CHAPTER VII

THE MITAGARS OF GOA:

SOME ISSUES IN

CHANGE AND

CONTINUITY
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Introduction

In this chapter, certain transition-related issues pertaining to all three villages are discussed. An attempt is made to understand the transition that the mitagars have been experiencing since 1992 till date, and the role of the State in implementing policies that impact the salt makers.

The findings point out that although the traditional occupation of salt making remains the same for the Mitagars, there are regional variations with respect to the caste, status of women and ownership pattern. The traditional occupation of the salt makers has undergone changes depending on the village and the local circumstances.

In Agarvaddo, for instance, the salt-makers have traditionally remained loyal to the work of salt making though they have still not become the owners of the land. In Arpora, the people involved in this occupation have ceased to pursue the jobs in the salt pans due to various factors mentioned in earlier chapters. In Batim, the Agris have ceased to perform the jobs in the salt pans and instead employ migrant workers from Karnataka.

In this chapter, common feature – like the main economic activity – are discussed. This is being done in order to show the regional variations in the castes which share the same occupation, and to highlight the interactions of Mithgaudas, Gauddis, Agris, Bhandaris and Agers within themselves and with other sections of society.
The chapter also addresses the status of women in all the three groups comparatively.

In order to examine the social changes taking place among the mitagars, the study has adopted a comparative framework. On the one hand, we find that some salt makers still engaged in their traditional occupation are those who have inherited the work from their forefathers. On the other hand, the children of salt makers who been educated have switched to new occupations. For instance, through education, other means of economic betterment, and job reservations, the Agers (who are scheduled castes) have achieved a new socio-economic status which delinks them from their traditional set up.

**Significant Issues Emerging From Fieldwork**

One of the emerging facts of significance in this study is that, while the mitagars under study share the same occupation, yet differences are visible as far as their religion, caste, ownership patterns, alternate means of livelihood patterns and rituals are concerned as noted in table 7.1.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Village</th>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Caste</th>
<th>Labour</th>
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<tr>
<td>Agarvaddo</td>
<td>Hindus</td>
<td>Mithgaudas</td>
<td>Self-operated</td>
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<td>Batim</td>
<td>Christians</td>
<td>Agris</td>
<td>Labour-operated</td>
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<td>Arpora</td>
<td>Christians, Hindu</td>
<td>Gauddi, Bhandaris</td>
<td>Labour-operated/self-operated</td>
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The changing economics of salt-farming in Goa, its sharply-declining fortunes as compared to the role it played across history, and also the varied pressures on the salt-farms in different areas of Goa are other important emerging issues.

**Ownership Issues and Operation**

Myth merges with lore and oral history when it comes to explaining the ownership patterns in the three villages under study. This makes it difficult to extricate fact from belief. For instance, one belief says that the original owners of Agarvaddo served the military of Adil Shah as a result of which large tracks of land were given to them in Agarvaddo.

Incidentally, some salt pans in Agarvaddo are currently owned by the local temple, and this ownership is reflected in their name, as they are called as *Devllacho agar*, which comes in for a periodic *leilany* or auction. These pans are let out on tender every two years.

In Arpora, the oral history says a few salt pans belonged to the Gauddis and some other to the Hindu landlords, who resided in Arpora in the past. Later they were taken control of by the Gauddis who were the landowners and are believed to have held influential posts in the Portuguese administration. They held posts of *escrivaos* (local clerks, who maintained crucial registers and documents) and collected the *prediaal* (land-tax or liability to be paid to government) during the Portuguese rule.

For some reason, Arpora also saw a unique ownership pattern wherein every salt pan was owned by multiple owners. This feature is not noticed by the researcher in any other salt pans in Goa. Many owners, Hindus and Christians, jointly own the salt pans in Arpora. Even a tamarind tree in Arpora is jointly owned by as many as
sixteen landlords wherein equal shares are made for all, including one share for the plucker.

In Arpora, the Gauddis and the Bhandaris performed the salt work. Since this village initially employed the Mithgaudas from Pernem slowly the Mithgaudas stopped coming to Arpora as a result of which the Bhandari caste of Arpora, over the years, has learnt the art of salt making. In Arpora, some Gauddi landlords who had bigger salt pans employed daily wage migrant workers from Calangute.

