Chapter VII
CONCLUSIONS

This study was aimed at an understanding of social mobility among the Syrian Christians, a minority group. In the context of mobility, it was attempting to compare the Syrian Christians with other religious communities and to situate them in that wider context.

In the context of minorities and mobility, the assumption has been that because minorities are disadvantaged by definition, mobility would be extremely limited, if at all possible. In Indian society, where the dominant Hindu group is so preponderant, mobility would appear to be even more difficult. Yet, the Hindu caste system itself was an all encompassing one, allowing little, if any mobility. But because of that, for groups outside the system, opportunities for mobility emerged, particularly during and after British colonial rule.

In the Syrian Christians in Kerala, we see a group which is an overwhelming minority at the all India level. But it is a group which is in a greater number in a society where the dominant Hindus are in a smaller number than at the all India level; a larger minority coexisting with a smaller majority. The Syrian Christians form 16% of Kera-
la's population, and the majority Hindus form only 58% as against 82.6% at the all India level. The figures themselves are an indication that in the case of the Syrian Christians, we are dealing with a minority in a context quite different from the all India one. This has had implications for the mobility of the group and its acceptance in Hindu society.

When we look at the Syrian Christians in the context of social mobility, we see their distinctiveness as a group beginning to emerge more strongly. If we take occupational change as a source of mobility for the group, we see that they have taken to a range of occupations. Mobility in the Syrian case has not corresponded with the traditional understanding that movement from manual to non-manual, agriculture to industry alone constitutes occupational mobility. There has been no linear displacement of occupations from traditional to non-traditional. This was unlike the Parsis and the Jains, but more like the Sikhs. As we saw in Chapter IV, the Syrian Christians moved in and out of traditional and non-traditional occupations with felicity. The usual association of caste or ethnic group with occupation breaks down in the Syrian case. Their occupational base is diffuse, and they are lacking in an occupational tradition. The traditional understanding that many minorities overcome their other handicaps by recourse
to business breaks down in the case of the Syrian Christians. Not only are they not specifically associated with business, but in fact business occupies a lower prestige rating than do white collar occupations and is seen, at best, as a stop-gap to quick mobility. The key characteristic of the Syrian Christians in occupational change is, again unlike the traditional association of many minorities with entrepreneurship which involves moderate risk taking. With the Syrians, there is always the need for status consolidation, that is, the need to seek a balance and security in occupational leanings. The Syrians are multi-anchored in terms of occupation. Therefore, no occupation-specificity and no occupational tradition. The joint family ethic which is seen as a key factor in the success of traditional business communities operates in the case of the Syrian Christians also. But again, with a difference. The joint family ethic does not usually extend to joint business or the combining of capital, however much it may extend to helping a kinsman with education or a job. That, coupled with no joint family venture has meant that although they do engage in business, the Syrian Christians never reach the top, remaining essentially middle range people. In contrast, in other areas, like higher administration, the professions, journalism and so on, Syrian Christians have contributed many luminaries.
When we look at education too, the Syrian Christians stand apart. As Christians, and therefore closely linked with the missionary spread of western education in Kerala, they were among the earliest to take to English education. The inherent pragmatism that dictates the multi-anchoredness in terms of occupation is seen in education as well. Education is prestigious, being associated with lucrative jobs. There is a clear instrumental orientation to education. It is an investment which must yield commensurate rewards, both social and economic. Given the unemployment problem in Kerala, particularly for the educated, education even at the graduate level does not ensure a job. This being so, although school education is almost always sought, education at a higher level is undertaken only after a cost-benefit analysis. Because professions are desirable occupations, being prestigious and well-paid, professional education is sought after. But it is not accessible to all, because of the long period of study and the cost involved. Therefore it is not undertaken unless (a) the parents can afford the education and (b) the child has an aptitude for it. Education in the case of the Syrians is clearly determined by family income levels, the size of the family and the aspirations of the family. Aspirations usually being realistic, education is desirable and pursued, but the level of education that is sought is determined not only by what one
can afford, but what will bring worthwhile returns. Education is not sought for the sake of knowledge *per se*, but for the prestigious occupations it should lead to.

