CHAPTER II

STUDYING MITAGARS OF GOA:
RESEARCH METHODS AND TOOLS
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The present research had been undertaken to study the Mitagars of Goa. The main concern of the research is not about salt or the salt industry per se but about the community of Mitagars in transition. It looked at the recent and also more long-term changes taking place in the salt industry, and specifically how this was impacting the community that was involved in the salt making.

The concept of transition is crucial here, since this is obviously a period of rapid change both for the salt industry and, more importantly from our perspective, for the people who earn their living from it. All through the research, we find that these have been intense times of change. The salt industry no longer plays the dominant role it once occupied in the Goan economy. Areas of salt-farming are shrinking and many salt-parns are falling into disuse. This has pushed a number of the hereditary and traditional salt-farmers out of the sector. Salt, with its low-returns, can no longer compete with alternative uses for land - such as tourism, in places like Arpora - and this too is impacting the sector. Likewise, traditional salt-farmers find it a low-remuneration occupation today, and thus the sector finds it difficult to compete with alternative forms of employment too. The Mitkaars, have been facing a phase of rapid transition and uncertainty about their future.

Field work was done to collect primary data from the people involved in salt-making, and also from those who work close to the salt-making areas. Since there are differences in the manner in which the caste hierarchy was replicated within the salt-making regions of Goa, this study also looked closely at the status of women, caste and socio-economic activities in this sector in an effort to understand the complexities
This was a qualitative study of this community covering the socio-cultural aspects, and comparing the communities involved in salt-making. So far, no systematic in-depth sociological study of the salt-makers of Goa had been attempted. There was a paucity of analytical and ethnographic literature on the life and problems of this community. The objective of this study was to explore the economic, social, religious and cultural aspects of this community.

Statement of the Research Problem

From a review of available literature it was evident that not much work had been done pertaining to the social aspects of the salt-makers in Goa. The many books, published and unpublished dissertations and Ph. D. thesis, purporting to take an overall comprehensive look at the various communities and people of Goa, do not feature studies on the salt making community. Much has been discussed regarding the trade and scientific analysis of salt, but studies of the salt producers themselves had been taken up.

Since sociological or social-anthropological study or research of Mitagars had not yet been attempted, analytical literature on the life and problems of this community was hard to come by. The present study attempted to study the historical and social aspects of the salt-making community in Goa – cutting across castes and region – and study the transitions that have occurred over a period of time. It also discusses whether the changes that had emerged are different or similar for the different jatis, specifically the Agris, the Mithgaudas, Bhandaris, Gauddis and Agers.

This was a comparative social-anthropological study of the diverse sections of people who form the salt-making community. To map out the larger picture, there was
a brief survey of the role of salt-making in Goa over the centuries, and the role it played in the past. This study made an attempt to understand the present socio-economic and living conditions of the *mitagar* in Goa, which is one of the early communities to be settled in the region.

Just as many indigenous populations had faced dramatic declines, sometimes even moving to the verge of extinction, and remained threatened in many parts of the globe, in a similar manner the salt producers of Goa too have undergone such changes. This is true specially with regard to the transformation of their culture, and the loss of salt making lands.

**Objectives of the Research**

The specific objectives of the study are:-

1. To understand the historical aspects of the salt making community;

2. To provide insights into the contemporary socio-cultural and economic life as well as the social organization of the salt-making castes, viz *Mithgaudas, Agris, Gauudis, Bhandaris* and the *Ager*;

3. To identify the areas of salt production which are currently observed to be shrinking, and the effects of this on the salt-makers, and to study how the community is negotiating this transition; and

4. To offer policy suggestions based on the findings.

**Research Design**

After the selection and formulation of the research problem, the researcher decided about the type of research design to be followed to carry out the research. The design of a sociological research project can be said to be the action plan, the strategy
and the structure of the overall procedure by which we intend to gain more knowledge of a specific problem or a specific aspect of the society (Thakur 1998: 163).

The study has been undertaken within qualitative framework. In order to understand the objectives of religious conversion on some section of the salt making community and its consequences and the other objectives of the study - i.e. to analyse and understand the contemporary socio-cultural life and the social organization of the Mithgaudas, Agris, Gauudis, Bhandaris and the Agers - the researcher employed the participant observation, interview schedule, informal discussions, formal discussions, focused group discussions, household case study method, and the in-depth interview method.

These methods helped in collecting information to answer the research questions on the traditional roots of mitagar community in Goa, to understand the socio-cultural and economic differences found among these communities, to examine the nature of social organization of salt production and to locate the changes that had occurred in the community with respect to salt production and marketing and to explain the changes that had taken place due to the process of globalization, liberalization and government policies-which had on the salt production and the Mitagar community.

