CHAPTER I

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“Although there may be someone who does not seek gold, there never yet lived the man who does not desire salt...”

Flavius Magnus Aurelius Cassiodorus Senator (c. 485 - c. 585), Roman statesman and writer commonly known as Cassiodorus (ASAP 2003: 1).

Salt has played an important role in human history. No substance other than water has been used with such regularity as salt (Petch 2006: 2). The value of salt was known long before humans began to write their history. Given its socio-cultural importance, many questions arise when one undertakes a study of salt makers whom this researcher calls Mitagars. Who produces salt? How is it produced? Why is salt produced? When is it produced? How is salt sold? What has been the economic history and relevance of salt to Goa? Behind all these questions lie socio-cultural dimensions, many of which are still not adequately understood. These aspects are also linked to a range of other aspects that affect the lives of a significant section of Goa's coastal population.

This study discusses the transition experienced by the salt making community in Goa. In recent decades, the salt industry of Goa has been declining, and the number of salt pans (field-based pools used for obtaining salt by the natural evaporation of sea water) has also dwindled. This has resulted in a further decrease in the traditional occupation of the salt makers of Goa.

This study discusses the salt-manufacturing community found in Goa, which comprises five different jatis. It tries to discuss the transition within the salt-making
community of Goa, with a particular emphasis from 1992 till date.

Salt has long been a major industry in Goa, given this small state's relatively lengthy coastline and many rivers which get salt water during high tide. Salt prepared in Goa comes solely from the sea water. Traditionally, Goan salt has been considered to be of a high quality. In the past, Goan salt was exported to several African and Arabian regions during the post-medieval period, as evident from historical records.

The salt industry, however, suffered a setback over the past four or so decades, and the large-scale changes brought on in the wake of the end of Portuguese colonial rule in 1961. There was a steady decline in the traditional salt production sector.

Since India's Independence in 1947, salt-production, being a traditional village industry, was given Constitutional protection. Due to its role in Indian history, salt also resonated with the national freedom struggle, and thus is considered to have wider significance. However, the salt-industry in Goa did not receive any specific benefits or support after Liberation, the end of colonial rule having come here nearly a decade-and-half later.

Resultantly, the number of villages producing salt has drastically reduced, the number of salt pans decreased and the salt production fell sharply. This fall in the salt pans led to the steady decline in the number of salt producers in Goa. This phenomenon of passing from one state to another or the transition of the salt makers of Goa is dealt with and examined in its various dimensions in this study.

Transitional aspects as the division of labour, involvement of the different jatis in this occupation, status of women, ownership patterns, and pisciculture — as playing out in both the Old Conquest and the New Conquest areas - have been delineated in the thesis.

There are other aspects which emerge. For instance, in the caste system
prevailing in India, each *jati* was associated with one or more hereditary occupations. For example, the Brahmin is supposed to follow the priestly occupation, and so on. But, the occupation of salt-making in Goa is not *jati* specific. Neither is it entirely caste-neutral (as in the case of certain occupations like agriculture). Here, there are some apparent differences emerging between the way caste works itself out in Goa and the rest of India.

According to the available literature, the salt-making occupation in other parts of India is restricted to one particular caste group. As pointed out earlier in Goa, there are five different *jatis* that operate in the salt making occupation. Significantly, of these, the Mithgaudas claim to be from the Kshatriya segment of the caste hierarchy, the Gauddis—some do not reveal their caste and others say they are from Chardos, and prefer to project their currently higher economic status rather than their caste position in the social hierarchy. The Bhandaris claim to be from the O.B.C., and lastly the Agers acknowledge themselves as being part of the Dalit caste.

Reality may be different from the claims though, as caste is an easily misunderstood topic in Goa, and definitive academic studies are still lacking. The make-up of this wider salt-making community is also in transition. So is their perceived position in the caste hierarchy. All these five *jatis* also do not work solely in this occupation of salt making, but have now moved directly to other occupations as well.

In the ambitious ‘*People of India*’ series, published by the Anthropological Survey of India, the Goa volume includes only a brief account of the Mithgauda among all the five salt-making *jatis* that this researcher has studied. In the absence of any other detailed existing sociological or anthropological study on the *mitagars* of Goa, the researcher developed an interest in this area.
The salt-making community has, of late, witnessed changes, especially in the period under study, and it faces a serious threat to its continued existence. This chapter conceptualises aspects of community. It also attempts to deal with the recent literature on communities.