The same orientation is evident when we turn to the question of migration as a source of mobility. Both education and the lack of it were involved in migration. Migration has been primarily as a means to better one's occupational position either out of choice or necessity. Both the educated and uneducated, professionals and skilled and semi-skilled workers migrate. Where they migrate to become important and is dependent upon their level of education. As we saw in Chapter VI, this produces a prestige rating based on popular perceptions. As a consequence, migration to the Gulf, which is currently the largest migration taking place outside India, is seen as low in prestige because the bulk of migrants are semi-skilled workers. In contrast, the migration to countries like the United States of America being associated with the movement of professionally qualified people is regarded as more prestigious. The striking characteristic of Syrian Christian behaviour in migration, whether within India, or outside is the individual's inextricable link with his homeland and strong territorial attachment. The territorial attachment makes him loth to put down roots in his new home. Unlike the traditional business groups that many minorities
are purported to be, the Syrians rarely develop long term business interests elsewhere. This again explains the lack of 'big' business people among them. No matter where he migrates to, he returns, and demonstration of his success at home is critical.

At the beginning of this study, we commented on the problem with regarding minority groups in India as homogeneous entities. Nowhere is the heterogeneous nature of minorities more evident than with the Christians in India. Christianity has been in India at least since the 4th century A.D. Apart from these pre-colonial Christians, that is, the Syrian Christians, the Christians of colonial origin, that is post-15th century fall into three categories. The large scale conversions of low castes by missionaries, first under the Portuguese and then under British rule, form the first category. For this group, their identity as ex-low castes has been a barrier to their mobility. Those tribals in the north-east of India and central India who were converted to Christianity form the second category. For them, the salient identity as tribals meant that for years they had been isolated from the dominant Hindu society, being outside its pale and distinctive in culture and practice. This seriously hampered their mobility. For both these categories, becoming Christian did not succeed in erasing their earlier identities, very much
as happened in the case of the Buddhists and the Baha'is.

The third category consists of the Anglo Indians, who were the product of sexual unions between European men and Indian women. They were in the unfortunate position of being caught between two worlds, British and Indian and condemned by both alike. Not recognized as British by the erstwhile rulers, they were therefore not welcome in the land of their fathers. Forced to make India their home, they were regarded as outsiders in the land of their mothers. Mobility for them was limited, taking place primarily through education as for the other two categories of Christians discussed above.

The Syrian Christians, that is, pre-colonial Christians, are clearly distinct from the colonial Christians. This has implications for their mobility. In India, Christians are only 2.4% of the population. In Kerala, the Christians account for 21% of the state's population. Of these, the Syrians make up 16%. Simply in terms of numbers, the Syrian Christian presence is more marked than elsewhere.

The tribal Christians, the Dalit, that is, 'untouchable' Christians and the Anglo Indians owe their origins to as recent a period as the 19th century. This means that in the case of the tribals and depressed classes, their earlier
identities continue to dominate. The Syrian Christians' origins go back to the 4th century A.D., if not earlier, as noted above. They are truly entrenched and native to Kerala soil and regarded as such.

As a result of their origins and lack of mobility, the tribal Christians, the Dalit Christians and Anglo Indians are marginals in Indian society, and seen as clearly different by the dominant Hindus, and indeed by themselves. The Syrian Christian, on the other hand, has achieved a degree of acceptance in Kerala society that other Christians could only aspire to, in fact they are a dominant minority in Kerala.

Also, in their original situation, the tribals were outside the caste system and Hindu society altogether. The Dalit Christians were considered the lowest of the low, and denied inclusion in the caste system, being placed below the pollution line. Records show that the Syrian Christians were not only accepted and respected, but were virtually accorded a quasi caste ranking, roughly akin to the powerful Nair caste. This, in a society that was characterized by perhaps the most rigid variation of the caste system is nothing short of remarkable.

Because the tribals and Dalits entered the domain of mobility only after conversion to Christianity, the main
avenue of mobility for them remained the education system to which they had easy access as Christians. Unlike them, the Syrian Christians had, from very early days, interests in trade. This interest stood them in good stead in the 19th century, when they used their accumulated capital to buy land and finance entrepreneurial activity. They also took to English education, and new jobs, and went to different parts of India and abroad, making them one of the most mobile groups in Kerala, with more than one avenue of mobility.

