CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSIONS

A study of social change of any group or community in India poses certain problems. On the one side, the Indian society is a complex society where different cultural groups interact and in the process bring about change. And on the other, even within different religious, cultural and ethnic groups there are several differences between the subgroups. Thus it can be observed that, given the nature of the Indian society, it is difficult to make generalisations. However one can make an attempt to have insights into the processes of change that are taking place in society.

As already explained, the Indian society is a traditional society, and in the wake of its exposure to outside civilisations, it is undergoing change, without a major change in its structure. A simple example is that of the emergence of the seer movement. The emergence of the Arya Samaj movement in the north is a result of the impact of the Islamic as well as Christian civilisations. The Arya Samaj movement attempted only internal reforms within the framework of the traditional values of the Hindu religion. The Naidus of UP, SNDP (Sri Narayana
Dharma Paripulana movement of Kerala are all such examples. It is interesting to quote here from Gusfield: "The capacity of old and new cultures and structures to exist without conflict and even with mutual adaptations is a frequent phenomenon of social change; the old is not necessarily replaced by the new. The acceptance of a new product, a new religion, a new mode of decision making does not necessarily lead to the disappearance of the older form."* Although it is difficult to specifically define the term "tradition," it is generally understood as inherited or customary practices, and also has a certain amount of non-rationality and superstitious beliefs. However no society including the most advanced is devoid of traditional practices. What is certain is that the prevalence of tradition in a dominant form varies from society to society. Highly traditional societies are characterised by underdevelopment, while at the other end of the scale, we have the most modern societies where tradition plays a minimal role. The Indian society falls somewhere between the two extremes. The most interesting aspect of the Indian society is that certain traditional aspects of social life are adapted to suit the needs of modern society. In such a situation, as Gusfield has rightly

pointed out, a sort of continuity between the "tradition" and "modernity" is desirable. This is amply demonstrated in the Indian situation.

The present study is focused on this aspect. In the course of the analysis of the data on the leather-worker communities of Athani, it is discovered how these communities underwent change without breaking away from the traditional past. These communities, which had a traditional skill for leather work, by adapting a new method of production and a new technology have achieved progress and development. This adaptation has not only brought about change in the economic sphere but has also encompassed the social and political spheres. This is well reflected in the cases which we have presented elsewhere. The modernisation process, which has accelerated as a result of the intervention of the development agencies, has brought about new outlook and attitude with the basic traditional idea remaining intact. While the attitude towards caste, pollution etc. has undergone change, the family and religion have continued more or less in the same form. One more contribution of modernisation is in the area of politicisation. Earlier these groups had no access to power and position. Now they are moving in that direction.
It may be pointed out here that the development agencies, when they started operating among the leather-workers, had only one aim: to improve the economic conditions of the downtrodden people. This goal of the development agencies has more been or less fulfilled, and in the process modernisation of the communities has begun. In the following paragraphs, we venture to arrive at some conclusions on the basis of our study.

The first conclusion which emerges from our study is that the community of cobblers is getting steadily modernised. The modernisation firmly rests on economic development. The economic development has been perceived in the light of the traditional background and experience. What would have been the nature of modernisation or whether modernisation would have been successful if the cobblers had not retained their traditional occupation would be interesting to speculate. But as it is, the continuation of the traditional background in the economic sphere has assisted the process of development and modernisation.