Lastly, to indicate the salt production areas which are shrinking, the researcher contacted the talathis, sarpanchas, secretaries and the salt workers and the landlords and adapted the village survey maps to indicate the various areas in Goa where salt production continues, and where it had stopped in recent years.

**Purposive Sampling and Research Universe**

The villages that were producing salt in Goa were
Three villages were selected for the study from the above mentioned salt producing villages. In these three villages, 113 families were identified as the units of observation. All of these families could not be interviewed since some of them were either not available or had moved away from that village. The researcher could not trace some of them.

Besides these 113 families, the key informants from various salt-producing villages were also interviewed on various aspects of the salt-makers. For example, the talathis, sarpanchas, panchayat secretaries, advocates and other leaders of the village were consulted on various issues of relevance to the village. In the three villages under study, we find the salt makers belonging to two different religions and three different talukas of Goa. Religious diversity was the criteria in selecting them.

The first village, Agarvaddo, has Hindu salt makers i.e. the Mithgaudas; the second village Batim purely consists of Christian salt-makers, i.e. the Agris who have also employed the Agers from Karnataka. The Gauddis and the Bhandaris in the third village of Arpora comprise of a mixed group i.e. both Hindus and Christians.

Out of all the demographic factors, the researcher selected religion given that it is the dominant factor which affects the lifestyles of individuals in today's Goa. The researcher made the sample selection based on religion.

The purposive sampling method was employed in the identification of the villages. Purposive sampling, as its name suggests, is adopted in identifying a sample. Since it involves qualitative research, the dimensions or factors according to which
the samples were drawn up and analytically linked to the research questions being addressed. So the researcher visited all the salt producing villages of Goa based on the knowledge of the secondary sources and after that purposively identified the research universe.

Map No. 2.1
GOA: Salt production villages (Past)
These villages were deliberately selected which have three identified categories of salt-makers in terms of religious background. Thus, this study explored three villages namely Arpora, Batim and Agarvaddo, which represented the Mitagars of Goa.

The migrant workers are also considered for fieldwork, since they are
employed by the salt-makers of Batim and Arpora. These migrant workers hail from Karnataka, and usually come in pairs, such as husband-wife, father-daughter or mother-son etc. They are seasonal migrants, but working for several years for the original owners and the permanent tenant.

There is, however, not a single migrant worker in Agarvaddo village, where all the work was done by the Mithgaudas themselves. During the three years of the researcher's study in Arpora, different kinds of situations with regard to migrant workers were witnessed. In Arpora, in the year 2006, migrant workers from Karnataka used to work on the salt pans. In the year 2007, the laborers from Maharashtra were employed in the salt pans. Then, in the year 2009, the salt-pan owners personally went to Karnataka to bring-in the laborers but due to the non-availability of workers; they now employ the daily-wage migrant workers residing in Calangute.

Sites of Study

Salt is produced exclusively in four talukas out of eleven in Goa. This study focusses on one village from each taluka, except Salcette since the Agris from Salcette (from Telaulim in Navelim) had migrated to Batim which was already selected for this study.
In Salcette taluka, Cavelossim is the only village where salt is produced. The same situation prevails even today. The rest of the villages in Salcette have become
redundant to the purpose of this study, as can be noticed in the survey maps of Salcette in the chapter on salt making in Goa.

Selection of the Respondents

Table 2.1 and Diagrams 2.1 and 2.2 explain the selection of the respondents.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Village I</th>
<th>Village II</th>
<th>Village III</th>
<th>Universe</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Original Owner</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present Tenant</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labor Operated in pairs</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Families</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The research was carried out in three villages: Village I, Village II and Village III.

Village I, i.e. Agarvaddo, comprised of eight original owners, fifteen present tenants and all salt pans are self operated. So the total families involved in salt production are twenty three.

Village II, i.e. Batim, comprised of six original owners, eighteen present tenants and had a total of 36 laboring pairs operating in the salt pans. So the total families involved in salt production were sixty.

Village III, i.e. Arpora, comprised of sixteen original owners, twelve present tenants and have a total of two laboring pairs operating in the salt pans. So the total families involved in salt production were 15, but towards the end of the fieldwork there was just one family.
In all, from Village I; 23; Village II; 60 families and from Village III; 30 families were to be included for the study. The universe of the study was made of a
hundred and thirteen families. Since it was a qualitative study and the universe being small, there was no need to determine the sample size. Therefore, all the families were taken up for study. However in course of time many saltpans became non operative as indicated in the below table. All the 113 families identified were not available at the time of field work. Only 51 families could be contacted. Hence the researcher had no option but to finally interview 51 respondents as depicted in the below table.

