages which are covered by the development blocks. The Killekyathas of these villages have realized their ignorance and have started practicing farming, utilizing improved methods. They now have irrigation facilities and they grow commercial and vegetable crops. They apply chemical manure to the land with beneficial results. The seeds they use are also of improved quality and as a result they often have a bumper crop. Traditionally, poverty-hit Killekyathas, have now improved considerably by the new methods of cultivation. Consequently, their living standard has also gone up. But this is not to say that they have become rich—they are better off when compared to their previous condition.

Besides being attached to conservative methods of agriculture, the Killekyathas are also not skilled in trade. Being illiterate, they have little knowledge of the mechanics of the market price-system. At harvesting time, they sell practically all their produce without considering their
annual requirements. The law of demand and supply operates against them and their produce is sold at lower rates. Then, in times of need they run to the traders and purchase the grains at exorbitant rates. Their failure to observe market trends, make them economic sufferers.

The Killekyathas have a few secondary sources of income, but these are not sufficient to raise them to a higher economic standard. Our survey of the villages reveals that no Killekyatha has ever deposited anything voluntarily in the Bank or Post-Office by way of savings. There is a total absence of the habit of trift. Pressed by social and economic circumstances, he is compelled to approach money-lenders and borrow money at rates of interest as high as five percent per month.

Among Killekyathas, some of them when noticed that there was not much economic advantage in following their traditional occupations under the changed circumstances, a few people in Agatoor village took to a new occupation, namely, that of drama show and these found favour with many among the nomadic families. Economic benefits from the new occupations were greater, being more paying, it attracted many people, particularly the youth to its fold. Those who are expert swimmers live by fishing. During high floods, they tie up two gourds together with a stout rope, and ride on the water over incredible distance by sitting astride on
the floating rope between the gourds, riding as if it were horse.

As for as the occupation followed by women are concerned, it has been seen that the market for tattooing has declined as the women of the other communities do not any longer care for elaborate tattooing as once they used to do. But there is still demand for quilts. There are fifteen cases of educated people, who have taken to jobs in Government service.

With these occupational changes, the role of the Killekyatha artist as a travelling cultural specialist is being relegated to the background. Infact, today there are only four families whose members are proficient in the art and are invited for giving their shows.

The Killekyathas used to have extended families in olden days and this was useful in giving cultural performances where assistance of a member of people was required. They used to move from one village to another in small groups consisting mainly of their near kin. The sole dependence on the nomadic occupation, the process of sedentarization have largely contributed to the breakdown of the extended family and it beings supplemented by the nuclear family. The researcher observed that among the both settled and nomadic - the family is a small, economically independent unit.
Movements to villages are made by members of individual families as a unit. Due to the nuclearisation of the families the authority of elder has waned. The heads of individual nuclear families take their own decisions, concerning the matter of leading a nomadic or settled life, taking to various new occupations etc. These vital decisions were in olden days generally taken by the heads of the extended families. However, on the occasions like marriage, death and also at the time of pre and post natal treatments help from elder kin is sought.

Our survey reveals that the present position is slightly different as people of this race remaining scattered and could not unite for the common purpose of development, as a result they remained in the state of backwardness and ignorant. Majority of people are still unemployed and unaware of the present day living conditions. Still this community earnestly desires for some help in respect of finance, education and development. It lacks leaders due to which they are not represented properly. They have no representation in village Panchayats, Taluk Development Boards and Municipalities. There is a need of allotment of Government waste-land whereever available to these people for properly settling and for reformation.
The Government of Karnataka and other State Governments classified this community as caste, tribe, nomadic tribe, other backward community etc., in view of their living condition, education, traditional background and backward status.

Until 1952 the Killekyatha as a whole were identified as nomadic, semi-nomadic and backward tribes. The Havanur report (1975:96) has mentioned the community Killekyatha as Non-Scheduled Caste whereas one more synonymous name Khatbu has listed in Backward Tribes (now as group-A). The same Report again did one more thing that "Sillekyathas" who are the synonymous to this community are recognised as a Caste under Article 341 of the Constitution of India throughout Karnataka except Coorg, Belgaum, Bijapur, Dharwar, North-Kenara, South-Kenara, Gulburga, Raichur and Bidar districts, and Kollegal Taluka of Mysore District.

One more astonishing thing is that those who live by fishing, while they taking admissions of their children, knowingly or unknowingly they tell their caste name as 'Bunde Bestar'. Bunde Bestar is not shown either in the Debhar Committee Report, Kaka Kalelkar Committee Report, Lokur Committee Report, NagarGowda Committee Report or any Government Order as being synonymous for Killekyatha. This is now included in 'Group-A'.


There are certain synonymous local names to the Killekyatha community depending on the profession they followed who suffer under other social, educational and economic backwardness, and to find them out investigation is needed and Government should mention all the synonymous names of this community, then only it is possible to these community people to enjoy all the political privileges.

Another view is that they are the races belonging to Gujarat and Maharashtra. They were a fishing folk when there was bilingual State of Bombay and Gujarat. Some districts such as Bijapur, Dharwar, Karwar, Belgaum were parts of Maharashtra. After the bifurcation of the States on linguistics basis these four districts were submerged into Karnataka State. As a result this community people sided with Karnataka and depended on the high hopes of peace, progress and prosperity likely to be rendered by the Government of Karnataka which is sincerely making efforts of uplifting the conditions of these people.

From our study it is clear that the culture of Killekyathas is almost the same throughout Karnataka. Wherever they are, they speak Marathi as their mother tongue. However, Killekyathas have been influenced by the local cultures. That is why they differ to a certain extent in Southern Karnataka comparing their brothers in Northern
Karnataka. The same may be said about in Maharashtra and elsewhere.

The Killekyathas taken for our study on the basis of political divisions of Karnataka do not hold good in this respect. However, the Killekyathas living in different districts of Karnataka may differ to a certain extent as they are influenced by the indigenous cultures.

In course of time, the Killekyathas who were folk artists have changed their traditional occupation and at present they are mostly farmers, Government employees, fishermen and labourers.