Migrations out of Arpora led to further changes in the operations at the salt pans. Some landlords who settled abroad donated the land to a Priest of the church, who in turn was instructed to conduct masses out of the earnings generated from the salt pans. Some sold off their small shares to others. The Mithgaudas of Agarvaddo used to offer their services to the people of Arpora. But gradually the Mithgaudas of Agarvaddo, from across the taluka boundaries, stopped coming to Arpora to work in the salt pans as a result of which the Bhandaris learnt the art of salt making. Some of the Gauddis who were landlords also performed the jobs in the salt pans. The only salt pan which is today functioning in Arpora is owned by the Gauddi landlord.

In Batim, the salt pans were owned by the landlords from Gaunkar vaddo who belonged to the Chardo caste. Some of the Hindu landlords who own the salt pans in Batim reside outside the village. Some of the salt pans are also owned by the church and some by the Communidade.

In Agarvaddo, salt pans were owned by the temple and in Batim there are salt pans which are owned by the church. Some annual fees are paid to the church in Batim by those operating the salt pans. Some of the salt pans in Batim were also owned by the communidade, but the tenants of the same have not paid their dues to
the communidade for several years, probably due to the tenancy laws in force in Goa since the 1960s, which change the situation on the tenancy front.

In Agarvaddo, the people involved in the salt production were Hindus by religion and belonged to the Mithgaudas caste; actual owners were only Hindus who were Gaud Saraswat Brahmins. Here, the landlords do not reside in the village in Agarvaddo but reside in the adjacent village called Parcem, also in Pernem taluka. Some of the salt pans are owned by the temple.

In Batim, the people involved in the salt production were all Catholics who were of the Sudra caste group and are referred to as Agris, whereas the landlords were both Christians as well as Hindus. They live in various villages of Tiswadi and Bardez talukas. Some of them reside in Batim village.

According to the oral history in Batim, the Mithgaudas performed the jobs in the salt pans for hundreds of years. It is not known how and when the Mithgaudas disappeared in Batim. It is also not known from where the Agris originated before they settled in Salcette, and Tisvadi. In Batim, the Agris do not work in the salt pans since they are economically better off and can afford to employ migrant laborers.

In Agarvaddo, the members of the household work in the salt pans. It is a family occupation wherein the sons, unmarried daughters, daughter-in-laws and even the grandchildren work in the salt pans. Migrant workers from outside Goa are not employed in the salt pans here, though a lot of migrants do live in this village. Sometimes the Mithgaudas take the help of the Dalits in the fields and in the salt pans which the researcher observed during the course of the fieldwork. Bhandaris here cannot employ migrant workers due to the smaller size of their salt-pans. To make it economically viable to employ migrant workers, the salt-pan should be of at least a
hundred kunghes (The rectangular plots fenced in by little embankments or bunds for crystallization to hold saline water saturated with salt crystals) in size.

*Salt production and the original owners:* From the above, it is clear that changes have taken place in various aspects of the social world of the Mitagars. Mitagars comprised of different categories: some were landlords like the Gauddis of Arpora, who also worked in the salt pans.

Landlords of Agarvaddo and Batim however did not work in the salt pans. In Agarvaddo, all involved in the salt production were Hindus by religion and belong to the Mithgauda caste and the original owners were the Goud Saraswat Brahmins, whereas the permanent tenants belong to the Mithgaudas caste. The Bhandaris were the ones who had acquired the skill from their Mithgauda counterparts from Agarvaddo.

In Batim, the situation is different. Most of the salt pans were owned by the landlords from the Gaunkar ward but the Agris are now the owners (locally referred to as the *patraos*). Since they are better off, they now employ the migrant workers from Karnataka.

*Sale and storage of salt:* At the beginning of the salt season, salt was of light weight than during the season time when the crystals become heavier due to humidity. The rates of salt differed in all three villages. In Agarvaddo the rate of the salt was the highest as compared to the two other villages. In the Mapusa market, the rate for Agarvaddo salt was the highest since it contained less silt. But the salt makers of Arpora said that the salt produced in Arpora was reddish in colour wherein the salinity was more of Arpora salt.