This chapter also describes the various salt-making communities that exist in other parts of India and in Goa. The ambiguity regarding the jati status of the Gauddas and the Mithgaudas in Goa is studied. It also deals with a literature review on various aspects of salt, salt-making communities, their problems, their decline and related issues.

In the absence of sociological/anthropological studies on the salt making community in Goa and in India which was the specific topic for this study, the researcher has linked the research to other studies on common themes, for example occupational communities such as those involved in fishing, the Bhangis (scavengers of human wastes) etc. This was also done since this was a community study and the objective of this study was to study the salt making community of Goa in transition. Secondly, these too were caste-based communities.

The Concept Community and its Sociological Study.

Before going into the details it is necessary to understand the concept of community. In the last few years, community studies have received considerable attention from scholars and academicians. An understanding of what is meant by community is enhanced if one possesses the knowledge of the perspective from which its examination is approached.

The sociology of community has long been a dominant source of sociological inquiry. Each of the three most influential nineteenth century sociologists – Marx,
Durkheim, and Weber — regarded the social transformation of community in its various forms to be a fundamental problem of sociology and sociological theory. Thomas Bender (1978) suggests that as early social thinkers observed the disruption of the traditional social order and traditional patterns of social life associated with industrialisation, urbanisation, and the rise of capitalism, significant attention was focused on the social transformation of community and communal life.

Since the late nineteenth century, 'the use of the term community has remained to some extent associated with the hope and the wish of reviving once more the closer, warmer, more harmonious type of bonds between people vaguely attributed to past ages' (Elias 1974, quoted by Hoggett 1997: 5). Before 1910 little social science literature was available concerning 'community' and it was really only in 1915 that the first clear sociological definition emerged. This was coined by C. J. Galpin in relation to delineating rural communities in terms of the trade and service areas surrounding a central village (Harper and Dunham 1959: 19). Community has been defined in competing ways - focusing on a geographical area; or on a group of people living in a particular area; or even seeing community as an area of common life.

Community can be seen in three different ways (Willmott 1986; Lee and Newby 1983; and Crow and Allen 1995). Firstly, it could be seen as a place. 'Community studies' and locality studies have emerged out of a territorial or place where people have something in common, understood geographically. It could also been seen as a shared interest. 'Elective' communities linked together by factors such as religious belief, sexual orientation, occupation or ethnic origin. (For instance, the 'Catholic community', the 'gay community' or the 'Goan diaspora') 'Elective groups' and 'intentional communities' (ranging, according to Hoggett op cit from cyber-communities to car-boot enthusiasts) are a key feature of contemporary life. Thirdly, it
can also be a communion — having a sense of attachment to a place, group or idea or a profound meeting or encounter (with people or God).

As there are many definitions of the term community available in social scientific literature let us now explore the few definitions and relate them to the Mitagars of Goa.

A community can be a collection of people who share something in common. It could be a collection of people who share a geographical territory and some measure of inter-dependency that provides the reason for living in the same place (Johnson 2000: 53). The salt-makers are such type of a community who share a common occupation. They live in a particular place, since the nature of occupation is such that it demands that people working in it have to reside in that geographical space where the salt pans are located.

Community can also be defined as all the people living in the same place and subject to the same law (e.g. the people of any district or town.) or a group of people living together or sharing something in common such as interests or vocations (Barnhart 1992). The salt makers fit into this definition; they constitute a collectivity which occupies a geographical area, which is engaged in the occupation of salt-making. Since salt-making is an occupation which cannot be carried out inland, the process and its community needs to be situated in a coastal area.

The essential aspects of community are that a community may be thought of as consisting of a group of people living in a contiguous geographic area, having common centres of interests and activities, and functioning together in the chief concerns of life (Osborne and Neumeyer 1933: 8). But the reverse may also be true, wherein a community may not occupy a common geography or have common interest and activities and may not function together in the chief concerns of life.
The village has been described as a community by almost every sociologist studying villages. Likewise, a religious community or an occupational community can be communities only in a very broad sense, in the sense of community of interests. This thesis considers the salt-making people in Goa as a community — which is an occupational community engaged in the salt-making occupation although their caste, religious affiliations, location differ from each other.