As a group, the Syrian Christians have been mobile. Using occupational change, education and migration, they have achieved mobility. The diffuseness of occupational base, which we have frequently remarked upon, is the most enduring characteristic of the community in terms of social mobility.

We suggested at the beginning of this study that the clue to occupational diffuseness and specificity among religious minorities may lie in the presence or absence of a territorial attachment within India. It is time now to elaborate on this idea, and to attempt a typology of religious minorities in India on this basis.

We can compare religious minorities in India on the basis of territorial anchorage in terms of two groups --
those which have a territorial anchorage in India and those who do not. We can further subdivide these groups. In the first group, we consider both territorially unanchored groups which are mobile and which are not. In the second broad group, we take into account the territorially anchored groups which are mobile and those which are not.

First we consider those groups which have no territorial attachment in India. The Parsis, Jews and Jains fall into this category. The Parsis and the Jews arrived in India before the 10th century as migrant refugees fleeing from religious persecution at home. Both groups became highly urbanized. The Jews tended to trade, and the Parsis were in industry and the professions. For neither group was India anything other than a temporary home. The Jains are followers of a religious faith which emerged in India about the 6th century B.C. Unlike the Parsis and the Jews, they were not alien nor were they refugees. For them, India as a whole was their canvas. However, like the Parsis and the Jews, within India, they had no firm anchorage in any part. They have also been a highly urbanized group, and have traditionally been associated with urban occupations like trade, banking and industry. These three groups, more so the Parsis and the Jains, since the Jews are a vanishing minority, have, despite the smallness of their size, been important contributors to Indian economic development.
This is also true of the religio-linguistic group, the Sindhis. They had an accredited homeland, Sind, in undivided India. In post-1947 India, however, their status was changed to that of migrant refugees. They did not have a counterpart to Sind in India, and became dispersed in several urban settlements. Given this dispersal, they never identified with any specific part of India. Like the Parsis, Jews and Jains with whom we can compare them in this regard, the Sindhis pursued trade and commerce.

What thus binds all these groups together is the absence of a territorial identification within India. Also, as we noted earlier, these groups had an adequate combination of capital and skills to be able to take advantage of new mobility opportunities and veered towards trade and commerce. In the absence of territorial anchorage, then, the religious minority is likely to be urban in residence and occupation specific.

If this is so, then why do we not include the Muslims in the above mentioned category? We have earlier said although the overwhelming majority of Muslims are local converts, they are still perceived by the dominant majority as being of alien faith. Unlike the Parsis and the Jews, they were never migrant refugees, but were associated with conquest and through conquest, active proselytization. The
Muslims form the largest minority in India. Like the Parsis, Jews and Jains, they are scattered all over India, and are lacking in a territorial rooting. The large mass of Muslims, rural and urban are, however illiterate and poor and are engaged in typical specific occupations of low prestige. Thus we see a crucial difference between the Parsis, Jews and Jains on the one hand and the Muslims on the other. The Parsis, Jews and Jains form one category and are comparable because they lack a territorial base in India, therefore they are urban and occupation specific. The Muslims are in a group by themselves. They too lack an anchorage in terms of territory. They were associated with typical occupations. But, and this was critical, they were lacking in the necessary capital and education that made the Parsis, Jews and Jains such mobile groups. What we saying, then is that in the absence of a territorial anchorage, the religious minority will be occupation specific. But in the absence of capital and education or skills, the group will not be mobile one.