If the rate of salt in Batim salt pans was rupees twenty a tin, the rate of the same tin of salt when sold in the villages also remained the same although there was
cost of transport and more labour and time factor involved while selling the salt in the
villages. The reasons were that salt that was sold in the villages the tin which was
used for the sale of salt had dent which took less salt in each tin. Secondly as one of
the respondents commented that ‘Tim advim ravon lath otoita’ meaning they bend and
fill the salt resulting in filling only half the tin.

In earlier times, the oral history suggests, the people of Batim used to leave
their house early in the morning at 3.30 am. They left their homes before dawn since
there was no transport system. The whole ward used to come together when they
wanted to take rice or salt for sale to nearby villages like Dongri (Mandur), Neura,
Agacaim with the help of chudio vat disna zalear (coconut leaves are tied together
with the help of coconut leaves and lit with fire to use it like a torch in the dark). They
would keep extra chudio with them (chudio dobraadh asthaale). Later the salt was
transported in what is referred to as a tamndo truck (red, or larger, truck). The driver
would stay in their house in the night so that they could set out early in the morning
the next day. Sometimes the divers played truant. After selling the salt in distant
villages of Salcette, around Cuncolim and in Canacona, they would return back from
there at twelve in the midnight. But nowadays there is not much problem since people
now own their own transport like the pickups to transport and sell the salt.

Agarvaddo salt was mostly sold by local canoes in different places in
Maharashtra. But now due to the lack of roads in the salt pans salt is brought on
bicycles and kept on the road. Some people come personally on the salt pans to buy
the salt.

In Arpora, salt was sold in bullock carts to different places in North Goa like
Siolim, Nanora, Uspaa, Assonora, Sal, Caisua (Chapora) and the like. Sometimes the
people used to come in their bullock carts from far off places and reach by midnight.
or 2 a.m. They would come with a lampiao or a lantern since there was no electricity. They would fill the bullock carts in the night and leave by six in the morning. But now, due to the easy availability of a network of roads in Goa, people buy the salt directly from the salt pans which reduces the cost of labour and transportation to the salt workers in Arpora. One respondent said that ever since stories about the iodization of salt has emerged amche mitt nothaar kelem meaning our salt was considered as degraded by the government and the multinational companies which have affected the salt making in Arpora. Mitaacho kalank kelo (salt from the salt pans was discouraged for human use). Earlier, the major use of salt pans was for salt production as a result the salt was also sold to freezing and ice-factories Padheraache fornaak (baker’s oven), bordhik ani barfaak (ice factory) ani khaavadik chalta kampanin valor kami kelo (the multinational companies brought down the value of local salt).

Usually the sale of the salt is done by the females of the village. If asked why, they say, “daadliancho haath vhodlo” (literally, “men have larger hands”, which means, a greater amount of salt is given away while selling by men). There are middlemen too from other villages who come with a pick up van.

Earlier the salt was transported either in small boats (vadien) or by a bail ghaaddo (ghaddiakar) i.e. a man driving the bullock cart (see photo). He would to take the salt from the village to distant villages which did not produce salt. But now the salt is transported from the salt pans to the road by motorbike, or mostly on cycle, since the salt pans are not connected by roads and then it is later transported on the pickup.

Storage: Salt was stored with Korodd (hay) from the hill (dhongor) in olden days in Batim. Hay (thonn) was covered on the huge heaps of salt during the rainy
season, but then it was not available on the hill. So the Agris tried another option of hay made of *Bimutt* grass which consists of a plant called the *bimutt* in Konkani which is available in *kharem shetaani* where they grow *Korgutt*. *Ami gorjek hem thonn dhampleelem pun hem kordaa poros ekdum borem ravlem* actually we used this *Bimutt* grass as since there was no other option for us but this turned out to be more effective and available in plenty than the grass from the hill. Nowadays salt is stored near the salt pans on a place called *bandh*.

During the rainy season, water slides on the roof and keeps the salt dry although some amount does get wasted with the moisture. Each heap contains roughly about 800-900 sacks. But in Agarvaddo permanent structures are built in the *bandhs* called *mangar* (see photo) and in Arpora these are called as *khop*. The *khop* is made of coconut leaves whereas the *manger* is built with roof tiles. In Batim, the landlords do not permit the salt makers to build theses storage facilities.