Community - Empirical Studies

Main contents of a few studies focussing diverse communities are given below.

Gurdon P.R. (1990) in his book *The Khasis* has sought to offer a systematic account of the Khasi people, their manners and customs, their ethnological affinities, their laws and institutions, their religious beliefs, their folklore, their theories as to their origin, and their language. This work presents the complete description of primitive customs and manners." The work presents a complete description of primitive customs and manners.

Sharma (1982) in his book *The Tai Phakes of Assam* has studied the Tai Phakes who inhabit the riverine areas of Dibrugarh district of upper Assam. They are found in areas extending up to the Chinese province of Kwansi and from Bangkok to the interior of Yunnan province. While studying the Tai Phakes, their manners and customs, material culture, social and religious institutions, their folklore and religious affinities, the author noticed that the small but homogeneous Tai Phakes had been maintaining their traditional distinctiveness even though they are surrounded, on all sides, by cultures and peoples with whom the pacific Tai Phakes have imperfect sympathies.
Cristoph Von Furer Haimendorf (1979) in his book *Gonds of Andhra Pradesh* presents the social and cultural life as observed over a period of thirty eight years in Adilabad district, a part of the erstwhile Hyderabad state. The author drew a picture of the life of the village community and traced the fates of men and women over a long stretch of time. A special emphasis has been laid on the economic and social changes which have transformed the character of Gond society in recent years.

Gorer, Geoffrey (1996) in his book, *The Lepchas of Sikkim* studies the Mongoloid ethnic group of the Lepchas as a tribe. They are seen as sharply different from their eastern counterparts like the Bhutanese, Daflas and Akas or from western neighbours such as the Gorkhas, known for their aggressive character. Lepchas are projected as marked by traits like absence of aggressiveness, “obsession with sex” and optimistic character. And this is what makes the Lepchas look unusual, looked in the light of popular beliefs about the tribal way of life of swashbuckling people having skirmishes at slightest provocation.

Ravindranath Rao’s (2003) study of the *Kudubis of South India* deals with a tribal society, comprising a community that migrated out of Goa further along the south coast, and has been described as a warrior and wild animal-hunting community. The main objective of this study was to examine the social changes that have occurred in the social structure and the functions of Kudubi society. In a similar manner, this study will focus on the social changes that are being felt on another section of the population in a period of transition in the Goan society.

Maruthi (2003) in his study of *The Holeyas*, examined the social, economic and cultural situation of the untouchable community who have a social status at the very bottom of the caste pyramid, namely Holeyas in Karnataka. The author has analyzed the social organization of Holeya community, covering the changes in the
caste-based endogamy, structure of the family, residential pattern, occupational pattern particularly focusing on the access to agricultural land and dependence on wage labour, the economic condition in terms of access to housing, social services, education and also political participation. Aspects taken up in this study help to understand the various aspects of the researcher's study.

K. S. Singh (1993), in *People of India – Goa*, identified 34 communities from within the region of Goa. The Anthropological Survey of India (AnSI) had done this work as part of a project to study the people of India; the objective of the project was to generate a brief, descriptive, anthropological profile of all the communities in India. This study has touched upon the salt-makers of Goa but only the Mithgauda community has been studied. Other castes that are operating on the salt making occupation have been overlooked by this study. No mention has been made of the salt-making Agris, Gauddis and the Bhandaris in this study.

S. K. Pramanik's (1993) study on the *Fishermen Community of Coastal Villages in West Bengal* is based on the study of the fishermen who constitute a community only by virtue of their common occupation and all that the common occupation entails. It is, in other words, an occupational community. The fishermen of the Hara and Sultanpur however constitute real communities as well, by virtue of their living in particular localities. In the case of Hara, the territorial and occupational aspects are overlapping because the village is exclusively a fishermen's village. However in the case of Sultanpur, the fishermen constitute only a part of the village population. So, the fishermen here constitute an occupational community within the territorial community composed of fishermen and non fishermen. It may be noted, of course, that fishermen of Sultanpur live in a particular locality of their own, and hence here the community has a spatial basis, the aerial unit here being not the entire village.
but the particular locality in it.