The traditional process of working leather and making footwear has been improved by the introduction of certain key inputs. The key inputs have been the assured marketing of the products and assured supply of credit to the cobblers. The other side of the picture has been that the cobblers have been
freed from the clutches of the traditional money lenders and
the vicious circle of taking loans and again taking them to
pay back the old ones. The supply of credit meant virtual
liberation of the cobblers from the economic bondage which had
been imposed upon them by the money lenders. The conclusion which
emerges from this situation is that modernisation of occupations
like the one of the cobblers is possible when the process of
making the occupation profitable and removing the self-defeating
constraints like unrepayable loans is closely and continuously
supervised. Such a close and continuous supervision has been
provided by the three key agencies: the KVIC, the KVIB and the
Lidkar. It is obvious that these agencies have been powerful
enough to liberate the leather-workers from the clutches of the
traditional exploiters. It would be interesting to speculate
whether such success in case of the cobblers would have been
possible if the liberating agencies came from the same town of
Athani instead of from outside. A related conclusion therefore
is irresistible: that it is desirable to have outside agencies
to supply the inputs of modernisation if we are to modernise
certain traditional occupations like footwear making and a
traditional community like that of the cobblers. In this
particular case the outsideness of the agencies has meant certain
objectivity and impartiality in dealing with the situation of the
cobblers and freeing them from the bondage of the traditional
masters (some of whom came from the nearby cities).
While there is social transformation of the younger generation as a result of the modernisation process introduced by the developmental agencies, the older generation, in spite of its participation in the activities of the developmental agencies, has shown a tendency to hang onto the old values and attitudes. For example, the older people still prefer to live in segregated colonies and in isolation. These are the people who still have not given up their notions of pollution and untouchability and are very reluctant to come forward to make use of the services provided by the upper class Hindu groups (barbers, washermen etc.). They also hesitate to visit hotels, temples and other public places. Mostly these people are aged 50 years and above. They have spent their formative years in rural areas or have worked as labourers.

In contrast with this, the younger people who are exposed to different values in the process of socialisation have no reservation in considering themselves in no way inferior in status to anybody. By and large they appear to be at home in any company, of upper class or upper caste. Unlike the younger people, the elderly people were exposed to the hardships of untouchability, restricted use of public places and with this background they find it very hard to come out psychologically.
The horizons of the older generation were limited to the business of day-to-day living. Their technology was such that even if they wanted to go beyond, could not have gone beyond. But the appearance of the development agencies that stressed introduction of new technologies and modernisation in terms of production and marketing has taken the leather-workers beyond the taluka or district and from subsistence economy to commercial economy. This required acquisition of new skills and new knowledge in the occupation which was traditional. The set-up attracted the younger generation.

The younger generation not only prefers to make what it already knows but is also eager to produce new designs to suit the trends of the day. The younger people desire to make large quantities of footwear fully exploiting the production capacity. They would like to make more money. In contrast, the older people still do not know how to price the commodity. They do not calculate the labour that has gone into the making of footwear. They are contented in earning enough to live and their living standards are low. Though the older people are skilful and highly talented, they do not exhibit that refinement in what they ultimately produce. The younger people produce in a given quantity of leather and hide more pairs, minimising the waste. Such pairs are also light in weight, elegant to look at and easy to wear.
The older people relied more on private bankers or money lenders. They seldom realised the extent of exploitation by the financiers. They even took advance from the traders without bothering to know the terms and conditions and its consequent impact on their income. The present generation avoids borrowing from the money lenders and private traders. Even if they borrow, they will be aware of the terms and conditions, the rate of interest, sale price of footwear etc. Instead they prefer to have transactions with the bank and development agencies. They are aware of the preferential treatment they receive in the bank. They know that it is their advantage. They know the various schemes under which they can borrow. They know that they are to pay only four per cent interest under the differential rate of interest (DIR) scheme. They prefer to sell footwear they make only to the development agencies. They are aware that the development agencies have come into existence to protect the interests of the cobblers. The present generation prefers cash transactions to buy the raw material and sell the finished product. They are very calculating. They keep a close watch on the cost of inputs and price the sale accordingly. They watch the balance sheet. The earlier generation lacked this practice. They were unaware of the actual inputs and the final outcome till they were financially in the red when it was too late.
The differences between the older generation and the younger generation highlight the changes that are taking place. In addition, some changes have also occurred in the area of inter-caste relations. Take the case of Madars who as a caste are cognate with the Samagars and who have specialised in one aspect of leather-work. Even in 1980-81 it was a familiar sight in the Sant Haralayya road commencing from the Athani-Bijapur road to see Madars, men, women, and children spinning ropes with agricultural waste and fibre pieces. This was a specialisation of the Madars. Today, there are very few to be seen doing this work. Although the Madars are considered lower in the eyes of the Samagars for the reasons that they consume carrion and practise the dedication of women as Davadasis, with the advent of the development agencies, more and more Madars have taken to sophisticated leather work on the models of the Samagars. With this occupational change and with their shunning carrion, they are becoming more and more acceptable to the Samagars as equals. Today, there is no segregation and there is free intermixing and interdining, although there are no reported cases of inter-marriage. This was unthinkable even 10 years ago. The Charmalaya and the Lidkar treat the Madars on the same footing as the Samagars and they do not make any discrimination in the allotment of work cum-house sites. This has brought about certain changes in the
economic and social conditions of the Madars who have taken to fine leather work. The Madars are becoming a model to their community members living elsewhere. It has been reported that more and more Madars living in other localities are also wanting to seek the assistance from the development agencies. It is significant to note that there are about 100 households of the Madars in the area of which nearly 25 per cent have come under the influence of the development agencies.