**Caste and Continuity**

Caste is a complex reality in the lives of the Mitagars of the three studied villages of Goa.

Mithgaudas claim to be higher than the Bhandaris and the Bhandari say the Mithgaudas do not belong to their *jat* but are ‘*Gauddes*’. They pointedly requested the researcher not to include them with the Mithgaudas, suggesting that their caste was higher.

To complicate the situation further, the Mithgaudas claim superiority of status over the Bhandaris. There is some confusion over who is 'superior'. Everyone, however, is agreed that the two are of unequal status and that they cannot intermarry.
Few years back, the Bhandaris would get married to the Mithgaudas, but the Mithgaudas would not get married to the Bhandaris. The Mithgaudas kept rigidly apart and would not take food, nor would share any ritual. There is a fixed group of people with whom one can marry but in fact it is impossible to specify precisely who they are.

The researcher, however, witnessed a night festival in Agarvaddo where the Bhandaris and the Mithgaudas worshipped in common. This God Nagnath was shifted by the Bhandaris of Arpora to Agarvaddo during the time of conversion and constructed the temple. When the researcher was one day standing outside the temple, a group of men came outside the temple and told her: “While writing your study, please do not write that the Bhandaris are higher than the Mithgaudas, since we were higher than the Bhandaris.” In the empirical level this fight for superior status continues.

Nowadays all the Gauddis from Arpora, with the exception of one Gauddi family who is still in occupation till date, feel that the occupation of salt making is somewhat degrading and is best avoided if possible. This was revealed during the field work wherein they said they even sold the saltpans. Most of the Gauddis when interviewed would not even mention which caste they belonged to. They would get annoyed if any enquiries regarding the caste were made. But the Gauddi family which currently runs salt-pans mentioned to the researcher the caste to which they belonged to. The salt makers in one caste hierarchy are not similar to the salt makers in another even though these two groups may not actually maintain any relations with each other, or perform the same ritual functions in their respective communities.

In this study, the salt-making groups following the established conventions use proper names which designate a caste group. Some caste groups claimed to belong to
a higher position in the caste hierarchy, but took on occupations ascribed to persons lower down in the caste hierarchy.

For example, the Mithgaudas claim to be Kshatriyas, but take on a 'lower' occupational role. The Bhandaris of Arpora are not originally salt makers but toddy tappers, and considered to be the Other Backward Class. Not long ago, members of this community were dependent on their income from salt making. But with the development of saltpans getting converted to hotels has made the salt making occupation redundant in Arpora. Srinivas (1991:14) has focused on how the caste involved in different occupations of the same and neighboring villages that are bound to each other with economic ties. Srinivas says “economic ties bind the castes living in a village, or a group of neighboring villages. Generally, the peasant castes are numerically preponderant in villages and they need the carpenter, blacksmith and leather work castes to perform agricultural work. Servicing castes such as priest (Brahmin as well as non-Brahmin), barber and washmen castes, meet the needs of everyone except Harijans. The artisan’s castes produce goods, which are wanted by everyone. Most Indian villages do not have a few of the essential castes and depend on neighboring villages for certain services, skills and goods. Hence we find that jajmani relations between Yajamans and Kamins are extended beyond village boundaries.” In the present study of the salt makers same kind of economic relationship existed among the Mitagars.

There are other shades of distinction regarding castes. The Bhandaris in Arpora consider the Mithgaudas from Agarvaddo to be inferior. They refer to them as kusaakaars, or those who are ready to fight. But the Mithgaudas considered themselves to be superior to the Bhandaris. The Bhandaris referred to the salt makers
of Agarvaddo in a derogatory sense as Gauddas. Here the Gaudda means the *Dhettle Gauda*.

The Bhandaris appear more liberal than the Mithgaudas. For example, in the temple at Agarvaddo, the Mithgaudas would not allow the Dalits to enter the temple, even if the latter was in a trance (*bhaar*) or considered to be in a state of possession. Likewise, the Mithgaudas would not accept food or water from the Bhandaris, nor would take their sons and daughters in marriage.

The Mithgaudas are unwilling to accept the sons or daughters of the Bhandaris in marriage, but the Bhandaris were open to accepting a Mithgauda in a matrimonial alliance. The researcher witnessed a festival at Agarvaddo wherein both the castes that is Bhandaris and Mithgaudas were involved in this common festival.