O.J.F. Gomes (1996), in his study *Village Goa* deals with the social structure of Chandor village in Salcete. It delves deep into the social structure of Chandor village. This work also focuses on its position in the rest of Goa, in comparison and contrast, and records the social changes that have come about in it during the last twenty five years, since the liberation of Goa for four centuries of Portuguese rule. It is mainly a descriptive study of the physical environment, demographic characteristics, caste structure, economic affairs, cultural activities, religious practices feasts and festivals, influence of the church and folklore of the Goan society, but appears to fail to understand the changes that have emerged in the Goan society. The study depicts that all the castes are prevalent in Chandor except the caste of Gauddo the Goan counterpart of Karnataka’s Gowda and possibly convert from the Vaishya-Vani caste. But the author overlooks the fact that the social changes which took place in the Chandor village cannot be generalized for the whole of Goa. As Chandor falls in the Old Conquests and the changes which emerged for the Old Conquest were not similar to those which emerged in the New Conquests. These aspects are dealt in detail in the chapter on Salt Making of Goa.

Thakur’s (2007) work on the Agaris of North-West Maharashtra: An ethnographic Study is an ethnographic and historical account of the Agari community. Her study on the Agaris of Maharashtra clearly indicates that the Agaris belonged to the Shudhra caste. They reside mainly in six districts of Maharashtra – Thane, Raigad, Ratnagiri, Pune, Nashik and Mumbai city. With the exception of Nashik and Pune, which are inland districts, the remaining four are coastal districts. The traditional occupation of this caste community, from which it derives its caste name, is salt making. The Marathi word for salt pan is agar: from which it derives its caste name.
Agari. But salt making is not the Agaris main source of livelihood. The majority of the community members are also cultivators. Salt making is a seasonal activity carried out during the summer months. The proportion of the community members earning their livelihood through salt making has also declined over the years. She has traced the historical trajectory which would unfold the emergence of that Agaris as a caste and delineate their process of marginalization. The specific objective was to trace the particular pattern of this process in a village and its surrounding region. This thesis hinges upon three concepts: caste, peasants and history.

P. L. Souza’s (2005) *A Socio- Economic Study of Salt pan Workers with special Reference to Uttara Kannada District* reveals that mostly Agers are employed in the salt field and belong to the scheduled caste population, they specialize in the work of salt pans, maintain their traditional occupation and are considered as despised classes. He dealt on the importance of salt and the growth of the salt industry. His work throws light on methodological aspects, including theoretical orientation and the aspect of poverty, the social, economic, and health problems of the salt pan workers of the Salt Owners Co-operative Society, Sanikatta.

The present empirical study has been undertaken with an objective to explore the economic, social, religious and cultural aspects of the Mitagar community of Goa. The work focussed on how the salt-making community of three pockets of Goa is experiencing transition.

Transition

The common definition of transition is a passage from one place or state to another; the transition of the weather from hot to cold. Another definition of transition is a change from one form to another or the act of passing from one state or place to
the next. It is a change from one place or state or subject or stage to another. Transition is also an event that results in a transformation (http://ardictionary.com/Transition/ 6133Communities in Transition).

According to the World Book Dictionary, 'transition is a change or passing from one condition, place, thing, activity, or topic to another. According to Roget's Super Thesaurus the term transition implies a change, transformation, switch, shift, conversion, changeover, metamorphosis, passage, transmogrification and transmutation. Apart from this dictionary meaning, "Transition" is one of the important concepts in sociology. Transition is a complex process involving many dimensions of change. Classical sociologists like Ferdinand Toenies and Emile Durkheim explained the concept of transition with modernity. Such an understanding informs this thesis.

Tonnies' work 'Gemeinschaft and Gesellschafter' (can roughly be translated as Community and Society in English) was first published in 1887 (Salaman 1974: 5, Bell 1971: 24). According to Tonnies, there are two basic types of social organizations: the Gemeinschaft and the Gesellschaft (Tonnies 1955: 57, Bell 1971: 23). In Gemeinschaft ('community'), human relationships are intimate, enduring and based on a clear understanding of where each person stands in society. A man's 'worth' is estimated according to who he is, not what he has done. Tonnies (1855-1937) viewed modernization as a progressive loss of gemeinschaft, or human community (Macionis 2009: 630). In other words, status is ascriptive in the case of the Agris, Mithgaudas, Agers and Gauddis – except in the case of the Bhandaris wherein it is achieved. The very core of the community concept is the sentimental attachment to the conventions and mores of a beloved place. The salt makers fit well in the Gemeinschaft ideas of Tonnies wherein the relationships are more intimate,
enduring and based on where each person stands in society.

