CHAPTER VIII

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The study on the communication behaviour of the Todas and the Kotas of the Nilgiris district in Tamil Nadu revealed a complex pattern of relationships, attitudes and changes that have occurred in these tribes over a period of time due to various factors.

Ever since India attained independence the development of the tribes has been utmost in the minds of the development planners, and successive governments have introduced various programmes for their benefit, as well as to integrate them into the mainstream of the Indian civilization, at the same time preserving their culture. Thus the tribal problem has been an integral part of the national endeavour for the development of India as a whole.

Any talk on development must focus on communication, since communication is primary to the dissemination of messages. People should be informed and sensitised to the issues of development and their participation should be sought. Apart from this,
communication is basic to any society, as ideas or messages of various kinds are transmitted, and relationships maintained through this process. Thus communication is a key factor at all levels in society as it affects the behaviour patterns of the people.

This chapter aims to present a summary of the study, and to draw together some conclusions based on the data from the survey as well as the participant observation. The major concern of this study has been communication and social change among the Todas and the Kotas. The major objectives of the study were: to explore the formal and informal channels used by the two tribes for different forms of communication; to examine the socio-economic and cultural changes that have occurred among the two communities; to inquire into the media habits and preferences and to determine the role of the mass media in the two societies; to find out if the tribals are aware of the development programmes and to identify sources of information with regard to the development messages; to assess the effectiveness of communication channels and content in conveying developmental information to the tribals and to study the utilisation of this information by the target audience; to
find out the role of the traditional leaders in the two communities; to find out political awareness and participation among the two tribes; and to determine the interrelationships of the variables under study.

In accordance with the above mentioned objectives, the following hypotheses were formulated.

1. Interpersonal channels are the predominant sources of information with regard to development and other messages for both Todas and Kotas.

2. Both the Todas and Kotas are exposed to the mass media, especially the electronic media. Factors influencing mass media exposure are age, literacy, occupation and income. In this context literacy is more highly related to print media than non-print media exposure.

3. Mass media messages are of low interest and relevance to the tribes due to the urban orientation of the mass media but the role of radio as an entertainer and informer (especially political) is of predominant importance in both tribes.

4. Awareness is high among the Todas and Kotas with regard to the development programmes, though the
utilisation of the information in terms of application is low due to various socio-economic and cultural factors especially in the case of the Todas.

5. None of the development programmes at the district level are well-planned or systematically executed, and communication between the development functionaries and the tribes is not a planned activity.

6. Both tribes are politically conscious though political participation is more or less confined to listening to campaigns and voting. At the community level the traditional leaders have a very limited role in the new set up.

7. Literacy, level of education, occupation, income, mass media exposure and cosmopolitanism are the major contributors to changes that have occurred among the two tribes in the social, economic, political and cultural spheres. Between the tribes, the Kotas are more developed than the Todas.

The study was conducted in the Nilgiris district in the State of Tamil Nadu. The tribes selected for the study were the Todas and the Kotas. The selection of villages and the respondents for the collection of primary data was based on stratified random sampling. Most of the
respondents were men, though a few women were included in the sample. The rationale underlying the selection of male members was that they were the ones who were exposed to modernising influences. Moreover, they took an active part in the local administrative matters, and were the decision makers in the family. The sample consisted of people belonging to the age groups of above eighteen.

A combination of field techniques such as the participant observation and the survey method was used in order to provide a complete and clear picture of the patterns of behaviour and change among the two tribes.

Interview schedule which was structured in form was used for collection of data to substantiate and standardise information collected through participant observation. For analytical purposes the sample was categorised on the basis of age, literacy, level of education, occupation and income, since these are the factors that influence the behaviour of people at large.

The study was conducted against the backdrop of the socio-economic, demographic and cultural characteristics of the two tribes so as to gain a deep understanding of the dynamics of tribal life. The study revealed that there have been changes in the
socio-economic and cultural characteristics of the Todas and the Kotas due to various influencing factors such as culture contacts, education, diverse occupation, and participation in a cash economy. There have been changes in the traditional patterns of interaction between the Todas and the Kotas with the latter refusing to be considered subordinate to the former. Both the tribes, at present, do not exchange goods, and the Kotas who were the traditional musicians at the Toda functions have now severed all ties with them. For both tribes it has been a transition from subsistence economy to that of the market. The emergence of surplus peasants and servicemen among the tribals is the result of forces of modernization. The modern occupations provide cash to the tribals. A fact that is more significant is that the tribals who lived an isolated life, zealously preserving their own set of values, were brought close to the more advanced people. This sort of culture contact has had an impact on the social matrix as well as their habits of life.