The Athani experiment has in a way vindicated the Gandhian approach to socio-economic development. Mahatma Gandhi was opposed to industrialisation but he was not opposed to the use of suitable machines to improve the work of artisans and craftsmen. He supported the cause of handicrafts and village industries and it was a part of his village building programme to improve the status and working conditions of the downtrodden groups like the cobblers. The groups of Samagars, Dhors and Madars in Athani may be said to have translated into the practice of the socio-economic philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi.

The fourth conclusion one may draw from this situation is that the programmes or policies launched by a modernising administration like that of the state government need to be utilised properly and this must be accomplished as a fact in practice. The KVIC and the KVIB and the Lidkar are public
corporations and these corporations have been successful in modernising the community of cobblers at Athani and this is to be taken as a surprise because several such corporations as well as departmental agencies have been frustrated in the various projects and programmes undertaken by them. In this particular case these corporations have functioned as successful agencies of social change. It is interesting to probe as to what has made the work of these agencies successful at Athani. Obviously we have to concede the point that the agencies have been functioning with a degree of sincerity and a sense of purpose. The other side of the picture is that the cobblers themselves have been fairly well motivated in the direction of the change. Three factors seem to have contributed to the successful motivation. One is the continuation of the traditional background and the occupation that we have spoken of. The other is the assured marketing of the product for which the agencies have taken responsibility. The third is the fact that the frustrated and the debt-ridden cobblers have been rescued from the clutches of the exploiting money lenders and unfair buyers of their product. A fourth factor needs to be added here. This is the factor of the purposeful and productive round of activities built up by the cobblers. This is not always easy. This presupposes a certain discipline and a certain amount of hard work. The cobblers have given a sufficient evidence of such a disciplined and purposeful
life in the service of the footwear production and maintenance of schedule. Here the cooperation of the whole family and the leadership provided by the head of the family, the father, also deserve to be noticed. When the cobbler's family works, it is something like the work of an assembly line, in the sense that various tasks of the footwear making are divided (division of labour) and coordinated. This is really a new idea. Thus discipline and hard work are meant for the whole family, including children. This factor is very strongly present in the case of the cobblers and this seems to be responsible for their socio-economic transformation and the beginning of their political awareness.