**Issues of Continuity and Change in the Lives of the Mitagars**

*Cultural synthesis.* Cultural synthesis in the face of colonial subjugation exposes not only the capacity of the colonized to adapt to oppression, but also underlies the complexity of the cultural integration that has taken place (Kamat1999:66). Many of the socio religious customs and the practices in the salt pans exhibit a syncretic form. The various practices that were performed in the salt pans by the Mithgaudas of Pernem have been followed in the convert society though with slight modifications.

For instance, the Mithgaudas kill a cock in the salt pans. The same idea was followed by the convert society i.e. the Agris of Batim, where they would kill a pig. But some salt pans were forbidden to kill a pig so they had to slay a goat. With the coming of the Agers, who are Hindus, the ritual of cutting a pig again changed and the Agers follow a custom of killing a cock in the salt pans.
In Agarvaddo, for the village zatra, the Dalits beat the drum early in the morning to inform the people about the zatra. With conversion, the Agris created their own culture and continued old practices followed before the time of conversion. When the feast begins early in the morning, the alvorad (musicians) move around the village playing music to announce the feast day. Some marriage customs of Hindu salt makers like the Bhandaris and the Mithgaudas – for instance, the Paanch dis – are followed by them. Only the Agris follow the Paanch okhta; meaning the day after the marriage the bridegroom goes to the bride's house and stays for a day and has to complete five meals before she returns to the groom’s house.

Resistance through syncretism and collaboration. The Goan diaspora culture is characterized by a periodic return to the roots, to their God’s in Goa (rooted in the concept of “devak aylla”, or referring to someone having come to seek the blessings of God). The Gods, it is said, did not protect the Goans; rather the people saved their deities by shifting the idols to safer locales across the rivers. Incidentally, the transportation of the deity on logs of woods fastened together or on canoes tied up in a similar fashion (known as sangodd) is even today commemorated by the Hindus and Catholics alike, with the latter too associating with the celebration of sangodd. (Kamat1999:65). In the mixed village like Arpora, the people belief of St. Sebastian is manifested in the belief by the Bhandaris of him being a convert from Hinduism – although St. Sebastian was a third century Christian martyr said to have been killed during the Roman emperor Diocletian's persecution. The Agris of Batim although having been converted probably around four centuries ago still visit their Hindu Goddess in Pilgao before the start of the salt season.
Segregation in Religious Places: In the convert society too, the Agris had separate benches to sit in the church to show their inferiority. This trend is changing slowly though in Batim. The Mithgaudas in Agarvaddo do not allow the Mahars (Dalits) to enter into the temple. But the educated Dalits too do not enter the temple at Agarvaddo – although they are exposed to tourism, use the internet to seek information and see the world through television and cable.

Salt making as status distinguisher in Goa. Status refers to the position occupied by a person, family or kinship group in a social system relative to others, such as teacher or priest. This determines rights, duties and other behaviors including the nature and extent of the relationships with persons of other statuses. Social status has a hierarchal distribution, in which a few persons occupy the highest positions.

Social status is determined by education, income, possessions and the social valuation of occupation and of other activities in society. Attempts are made to achieve high status by some persons who concentrate their resources upon the purchase of certain visible items of the style of life of a higher group: these are popularly called status symbols. Although social status can be considered as a continuous variable, there is a tendency for the population to group itself into fairly distinct clusters around incomes corresponding to broad occupational groups (Duncan 1979: 193).

Occupational population (like those people engaged in a particular occupation at a particular time e.g. Mitagars show dramatic differences in composition when viewed in terms of age, sex, race and other characteristics. Some of these differences are attributable to the nature of work but more of them can be traced to the social history of individual occupations (Gupta 1991: 39).
Evidence suggests that the occupational status of the salt makers and fishermen (Kharvi) in Goa is low as compared to the other occupations; they are subject to various types of discriminations.

With the advancement in technology and refinement of division of labour, the functions become more specialized and productive tasks come more and more to depend on one another. These developments have two major effects on occupations

- Occupations become more numerous. New occupations develop and existing ones are sub-divided.
- The rate of change within occupations, i.e. the transformation of occupational tasks, the training required for them, and the conditions under which they are performed greatly accelerates (Caplow 1975: 111).