One important finding was that education or instructional communication has been instrumental in the changes that have occurred among the Todas as well as the Kotas. It has helped enrich their knowledge in various spheres and helped them engage in diverse jobs. Between
the tribes it was seen that more of the Kotas (74%) were literate than the Todas (54.7%) and also had a higher level of education. Other than providing job opportunities, education was seen to influence mass media exposure to a great extent, especially the print media as the majority of the literates with better education were the ones to be exposed to the same.

One major finding from both the survey and the participant observation was that interpersonal channels were the predominant sources of information with regard to developmental and other messages. Both tribes were exposed to a certain extent to the various media such as the newspaper, radio, television and film. The Kotas (54.7%) had better exposure to the print media than the Todas (29.3%). Though at the superficial level the figures presented appear to indicate good exposure to the medium, most of the respondents were casual readers who consulted a newspaper occasionally at places such as the tea shop, neighbours' place, etc.

The radio was found to be the most popular medium with regard to both tribes, with 69 per cent of the 300 respondents owning transistor radios or two-in-ones. Not much difference was observed between the two tribes in the pattern of radio listening, though a higher proportion of
the Kotas were more frequently exposed to the medium than the Todas. The most favoured programmes on the radio were the film and devotional songs and to some extent the news bulletins. Over 90 per cent of the respondents indicated news bulletins as useful. Only a handful stated agricultural broadcasts as useful too.

Television is of very recent origin in the tribal villages with 20 per cent Kotas and 11.3 per cent Todas owning television sets. Of the Todas majority of the TV owners were the Toda Christians. The overall picture that emerges is one of uneven access, though the analysis of television exposure revealed that persons not owning a set were also exposed to it. Sixty eight per cent of the Kota respondents claimed to watch the TV while 38 per cent Todas answered in the positive. The difference in the number exposed to the medium among the two tribes can be attributed to the fact that the Kotas live together while the Toda villages are spread out.

With regard to viewership only 20 per cent of the Kotas and 11 per cent of the Todas stated to watch the news telecast daily. Over 68 per cent Kota and 72 per cent Toda viewers watched entertainment programmes regularly. Agriculture and health programmes were viewed by only 11
per cent of the sample. The cinema telecast on Sundays emerged as the greatest crowd-puller.

Cinema which is a very powerful medium influences the audience to a great extent. Both the Todas and the Kotas were well exposed to this medium. Over 84 per cent of the Toda and Kota respondents claimed to see films. Though majority of the respondents did watch films in theatres quite often, television could be cited as one important factor for the high figures for regular viewing of films. It is significant that 83.5 per cent and 84 per cent Toda and Kota respondents saw movies. The stated purpose of viewing films by both tribes was entertainment, though a few were of the opinion that films had educational value. With regard to documentaries only 5 per cent of the respondents expressed a liking for the same. One interesting feature was that the Kota women displayed great interest in films.

With regard to the role of media in the two societies it was seen that the radio, the television and film were considered mainly as sources of entertainment, though the radio was also depended on for information (especially political). Over 75 per cent Toda and Kota respondents stated to listen to songs. When questioned on
the usefulness of programmes on the television only a handful responded.

Major factors that were seen to influence mass media exposure were age, literacy, occupation and income. Literacy was seen to be highly related to print media exposure.

Mass media nevertheless was seen to contribute in many ways. The literates among both tribes, though irregularly, read the newspaper and passed on information to others. The radio was an important source of political and other news from the outside world. Films have contributed to changes in culture especially among the younger generation. During the interview sessions it was gathered that the young men followed the dress and hair styles of film stars. Thus the media have introduced new values and ideas especially among the younger generation.

As far as the political life of the tribes is concerned a number of significant changes have taken place in the two societies over the years. Both tribes have largely retained their traditional socio-political system. Every individual in the community has a share in the political management of the village. The Toda society does
not have a formal headman at any level. The noym or caste council is still the highest body of justice in the society. Yet, most respondents mentioned the name of influential men who were in charge of the activities in the society. The Kota administrative system was entirely different from that of the Todas and each village had its own head who was assisted by other members in the village council.