If the lack of territorial anchoredness and occupation specificity go hand in hand, then would the presence of such anchoredness mean that such groups would be occupationally diffuse? If we look at the Buddhists and the Baha'is in India, this would not appear to be true. Despite the fact that Buddhists in India has a history dating back to the 6th
century B.C., and the Baha'í presence in India is just over a hundred years old, these two groups are comparable. The bulk of Indian Buddhists are those who converted from scheduled castes. Also, the majority of them live in Maharashtra, and to that extent they have a territorial anchorage in India. Likewise, the Baha'í converts were primarily among the low caste Chamars of Malawa in Madhya Pradesh, and their moorings, in that sense are there. Both the Buddhists and the Baha'ís are generally rooted in rural areas. Given the notion of a specific homeland that these groups share, occupational diffuseness is a possibility. But that potential can be realized only if two things are present -- capital and skills. For religious minorities who are converted from scheduled castes, the social and economic disabilities are carried over into the new religious domain. They are thus usually lacking in both capital and skills. In the absence of these two, as is the case with the Buddhists and Baha'ís, agricultural labour becomes the occupational focus.

In the light of the above, it becomes clear that if a religious minority has a territorial anchorage in India, it becomes at once rural and urban. If it also has the requisite skills and capital, then it will be occupationally diffuse, and mobile. In this category, we contend that the Sikhs and the Syrian Christians are comparable. Sikhism is
of recent Indian origin, and the Syrian Christians, notwithstanding their antiquity, are not of Indian origin. But what is critical in terms of our current interest is that both have a strong homeland notion in India. The Sikhs, despite their wide dispersal in and outside India, have their roots in the Punjab. The Syrian Christians, too, have moved to different parts of India and the world, but are strongly anchored in Kerala. With this strong territorial attachment, a group immediately becomes rural and urban. This is true of both the Sikhs and the Syrian Christians. Both had strong traditional interests in agriculture and trade, and later also took to urban occupations. They thus had capital and skills and subsequently took to modern education. They have been associated with a range of occupational interests, both rural and urban. This occupational diffuseness has been an important characteristic of both these groups, and has contributed to their mobility as a group.

Having said that, we must point out two major specificities in the context of the Sikhs. First, a substantial number of Sikhs came to India as refugees in the wake of partition. Therefore they faced a political crisis and suffered consequently. This is not true of the Syrian Christians who have been initially migrant, but never refugees. Second, at least a segment of Sikhs over time
developed a notion of being a political community, as was seen in the demand for a Khalistan. This has never been the case with the Syrian Christians, for whom the idea of delinking with the total ethos of Kerala is beyond cognition.

When we look at the Syrian Christians as a minority group we see that in many ways they stand out as a distinct group. They do not correspond with the concept of the persecuted minority with a tendency to pursue entrepreneurial occupations. They do not correspond with the joint family ethic of some communities, even while they retain a strong sense of familial attachment. They are not strongly identified with professional or higher education, even while they look on education an important and pursue it. They do not develop strong roots in new places of residence, even as they migrate for economic betterment, retaining as they do a strong attachment to their home. The specificity of the Syrian case is thus clear.

The behaviour of the Syrians tends to be a reflection of Kerala society. Most minority groups are regarded by the dominant Hindus and by themselves as distinct. This does not appear to be so with the Syrians. This may be due to their centuries old existence in Kerala and their greater strength in numbers. The need for status consolidation, and
the low rating given to business, and the preference shown for professions and white collar occupations is a reflection of Malayali thinking. When we discuss the importance given to education, albeit in an instrumental sense, the high literacy rate among the Syrians and the importance given to female education, we see a mirror image of Kerala society. When we paint a picture of the migrant behaviour of the Syrian Christians and emphasize his extraordinary territorial attachment, we are seeing a reflection of Malayali behaviour.

The Syrian Christians responded to the changes of 19th century India more than any other group in Kerala. At the time, their trading experience, accumulation of capital, western education and relationship with missionaries stood them in good stead. Notwithstanding the head start that the Syrian Christians had over other groups in Kerala in terms of mobility, others were soon trying to catch up.

In terms of the theory of minority mobility, some groups like the Parsis and Jews are essentially sojourners, others have pariah or stigmatized status like the neo-Buddhists. Others still are viewed as uprooted like the refugee Sikhs, or persecuted like the Baha’is, or the Parsis. That is, all these groups are marginalized in one way or another. Certainly the idea of the disadvantaged and marginalized minority breaks down in the face of the Syrian
case. The Syrian Christians fit none of these stereotypes and hence, although a demographic minority, are without a minority complex.