One of the considerations that may be brought against the assembly line production at the family level is the employment of little children. According to the Indian constitution, child labour is prohibited. One of the arguments, according to the sophisticated theory of upbringing of children and giving them happy times while they are growing, is that they should not be engaged in regular occupational tasks. They should be rather at school or play. While granting the element of truth in this view, it may be pointed out that what the cobblers are doing is right in the Indian situation. There is a growing unemployment among the educated in India and merely educating the cobblers'
children in the conventional style would only add to the number of educated unemployed. Once they are educated in the conventional school pattern, the children would expect white collar jobs or at least be in search of them. There would also be a strong likelihood of their being alienated from the work environment and traditional occupation. Instead of one’s educating the children and facing all these odds later, it seems better to put the young children on the job while their schooling proceeds side by side. Maybe the schooling is indifferent but then that would do in view of the strong and dependable occupational training not only in the skills and knowhow of footwear making but also in terms of occupational and attitudinal motivation. The children are thus rightly motivated and are cobbler’s in the making. It would not be improper to say that this is the kind of education and training, the job oriented training, which needs to be given not only to the children of cobbler’s but also the children of similar occupational groups in the Indian society. This kind of education would be called learning through doing, and this is more relevant in terms of the environment, the tradition and what is required by the society. There would be then no question of migration or dislocation of the occupational groups from their traditional moorings. So although on the surface the employment of children looks rather harsh, it is to be taken as a blessing in disguise.
As regards the relationship between the cobblers and the upper classes, we may say that the cobblers have charted out a wise course of action. Since they are backward in comparison with the upper classes, they have chosen to be comparatively passive. Their population constitutes a fraction of the total population. From this viewpoint they are right in conducting themselves in a quiet and peaceful manner. Elsewhere in the country, the various categories of the scheduled castes including the cobblers have come to odds with upper classes with disastrous consequences such as burning, looting, and murder and so on. Such cases are reported every now and then in the daily press. From this standpoint, the cobblers have been wise in forming a quiet part of the Hindu majority without falling into the error of converting to Islam or Christianity which would introduce an element of instability or hatred into the local situation. It has been observed that different attitudes or provocative gestures on the part of the scheduled castes in relation to the upper classes have invited the wrath of the latter upon the former. This mistake seems to have been avoided by the cobblers at Athani. The cobblers also seem to be freed from the problems of having been traditionally bonded labour, or dependent agricultural labour, in relation to the upper classes. In this way, they have remained outside the area of conflict. Athani is too small a context to give rise to any question of employment competition.
or conflict. This means the upper classes do not compete with
the cobblers in the business of footwear making. Part of the
protection conferred upon the cobblers comes from the traditional
four-fold classification of castes which makes it improper or
undignified for the upper classes to take to the occupation of
footwear making. Thus the cobblers securely stand in their
occupation and there is no fear of the upper classes encroaching
upon this area. Since the cobblers are occupationally happy and
earn sufficiently attractive incomes, the need for any agitation
or disturbing activity may be said to be minimum. On account of
these various factors, socially the cobblers are on stable and
positive terms with the upper classes. This facilitates their
modernisation which would have been obstructed if the relations
were hostile or otherwise violent.

Further, on account of the quiet and constructive
activities of the Samagars and the others in Athani, they have
spared themselves the many anxieties and agonies which they would
have to undergo if they were not on stable and friendly terms
with the other classes and castes. Part of the help comes from
the circumstances that they are part of the urban milieu where
the practice of untouchability and discrimination is considerably
less severe and painful than in the rural context of these
individuals. One of the 10 cases makes it clear that when a man
left his home town and came to Athani, he was considerably free from the humiliating practice of untouchability and discrimination. This has been true of several others. In a way, it may be said that the urban context is conducive to the tolerant mixing of castes and subcastes and it softens the harsh reality of untouchability and discrimination which remains mostly unmitigated in the rural surroundings. The urban context of Athani therefore has been helpful to the cobblers and the other leather-workers. Although, as we have said, these localities as well as the work-sheds are fairly isolated from the rest of the town and can be recognised as the localities of the these groups, this has not come in the way of improving their living conditions and their employment opportunities etc. In fact, as is made clear in one of the case studies, some cobblers are on particularly good terms with the upper castes and one of the cobbler leaders has taken a leading part in the Basava Jayanthi celebration etc. This does not of course imply that the process of assimilation of these groups into the general stream of Hindu society has started but it means that the cobblers and the others have managed to create an environment in which the upper castes are tolerant and understanding and even cooperative to some extent.