In the context of Goa, B.G. D' Souza's (1979) *Goan Society in Transition* and P.D.Xavier's (1993) work *Goa: A Social History* are of relevance in further an understanding of these concepts. B. G. D' Souza's (1975) Study includes an analysis of the nature of the pre-Portuguese Goan society, with regard to its political, economic educational, religious and social systems. Together with this, the value system which integrated traditional Goan society has also been studied. Further, the study also examines the new systems introduced by the Portuguese rulers and their impact on the traditional systems and how such impact helped to modernise the traditional Goan society. In his study, D' Souza has attempted to study the social change and the social transformation experienced by the Goan society during Portuguese rule.

P. D. Xavier’s (1993) study deals exhaustively on the social and cultural life of the people in the early years of Portuguese conquest. He has shown how the timid but friendly attitude of the coastal people in contrast to the belligerent and bellicose disposition of the people from the north speaks volumes on the social transformation that took place on the coastal regions of India. His work describes the heroic struggle of people to preserve their identity in the face of innumerable odds mounted by the Portuguese regime.

**Mitagars**

This section focuses on the communities engaged in salt-farming in India and Goa, and gives an outline of the nature of their community and relationships among themselves.
Meaning

In common parlance, the people engaged in salt extraction are called ‘Mitkaars’ in Goa. However, in this thesis, the neologism mitagar has been coined from two words: Mith means salt in Konkani and Agar refers to the salt pan in Konkani. The Mitagar, for the researcher, signifies the occupational community of the salt makers found in Goa. This section is about the actual people engaged in the salt production in India and Goa in particular.

Salt-Making Communities of India

AGER / AGRI: The word agri means salt pan. It is claimed that during Emperor Akbar’s (1542-1605) reign, the Rajput ruler of the north-west Indian state of Mewar, Maharana Pratap did not follow Akbar’s advice and fled the historical place of Chittor along with his soldiers. A few of them settled down along the Luni river and started making salt (Rose: 1919). Sherring (1872), on the other hand, states that the Agri are a subdivision of the Kunbi and a subgroup of the Koli. At present, they are distributed in Rajasthan, Delhi, the union territory of Dadra and Nagar Haveli, Gujarat and Maharashtra (Singh 1998: 41).

According to Enthoven (1990: 9), the Agris are also known as Agle and Kharpatil. They are principally found in Thana, Colaba and in the sub urban areas of Bombay city. There are two endogamous divisions of the caste: - (i) Shudh-agris (pure agris) who are also called Mith-agris (salt makers), Jas-agris (toddy drawers), Dhol-agris (drummers), Son-agle and Pan-agle. (ii) Das-agris (probably from dasi, a term applied by the Aryans to those of mixed descent or of a different race where the meaning of the word is dealt with in connection with Visa and Dasa sections of the Vanis). The Urap or Varap-Agris or Nava-Marathas were originally Agris, but were
converted by the Portuguese, before they subsequently reverted to Hinduism. They are now not recognized as Agris.

The Ager of Rajasthan, also known as Agri, is chiefly distributed in Aiwar district. They claim to be of Rajput descent and call themselves Sisodia Rajput. It is believed that they migrated from the Mewar and the Marwar regions of Rajasthan. Khadiboli is their mother tongue and they use the Devanagari script (Singh 1998: 41).

In Delhi, the Agri are also known as Noongar, Kharwal or Sisodia Rajput. They migrated to Delhi from Rajasthan and are now distributed all over the city. They speak Khadiboli as their mother tongue, but are conversant with Hindi and use the Devanagari script. They are vegetarian; wheat and rice are their staple cereals. They sometimes eat jowar, bajra, maize and barley as well. Alcoholic drinks purchased from the market are occasionally consumed by the men (ibid: 42).