The influence and power of the leaders have declined to a great extent and people consult them mostly in problems that collectively affect the villages or community. This is the case especially with the Kotas. The younger men have emerged as knowledge givers as they have developed contacts with the towns and with development agencies.

Education coupled with exposure to various mass media and other culture contacts have made them more knowledgeable. Thus the older men in the Kota villages are still respected, but they are no more the influential figures they once used to be. On the other hand the Toda leaders did play an important role since they occupied formal positions in the official set-up, in connection with the development campaigns. Otherwise they were not depended upon.
One significant factor is that the educated Toda youngsters have started challenging the age-old customs and religious practices considered by them to be detrimental to the society, such as buffalo sacrifice, child marriage, etc. All this has led to conflicts between the conservative traditional people and the modern young men who want a radical restructuring of the society along modern line of thinking. Thus a new class of opinion givers is taking form in the Toda society.

Regarding the participation of the tribes in the regional and national politics, both tribal communities have given up their isolated character and have started participating in the political processes, such as voting in the elections, listening to campaigns, etc. The people of both communities have their own party preferences for various reasons, and did not hesitate to mention them. But their linkage with any political party was more of a psychological, than an active nature, as they did not actively participate in political affairs. Only a handful of respondents were formal members in a political party.

Predominant sources of political information were the interpersonal channels as well as the radio, and to a very limited extent the newspaper and television. The literates to a great extent depended on the newspaper and
apart from keeping themselves informed, they played an important role in disseminating the news to other people in the villages.

With regard to election speeches the Kotas had more opportunity to listen to the campaigns as their villages were situated near the town or large villages where meetings were held. One hundred and twenty one Kota and eighty five Toda respondents reported that they listened to election speeches. Yet, the campaigns did not seem to have much of an impact on the respondents, as 53.7 per cent stated that the campaigns did not influence their voting behaviour. Most of the Todas and the Kotas were greatly influenced by their party affiliation and the deep-rooted image of their political leaders rather than the election campaign. As for the women, they generally voted for the party recommended by the household heads.

Outside sources were very important with regard to political communication as a large number of people collected information from nearby towns and villages. Thus village politics is no longer isolated and many of the educated, employed, as well as unemployed youth have started to participate actively in politics. Here again, age, education, occupation, and income were seen to greatly influence the political behaviour of the respondents.
With regard to the models described in the introductory chapter there were evidences of the two-step flow of information as the study revealed that information flowed from the mass media or change agents to the better educated, well off and influential persons, and from them to the rest of the members in the community. The best example of this is the Toda leaders who were seen to receive information from the change agents and pass on the same to the rest of the people. But the leaders were selective in what they passed on. Thus information was seen to flow along well-defined channels in the village social structure.

Almost all respondents had access to one communication channel or other. Awareness was high for most of the development programmes and people received information on various matters from personal as well as impersonal sources. For most purposes people with outside contacts provided the link between the villages and the development agencies. The major or primary source of information for most of the people was the neighbour, friend or relative. This clearly indicates that the village social structure and inter-personal channels are still the best means of transmitting information of various kinds in the two societies. Least reliance was
placed on the mass media as a basis for trying out any new ideas in agricultural matters.

With regard to various development campaigns people's awareness was far in excess of their participation in it. In the case of the Todas the major problems were lack of credit and other inputs, lack of motivation, lack of interest on the part of the extension officials and the absence of proper monitoring and feedback. Education was a neglected aspect of implementation.

For effective development communication the planners should recognise the need to plan for communication in integration with other activities. They should use the different channels and techniques depending on the characteristics of the beneficiaries. Locally available communication resources from the village to the district level should be exploited. The development agencies should identify the right persons to receive the benefits and these people should be consulted for a better understanding of their problems and needs. Thus proper communication is essential.

Information on various development programmes is not enough since knowledge does not necessarily result in
application. The people are unable to utilise the information without necessary inputs and skills. Thus they should be provided with the inputs as well as the education in the application of these inputs. Pilot projects should be repeated with the same degree of attention to linkages and extension so as to ensure the same degree of success. The schemes should be suited to the local conditions and acceptable to the beneficiaries. Only then can the development goals of the nation be realised, with regard to the backward classes, the Scheduled Tribes and the Scheduled Castes.