In terms of political awareness and participation, the cobblers are taking the initial steps, but here again they seem
to be wise in not threatening the power dominance and leadership of the upper classes. They are in touch with the various upper classes, elites, party leaders, and leaders of other types and they see to it that they are not disturbed in their socio-economic and political context. At this stage, the cobblers are rather weak to take to full-time political leadership which requires secure basis of wealth and capacity to spend money and withstand setbacks. The upper classes have such secure basis. Hence they do hold various formal and informal positions in the administration and outside. The political self-interest of the cobblers seems to dictate to them to limit their political role and not become ambitious or aggressive which may provoke adverse relations with the upper classes. With the passage of time, as the cobblers come to possess more and more economic strength and develop better relationship with the upper classes, they may take on higher political role which will be acceptable not only to the other scheduled castes but also to the upper classes. The cobblers have to prepare for this eventual role continuously and steadily. What we say about cobblers can hold good about similarly backward classes or castes elsewhere in the country. It does not make sense for a scheduled caste to take on aggressive roles and incur disruptive relations with the upper classes and then be weak and suppressed economically, socially and politically. It is shrewder, wiser for such backward people to preserve their
strength and proceed towards their goal of full-scale participation continuously and steadily. The manner the cobblers of Athani have acted seems to have signalled the way to the eventual goal.

The cobblers and the others in the Athani context seem to have taken a correct decision to give priority to economic stability instead of clamouring for political rights or concessions etc. Elsewhere in the country the groups of scheduled castes and scheduled tribes have put forward some prestige demand which are mostly political demands and which result in the neglect of the economic base of these groups. Some of these groups have demanded change in the name of a certain university or more funds or facilities for literature and so on. But they have generally sidetracked the issue of building their own economic base from where they can ensure their survival before they are able to talk of their political and literary demands. From this viewpoint the Athani cobblers and the others seem to have acted rightly in sticking to the economic priorities and formulating the other demands next and with caution.

The cobblers and the others have shown a remarkable concern for educating and grooming their children for certain careers. As will be clear from the foregoing chapters and particularly the
case studies, the members of the groups have been painfully aware of their (own) poor circumstances and deprivation in their childhood or boyhood and now that they are in a better position, they do not want their children to suffer in the same way. They want their children to study regularly and several of them have actually created opportunities and provided facilities for them to study better or to shape better. In a way this ensures the continuation of the process of modernisation.

One of the case studies refers to the caste discrimination and observance of distance between certain subcastes of the cobblers and others. This certainly underlines the difficulty of overcoming caste distinction and caste practices and prejudices which have taken root even among the downtrodden groups. But it must be noted that, unlike the relationship between these downtrodden groups and the upper castes, the relationship between the subcastes of the cobblers and the others is not disruptive or destructive. Distinctions are maintained but they are kept within the manageable limits and this may be said to be constructive from the viewpoint of modernisation of all the groups concerned.

In our study it was observed that there is a continuation between tradition and modernity. These two are contradictory
aspects stressing different values and attitudes. But in reality, they have continued to coexist so far. As the countries become more industrialised and advanced there is a tendency for "tradition" to take a second place in the process of social change. In such a situation, the society may get into a rational phase in which people take to refined manners, think and act in consonance with what is termed as "scientific temperament." The traditional beliefs and practices are either completely ignored or diluted and may be replaced by liberal thinking which is a strong indicator of "modernisation." In such a situation universal education becomes a dominant factor in the socialisation process.

Change is an ongoing process. In a society like ours, the changes that are taking place appear to be traditional and we have not yet reached a stage when we can categorically define the kind and direction of change in India. Therefore it can be assumed that dualism (tradition - modernity) will be a continuing factor in this society for years to come.