The Agri of Gujarat believes that their ancestors migrated from Maharashtra to Agra and only later came to Gujarat. As they first migrated from Agra, they are identified as Agri. They live in the Valsad district of Gujarat. A dialect of Marathi is their mother tongue, but they are bilingual as they also speak Gujarati and use the Gujarati script. They are non-vegetarian but do not take beef. The staple cereals taken are rice and wheat (Singh 1998: 42).

The Agris are also distributed all over the union territory of Dadra and Nagar Haveli, the former an enclave in Gujarat and the latter wedged between Maharashtra and Gujarat on the west coast of India. According to an account, they migrated from Agra during the period of the Mughals and took asylum in the Maratha state and finally settled there before the advent of the Portuguese. They speak Gujarati and use the Gujarati script. They are non-vegetarian, and their staple diet includes rice and ragi (Singh 1998: 43).
The Ager, treated as Scheduled Castes and specialized in salt work in the coastal region of Uttar Kannada district, are largely concentrated in the Kumta, Ankola, and Karwar talukas of the State of Karnataka. They speak the Kannada language and use its script. The Ager caste belongs to the scheduled caste. The Halakki Vokkal, a tribal community of Uttara Kannada district, consists of farmers who had joined salt making. Recently the Naik and other caste groups work as salt carriers or load salt in trucks or work in iodized plants (Souza 2005: 126).

In Maharashtra, the Mith Gauda is locally called Mitgaoda. They are distributed in the coastal belt of Maharashtra, but are concentrated in the areas of Kudal, Malvan, Deogarh and Vengurla talukas of Sindhudurg district. They speak Marathi and use the Devanagari script. They are non-vegetarian and rice is their staple cereal. The surnames used by them are Gawade, Jethe, Walke, Dhotam, Nare, Phansekar, Loke, Manjankar, Raule, Pathak and Chauhan. These surnames also represent their clan names (Singh 1998: 2314).
Hindu Salt-makers are Known as Mithgaudas in the South Konkan and Agaris in the north konkan. They are Kshatriyas and Shudras respectively.
The Salt Makers of Goa

In the northernmost taluka of Pernem, the people engaged in salt making are known as Mithgaudas. The Mithgaudas are a sub-division of the gauda or gavada community. In Maharashtra, they are known as Mithagavada.

The name of the community has been derived from their occupation, as is also the case elsewhere. According to Mithgaudas, Gaude means villager and therefore, the village people, who are salt makers by tradition are called as Mithguda. They are mostly concentrated along the coastal belt of Maharashtra and Goa. In Goa, the Mithgaudas consider themselves as being much higher in the caste hierarchy. They try to mark their difference from the other Gauddas of Goa by saying that they are different from the Dhetlle Gaude. The latter refers to a community of women who did not wear a blouse with their sari, but tied their sari over their chest with a knot which is referred as the Dhetlle, and hence the community name.

A typical Dhetlle Gauda woman
In *People of India: Goa*, K. S. Singh makes no mention of the Gaudão, Bhandari, Agri and the Ager castes operating in the salt-pans along the coast in Goa, but refers instead only to the Mithgaudas as being involved in this job. This book doesn't make a mention of the other castes that are operating in the traditional salt sector in different parts of Goa. For instance, there are Agris who are the Christian salt makers and belong to the Shudra community; the Bhandaris claim to belong to the Kshatriya strata; and the Gauddis are Christians who claim to be the twice-born.

Singh mentions in this book that the Mithgaudas of Maharashtra claim that they are from the Maratha community and do not have any connection with the Gaudas of Goa. The Mithgaudas claim to be higher than the Gaudas in the social hierarchy and belong to the Kshatriya caste.

In Maharashtra, they are found in the areas of Malvan, Vengurla, Deogarh, Sawantwadi and Kudal in the coastal Sindhudurg district. In Goa, they are mostly settled in the Pernem block of the North Goa district, adjacent to Sindhudurg. They are believed to have migrated from the Konkan belt of Maharashtra into Goa. They have their relations in Maharashtra (Singh 1993: 162, cited in Mitragotri 1999: 60). They speak the Indo-Aryan language, Konkani, which is their mother tongue (Singh 1998: 2313).

