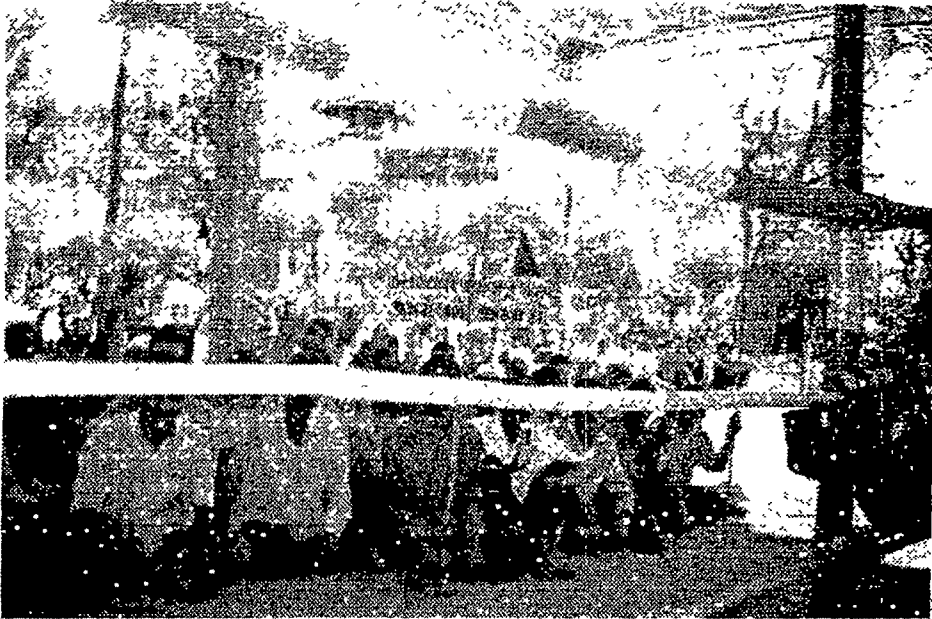


Chapter VII

CONCLUSION

The **transformation** is the central concept of the thesis. It explores almost all the aspects of change in the tribal societies of Eastern tribal tract in Gujarat. Right since the inception of the British colonial rule in Gujarat, slow, steady but definite and continuous infiltrations in the tribal regions of Gujarat have been taking place. These entrants were either the administrators or military officers who tried to subdue the fiercely independent tribes. The tribes of Gujarat always remained difficult people to be tamed. They gave tough time to the British rulers whenever they tried to subdue them and curb their freedom. The oppressive policies of the alien rulers were responded to in

¹ The picture is about the protest movement by the tribal communities of Dharampur against the making of a dam on river Mann. The dam is expected to drown forty two villages. The meeting was held at Dharampur on 19th February 2002 when I happened to be there. There were about 10,000 tribals who participated in the anti-dam rally. The march was completely silent and peaceful. This form of protest informed and guided by the Gandhian ideals of *satyagraha* is one indication how Gandhians' work among the tribal has affected a change in the tribals over a long period of time.

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the form of revolts against the British authorities, in which they used to loot and vandalize the official infrastructure. This kind of response to the outside agencies of power was not necessarily specific to the colonial rulers as if they happened to be different in race. The tribals had not surrendered even to any native ruler in the pre-colonial times. This is clear from their response to the Christian Missionaries who also happened to be white Europeans. Once they saw that missionaries had not come to suppress their independence but they were there to help them in several beneficial ways. Tribals readily accepted the missionaries and their religion.

This acculturation of tribal societies with an alien religion bringing in different value attachments was first of its own kind in Gujarat. The missionary activities transformed the tribal societies in terms of social services. With the growth of compatible relationships with these missionaries, tribals slowly opened up to new changes in their societies. This was the stage of mutation where tribal communities were adapting to the large world outlooks whereas all kinds of elite were becoming empathetic to the so-called wild people.