Salt too contributes to the determination of the status of the community in Goa.

In India one of the most striking features of the caste system as it actually exists is the lack of clarity in hierarchy, especially in the middle regions. Each caste tries to prove that it is equal to a superior 'caste' and 'superior' to its 'equals' and arguments are advanced to prove superiority. The vegetarian castes occupy the higher position in the hierarchy and approximation to vegetarianism is adduced as evidence of high status. The drinking of liquor, eating of a domestic pig which is a scavenger, and of the sacred cow, all these tend to lower the ritual rank of a caste. Similarly, the practice of a degrading occupation such as butchery, or a defiling occupation such as hair-cutting, or making leather sandals, salt making etc. tend to lower the ritual rank of a caste. There is a hierarchy in diet and occupation, though this varies somewhat from region to region. The caste from which a man accepts cooked food and drinking
water are either equal or superior, while the caste from which he does not are inferior (Gupta 1991: 31).

Generally, a caste or a group is assigned with a hereditary occupation. Thus, a Brahmin thought that it was correct for him to be a priest while the Chamar regarded it as his duty to cure hides and prepare shoes. This was only generally true, for there were groups of occupations like trading, agriculture, laboring in the field and doing military service which were looked upon as anybody's and most castes were supposed to be eligible for any of them. Among the artisans occupation which were more or less of the same status, were open to the members of these castes without incidental degradation (Gupta 1991: 44-45). In the same way, the Agris and the Mith Gaudas occupation is a hereditary occupation and no other caste is eligible to perform the same since this kind of activity requires a lot of skill to extract salt.

There are minute rules as to what sort of food or drink can be accepted by a person and from what castes. But there is very great diversity in this matter. The practices in the matter of food and social intercourse divide India into two broad belts. In Hindustan proper, caste can be divided into five groups: first, the twice born caste; second those castes at whose hands the twice-born can take pukka food; third, those castes at whose hands the twice-born cannot accept any kind of food but may take water; fourth, caste that are not untouchable, yet are such that water from them cannot be used by the twice-born; last come all those castes whose touch defiles not only the twice born but any orthodox Hindu. All food is divided into two classes kachcha and pukka, the former being any food in the cooking of which water has been used, and the latter all food cooked in ghee without the addition of water.

Inspite of the rigid restrictions that prevailed in the caste system in relation to food, it is surprising to note that the salt produced by the lowest castes was consumed
by the higher caste or the twice born caste from time immemorial till date. Of course, this is a matter of convention.

In Goa, the people associated with the salt work usually occupy lower position in the social hierarchy. For example, the Kharvis or the fishermen (the word Kharvi is derived from ‘khar’ or something which is salty a corrugation of the Sanskrit word ‘khar’ meaning 'Kshar' (salt) (Mangalekar 2006: 128). The Kharvis are considered to be low in status in Goa. Similarly, the people involved in salt extraction are also treated as low in society. Thus, salt making is one important factor which determines the status of an individual in Goa.

A stigma is attached to the kharvis (fisherfolk), Agris, Agers, Gauddis and the Mithgaudas. There is a rigid oversimplified, often exaggerated belief that is applied to the salt makers and to each individual within it. The belief that these people are ‘unclean’ is a stereotype. As argued by Gupta (1991: 41) it is important to distinguish between a stereotype and a generalization. A generalization is a descriptive statement that applies to the Mitagars as a whole. Stereotypes are important because they form the basis for prejudice, which in turn is used to justify discrimination. The Mitagars are ‘unclean’ and their presence defiles the high caste peoples’ house is a stereotype which is a negative one.

It can be concluded that, on the basis of the perception that people have about the mitagars who are treated low can be on the basis of income, caste, occupation, dress, geographical location, language etc. The salt workers of Batim are often referred by the higher caste people of the village as ‘sokoile’ (low). The villages considered them as of low status since salt making occupation is held degrading, may be because of the manual work which they have to perform which requires a lot of skill and hard work, secondly the dress that is worn by them in the process of salt
making has to be ordinary as they have to submerge themselves in the (chikol) and thirdly due to the position in the caste hierarchy which places them in the lowest rungs of the society. The typical language dialect that is spoken by the salt makers differentiates them from the other communities which also set them aside from the rest of the villages.