The Agris of Salcette and Tisvadi talukas of Goa and the Gauddis of Bardez are engaged in the salt-extraction or are farmers and landlords. The Census of India distinguishes the Agris from the Mit-Gaudes or Mit-Gavadas. The Mit-Gaudes or Mit-Gauddes are distinct from the Gaudde of the Novas Conquistas even in their physical features. The Agris live mainly in the Indian districts of Thane and Kolaba and the Mit-Gauddes in Ratnagiri, Kanara and Sawantwadi.

The Mithgaudas (who are involved in the salt-related work) should not be
confused with the Gauddas of Goa, a local aboriginal population who bear a similar sounding name, but share few other characteristics. The Mit-Gauddes or Mit-Gauddes are distinct from the Gaudde of the Novas Conquistas even in their physical features (Couto 2008: 43).

Salt-Making Communities: Issues, Problems and Changes

The present study primarily deals with the jatis involved in salt making in Goa – the Agris, the Mithgaudas, Bhandaris and the Gauddis. These jatis are caught up in the throes of transition, with the traditional lifestyles and economics coming under increasing pressure, even while they find it difficult to move into alternative jobs and occupations.

The main concern of this research was not salt and salt industry as such but was of the community involved in salt production. However the study will also cover salt and salt industry as studies pertaining to different sections of the Mitagars can be categorized under several headings like salt-manufacturing, the salt industry, decadence of the industry, and decline of the salt workers. Such studies also highlight the various problems of salt workers like poverty, poor living conditions, water, electricity, problems of women, employment opportunities, land, credit system, ecological consideration, pollution and the quality of salt. A few works, some academic and some journalistic, on salt and salt makers are described.

H. T. Nagvenkar's (1999) unpublished Ph. D. thesis on the economic history of salt in Goa helps us to understand Goa's salt industry and salt trade in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries during the Portuguese rule in Goa. He highlights the economic aspects of production of salt in Goa, including the quantity of Salt produced. This study discerns the impact of the different factors, which shaped the
destiny of the Goan salt industry during Portuguese rule till the Indian economic blockade on Portuguese-ruled Goa of 1955. It identifies factors which influenced the salt industry in Goa. It does not take into account the various aspects of the communities involved in salt making.

Frederick Noronha (Herald, May 16-31, 1997) in an article 'Salt Industry Turning Insipid' points out the decadence of this industry in the last century. An estimate of 28 villages earlier depended on a salt-based economy. But, over the years, that figure has come down to half a dozen. The changing lifestyles have led salt producers to newer means of livelihood, adversely affecting a number of people in this traditional profession. Authorities have been tardy in giving necessary encouragement, and, if properly utilised, salt farms could offer seasonal low intensive aquaculture, useful salt tolerant sea weeds and even environment friendly bio-fertilizers, it is argued. The study which the researcher has undertaken has shown the salt production areas which are shrinking in Goa resulting in the changing lifestyles of the salt making communities of Goa, the pressures on land which is diverted for more-lucrative alternative use, the age-old practices carried on by the salt, and the lack of official protection, among other factors.

Hayavandana Rao (1927) mentioned a salt based occupation of the Uppara caste, earth salt workers found chiefly in Mysore district. According to him, earth salt workers declined as the manufacture of earth salt is prohibited in Mysore and as sea-salt is comparatively cheap. An important observation of his study is that they are engaged in cultivation and labour.

S. Gasper D'Souza (The Navhind Times, July 3rd 2005), highlights the poor conditions of the salt workers of North Goa. He focuses on the historical aspect of salt production in Goa. The salt pans were flourishing with salt used not only for
consumption and exports but also to fill the hull of ships to steady them as they crossed the seas. From these glory days, salt production has seen a steady decline, reducing salt pan workers to practical oblivion – an oddity for tourists at best, he writes. Facing a dismal condition and uncertain future, many are considering giving up their ancestral occupation, though there may not be any other occupation.

Many descriptive accounts of the problems of the salt workers are available in a few academic (Sequeira 1993 and Phyllis 1995) and many journalistic descriptions (Jani 1989, Choudhary 1995, Parmar 2005 and so on).


The Overall Issue

This survey of related literature indicates that although there are many works and studies on the dimensions, problems, lives and conditions of salt makers, these studies are not exhaustive and comprehensive. Research carried out on various aspects of salt industry in India; in general do not focus much on the sociological aspects of this industry.