Apart from the missionaries some of Princes ruling over the tribal areas also initiated ameliorative programmes for their tribal subjects in the changing climate of the nineteenth century. Gaekwad Sayajirao-III of the Baroda State stands out of all the ruling princes in initiating tribal welfare policies and programme. He opened many schools and subsidized education for his tribal people and efforts were made to end their seclusion by building up their confidence.

Young tribal men and women ensured positive reforms in their communities after receiving education from these institutes. These persons were often enterprising in their approach. We have examples of

tribals launching their own institutions of social reforms. Altogether the number of such people may be small to warrant an evidence for a complete transformation of tribals in terms of education and broadening of their world outlook. Nonetheless this percentage may not be smaller when we compare the situation with the mainstream society.

It was in the first half of the twentieth century that people of India especially those living in the urban areas became conscious about the welfare of the people living in the villages under the influence of Mahatma Gandhi and his ideology of *sarvodaya*. The concept of *sarvodaya* of Gandhi becomes important because it was based on the idea of welfare of all and with the purpose to bringing the majority of Indians in the struggle for independence movement. Gandhi was convinced that when more than eighty percent of Indian population lived in villages it was futile to imagine of an Independent India without the participation of the rural masses. Moreover, in his scheme of things, these multitudes included the downtrodden, whether they were dalits, tribals or other marginalized sections including women. His inspirations were given shape in the ashrams of Sabarmati-Ahmedabad and Sewagram-Wardha. After 1920 at Gujarat Vidyapith, Ahmedabad he made special efforts in this regard where young men and women were trained to serve the village India. Through the network of his institutions Gandhi guided the persons working for the purpose of rural welfare in different parts of India and Gujarat. The young men who evolved themselves on the ideals of Gandhi came to be known as Gandhians.

When people like Thakkar Bapa and Jugatram Dave began their work with the tribal communities of Gujarat they were immersed in the ideas of Gandhi. The volunteers who came after them in the region also received training and orientation from Gujarat Vidyapith. They all

devotedly worked for the holistic development of the tribal regions in Gujarat. Rather than limiting their services only to education and health, they expanded it to agriculture, elimination of superstition, introducing different crafts and popularizing their traditional handicrafts. For them the most important thing was to understand the problems of indebtedness, and institutionalized exploitation of these societies. For these purposes they enunciated cooperative movement among them. To raise their voice against exploitation by the administration, Gandhians used *satyagriha* device which emerged as one of the most effective means of protest adopted by the tribals. Previously the tribals would always show their resentment and resistance through armed revolts which by and large were ruthlessly suppressed by the authorities. This new form of protest proved not only to be effective for the tribals but also changed the attitude of the mainstream people who generally considered tribals to be violent and aggressive.

The activities of Gandhians among the tribal communities of Gujarat ceaselessly continue to work. The nature of challenges for the activists has certainly changed with the passage of time. Before Independence the volunteers were tirelessly engaged to provide tribals education and prepare them for independence. After Independence they needed the support of Government to extend to them the rights to sustain and live with equal dignity at par with other communities of India. The demands of tribal people were put forward by the Gandhians to the notice of the Government of India. Thakkar Bapa effectively intervened in the Constitution Assembly of India resulting in the special provisions regarding the administration of the tribal communities of India. Bapa also began the Bhartiya Adimjati Sevak Sangh which united all the welfare bodies working for the tribal communities. This body

continues to influence the developmental policies planned for the Tribal communities of India.

Currently the tribals have chartered a long journey. They have seen all-round development in their lives. They are better educated, participate in the governance in a major ways and are contributing to the socio-economic life of the country in significant ways. They are chief-ministers of few states, not necessarily of the tribal dominated areas; they are union ministers; they are in the high positions of bureaucracy; their presence in the academic institutions has significantly increased. Tribal communities of Gujarat have made definite move towards progress which is a reflection of their overall transformation. The role of Gandhians surely can not be and should not be valorized for this process. But surely, along with other agencies, Christian missionaries, education, state, NGOs etc the Gandhians have played a major role in bringing an attitudinal change not only among the tribals themselves but also in the attitude of other communities towards them.