Dress, food habits and customs regarding marriages, funerals etc, vary from caste to caste. In every caste there are different sub-castes. The Agris felt that it is necessary to do away with the discrimination on account of religion and come together with a sense of fellow feeling. The Agris have gradually adapted themselves to the secular concept of the new regime and a distinct secular outlook is slowly but definitely developing in their midst. In the church, earlier there were seats demarcated for the higher castes and the lower castes. There was separate dress (opmurs) that was worn especially during the feast procession and at the time of funerals. The color of this dress was different for the higher caste and the Agris. The colour of this dress used by the Agris was white and red and for the higher caste it was only white. Agris have slowly given up wearing of this dress and as a result this trend is gradually disappearing. Thus, the Mitagars have been witnessing major changes in almost all spheres of their life.

**Occupation, Gender and Social Change**

*Alternative means of livelihood patterns.* That the lives and lifestyles of the salt-makers is under pressure is clear from the various issues emerging from the study. The source of pressure might be different, and so are the alternatives sought to gain new livelihoods.
In Agarvaddo, due to the breach in the crucial river embankments, many traditional mitagars had lost their traditional occupation of salt making as a result of which they had switched on too new sources of livelihood. Most of them had started their own petty enterprises like small shops, restaurants and, whenever possible, took to white collar jobs.

In Arpora, starred hotels have come up near the erstwhile saltpans. The salt pans have been utilized for recreation purposes as a result of which most of the displaced persons from salt making Bhandari families had taken up various kinds of jobs in the hotels. Some of them had purchased taxis which were being used in the hotels and others have started their own business to cater to the needs of the domestic as well as the international tourists who visit Arpora. Tourism played an important role in displacing the mitagars of this village. In short tourism has created alternative jobs and improved the standard of living in Arpora.

In Batim, the situation is quite different. Most of the salt pans were unaffected. Batim was one of the salt producing villages where all the salt-pans were intact and none of them were being destroyed either due to natural forces or man-made factors. In the wake of tenancy reforms being implemented in Goa in the 1960s and 1970s, the tenants had emerged to become the owners of the land. As a result of which, they employed migrant workers. Most of the traditional mitagars had taken white collar jobs. Some had moved abroad.

During the off-season i.e. during the monsoons the salt pans were used for fishing. Pisciculture is practised by placing thorn twigs (kantte ghalun) when the salt pans are submerged with water in the months from June to October. Various types of fish available are kalandur, shevtto, forgoso, agi, korkoro, tonak, lep and kurli.
In Agarvaddo village fishing could be undertaken by anyone, even by a person from outside the village. When enquired why it is so, the Mithgaudas said if they exclude outsiders from fishing then the original owners will realize that they get some profit out of pisciculture and would start demanding more money in the form of rent. One of the respondents, when asked about the same said Ami mashe kadlear charge diunk zai, meaning, if we fish only then ourselves will have to pay fees to the landlord so, it is better to allow everybody to fish in the saltpans.

In Batim the permanent tenants operated on the salt pans as well as caught fish during the monsoons; great care was taken and saw that no outsider would take fish from their salt pans. During the fishing season, the permanent tenants resided in small huts in the salt pans and do not allow any outsider to fish in their territory. They spent considerable resources on breeding fish and prawns in the salt pans in the monsoons. So Batim was the only village among the three villages where the fishing and the salt making were pursued by the same set of permanent tenants.

In Arpora, fishing and salt-farming are done by two separate sets of tenants. This has given rise to a lot of problems for the original owners while trying to sell off their lands. As a result, one salt pan was lying idle for the past two years due to a litigation involving two different tenants. The landlords sold the salt pans to the tenants who undertook fishing for several years; the permanent tenant who performed salt work was not informed at all. As a result of all this the matter was taken up in the court and the case is going on. Contesting tenants had their own claims, when the researcher visited their homes. If the salt pans are used for pisciculture for a long time then Naarge merrank booraak karta (Some kind of worms harm the bunds permanently). Secondly, it was contended, if the adjacent salt pans are used for
pisciculture during the salt farming season it affects the salt pans which are used for salt.