From the review of the literature, it is evident that not much work has been done pertaining to the social aspect of the salt makers especially in Goa. Many works, published and unpublished, do not feature the salt makers.

Till date, no systematic in-depth sociological study of the salt-makers of Goa has been attempted. There is a need for analytical and ethnographic literature on the
life and problems of this community. Hence, the researcher undertook a study of the Mitagars of Goa. The results of this study are presented in the following chapterisation scheme which consists of eight chapters.

Chapter One - Introduction: This first introductory chapter outlines the background of the thesis.

Chapter Two – Studying Mitagars of Goa: Research Methods and Tools- This chapter primarily covers a section on research methods. It also focuses on: statement of research problem, objectives of research, research questions, research design, area of study, research universe and sample techniques, purposive sampling, tools of data collection, and scope of the study and secondary data.

Chapter Three – Salt making in Goa: This chapter is divided into two sections. The first section is on some historical factors which have changed the salt making occupation in Goa. The salt makers of Goa are spread both in the New as well as the Old Conquests. The characteristics of the salt makers differ in these conquests. So the first section focuses on the understanding of the two Old and New Conquests regions in Goa. The historical aspects of exports and the socio economic history of Goan society are delineated.

Chapter Four - Mithgaudas of Agarvaddo: This chapter deals with the study of Mithgaudas of Pernem. It gives a brief introduction to the village followed by a discussion on the traditional roots of the Mithgaudas. The ownership pattern of the salt pans in Agarvaddo is also discussed. It also highlights the personal profile of the respondents, socio-cultural life, the economic life, the political life and the impact of modern technology. All these will show how the transition is taking place in the Mithgauda community.

Chapter Five – The Agris of Batim: This chapter consists of two sections. The
first section deals with the Agris of Batim. The general background of the village is given in the first part. Some aspects regarding conversion are dealt with in order to understand the traditional roots of the Agris of Batim. Then it has tried to explain the main findings based on the primary data. The findings have been divided into five sections. The transitions that have emerged in relation to their social organization, cultural organization, their economy, political life and the impact of modern technology are discussed.

The second section focuses on how migrants have been incorporated and how the community is organized around the salt-making economy. In the absence of local employment opportunities migration is the only available option for the migrant Agris to survive. They come to Goa to work on the salt pans where laborious work is involved. When this community returns to its native place it is influenced socially, economically, educationally and culturally. They are exposed to a new social milieu since migration is just not a physical migration of people but it involves a host of other things like a transfer of ideas, culture, language etc.

Chapter Six — The Bhandaris and Gauddis of Arpora: This chapter focuses on the Bhandaris and the Gauddis of Arpora. It discusses the history and the etymology of the village. It studies the historical and social aspects of the Gauddi and the Bhandari community engaged in salt making occupation. It has brought out the social changes that have occurred over a period of time. The Landlords of the salt pans of Arpora used to employ the Mithgaudas to perform the salt work. In course of time the Mithgaudas ceased to work in the saltpans in Arpora; as a result the Bhandaris slowly learnt the art of salt making and started performing the salt work. In Arpora the economy has changed. The landscape has been transformed by the emergence of star hotels in the place of the salt pans in Arpora. The data collected deals with changes in
the social, economic, political sphere and the impact of modern technology.

Chapter Seven - Salt making Communities of Goa: Similarities and Differences: In this chapter certain issues pertaining to all three villages are discussed. The findings point out that although the traditional occupation of salt making remains the same for all the five communities, there are regional variations with respect to the caste, status of women, ownership pattern and pisciculture. The study details the transition that the salt making communities have undergone from the year 1992 till date and the role of the state in implementing policies that impact the salt makers. These questions are related to cultural and economic dimensions of globalization. The traditional occupation of the salt makers has varied according to the village and the circumstances relating to that village: In Agarvaddo the salt makers have traditionally remained loyal to the work of salt making. They have still not become the owners of the land. In Arpora they have slowly ceased to do the jobs in the saltpans due to various reasons. In Batim the Agris have ceased to perform the jobs in the saltpans and preferred to employ the migrant workers from Karnataka.

Chapter Eight - Summary and Conclusion: This chapter summarizes the whole thesis. It contains the summary of the analysis of the various salt making communities which are presented in the substantive chapters from three to seven. The chapter includes some important conclusions and suggestions made by the researcher.