*Gender division of labour in the salt production processes:* Traditionally, women have been denied access to education and have the larger share of household work compared to men. This is true of all social classes. The labour burden is even heavier for women in agriculture as they help their male family members in agricultural operations and other activities (Gune 1979:32) and at the same time carry out most of the domestic responsibilities as well.

Gender division of labour exists even among the mitagars of Goa. The women do help the men in the salt making operations but there are certain tasks that are performed exclusively by the men. Such as, digging in the salt pans, pulling the salt crystals with a long shovel, preparing the mud ridges (*mero*) etc. There are also certain tasks related to the production of salt that are the exclusive responsibilities of the women, such as, removing the shells and small stones from the salt beds and carrying the salt baskets from the salt pans to the bunds.

Among the salt makers who have migrated to Goa (Batim) from Karnataka, however, such tasks are interchangeable between men and women. Tasks meant for the men may be performed by women and tasks meant for the women are also shared by the Ager men in the salt pans. As a result the payment also comes in pairs. There is no discrimination made between men and women among the Ager. They are paid equally.

There is a paucity of analytical ethnographic literature on the life and problems of these women. In this section we focus on women involved in salt making in Goa. A distinction is made between the position of the local salt making women and the migrant women.
Education of women is one of the crucial factors defining the status of women in that society. The Mithgauda girls have yet to take up higher education. Some girls have slowly started taking higher education. In terms of political participation the Mithgauda women have not made any progress at all. Even if it is a reserved seat for the Mithgauda women in the Panchayat elections, they do not participate in politics. The Ager women appear more politically motivated advanced than the Mithgauda women. They do contest for the village panchayat elections. Some have even become panchayat sarpanchas.

The Mithgauda of Agarvaddo: The Mithgaudas form an endogamous group divided into several exogamous clans. Each group worshiped its own deity. In all the salt making villages, adult marriage was prevalent. Marriage was settled by negotiation only. Inter-caste marriages between these salt making communities operating in Goa do not take place. Among the Mithgaudas, the girls were not sent for education beyond the higher secondary level. They had not ventured into politics. They feel it is ‘man’s’ job since the men in Agarvaddo believe that *Him meeting-gek gheli zalear gharant konn randtolo* (“If they went for political meetings who would do the cooking at home?”)

But on the social side, the Mithgauda women had changed. They plucked coconuts which was a job once performed only by the men. The women also wore gumboots to squash the cashew apples. Traditionally, this work – though laborious – was the domain of menfolk.

The Agri Women of Goa: The *Agri* women of Batim are Christians and belonged to the Shudra caste. Their customs were also changed after conversion. They used to wear saris and bangles but nowadays they wore Western dresses. They were referred to as “sokoile”, meaning they were considered as low members of society
since salt making occupation was considered thus by the rest of the society. Marriage used to take place within close cousins and next door neighbours. But now-a-days girls had started moving out of the village in marriage; although they got married within the same caste.

Ager women of Karnataka: The Ager women Of Bankikodla, Gokarna and Karwar belonged to the Ager caste. They are migrants from Karnataka who come to Goa to work in (mixed or gender) pairs and are paid their wages collectively as a pair. Ager women, in spite of belonging to scheduled caste, have a positive response to the development programmes. They respond positively to contesting for elections, jobs and going for higher education to distant towns. They lived for six months in the salt pans in Batim and return for six months to Karnataka. Their children who are less than 12 years of age also lived in salt pans and were enrolled in schools, but missed school for half year. Other girls who lived in the respective villages and did not come to Goa attended school up to secondary level. Poverty is their main constraint.

The Ager women were respected within their community and took part in social, political, religious and economic activity equally with men. They earned equal wages as that of their male counterparts in the salt making work. Financial management in the household was controlled by the men in consultation with the women. The Ager girls who were above the age of twelve and those of their counterparts who worked in salt pans in their hometown were enrolled as students and received higher education and were in preparation for the achievement of better socio-economic status.
Property normally went to sons only, according to their community rule. Married daughters said that they cannot claim any share in their father's property. Whatever the father wants to give his daughter, he would give at the time of marriage. In case of an unmarried daughter, the brother shouldered all the responsibility. But among the Ager, girls have now started taking up higher education and have started venturing in politics. They have become sarpanchas and various political offices in Karnataka are given to them.