Diagram 2.1
Diagram showing declined Salt Pans and Salt workers

Mitagars of Goa
A Sociological Study of a Community in Transition

Legend

- **OO** – Original Owner
- **PT** – Permanent Tenant
- **LO** – Labor Operated
- **SO** – Self Operated
- **C** – Christian
- **H** – Hindu

Note: Some saltpans in Agarvaddo were owned by the temple committee and some were owned by the Communidade. In Batim, too, some saltpans were owned by the church and some were owned by the Communidade.
In Agarvaddo, there were four saltpans which were operative and eight which were non-operative – comprising of eight original owners, fifteen permanent tenants and all the salt pans were self-operated. All those involved in salt making here were Hindus by religious affiliation. In Batim, there were 18 operative and six non-operative saltpans comprising of six original owners, 18 present tenants and 36 pairs of migrant workers who operated the salt pans. Here, all those involved in salt-making (except the migrant workers) were Christians. In Arpora, there were four saltpans which were operative and six which were non-operative in the year 2005, but towards the end of her study in the year 2009 there is only one saltpan which was operative in Arpora. In Arpora there were earlier sixteen original owners, twelve present tenants and five migrant workers who operated the salt pans.
Hence, the total number of respondents interviewed by the researcher is 51.

**Tools and Techniques of Data Collection**

The techniques of data gathering employed by the researcher included participant observation, interview schedule, informal discussions, formal discussions, focused group discussions, household case study method, in-depth interviews and written and documentary sources.

As mentioned earlier, the present study is empirical based on qualitative data. In this study, various socio-economic aspects of the salt makers were observed and
studied by the same processes and techniques as other aspects of human behavior. However, the main techniques employed in the study were the observational technique and interview schedules. In this study, the researcher was interested in observing the general environment of the salt makers.

The interview schedule was an instrument for data collection. A common interview schedule for all the three categories of respondents had been adopted i.e. with the original owners, the permanent tenants and the migrant laborers.

The permanent tenants of Agarvaddo were referred as Mithgaudas. The permanent tenants of Batim were referred as Agris and the permanent tenants of Arpora were the Bhandaris. The landlords, i.e. the Gauddis, also used to work in the salt pans in Arpora. Sometimes these above terms were used interchangeably in the study. The interview schedule contained all items of open-ended questions on which details were sought from the persons being studied. The schedule consists of five sections. Section one was a personal profile of the respondents. Section two focused on the socio-cultural life. Section three on the economic life, section four on political life and section five was based on impact of modern technology.

Informal Discussions

Unstructured and informal discussions were held with the leaders, advocates, teachers, journalists, panchayat officials, government officials and members of the general public. This informal knowledge gave an idea of the Agris, Agers, Gauddis, Bhandaris and the Mithgaudas.
Focused Group Discussions

Focused Group Discussions were carried out with a group of people rather than with an individual. Sometimes, the women of Agarvaddo felt freer to speak in groups rather than individually. So they were interviewed in group whenever they came to the temple for fugddi (a religious-dance programme) or for other programs. This method provided an opportunity to discuss certain matters in depth, since people more freely expressed their views when in groups rather than when interviewed individually. This helped to improve the quality of information collected.

A sound recorder, digital camera, as well as video camera and a laptop were used to record the feeling, expressions of the Mitagar community.

Formal Discussions

Formal discussions were held with various kinds of village leaders. For example, to determine the areas under salt production and to map the areas which are shrinking, the researcher contacted all the sarpanchas, talathis, some panchas, secretaries of the village panchayats and the salt makers of all the salt producing villages of Goa.

Household Case Study Method

Household Case Study method was used for some households from the three villages. Households were identified during the household interviews and the interviews were pursued over a number of sessions, wherein in-depth information was collected. These informants were the key respondents based on the willingness, time factor and the approachability of these persons.

This was the most effective method to understand the Mitagar community,
which is in a process of intense transition as is obvious from the changes taking place in their areas of work, economy, priorities and the productivity of the field that has sustained them over generations. This method helped improve the qualitative strength of the research. It also helped to fill the gaps which were there in the interview schedule.

**Household Interview Schedule**

A household interview schedule was used to explore the *Mitagar* community, wherein a rapport was established before interviewing them. Household interview schedule was a mixture of both open-ended and closed-ended questions covering various aspects of socio-cultural life, economic life and political life. The rapport was established through the parish priest, the temple *bhatji* (religious priest), sarpanch or any other influential person in the village.

**In-depth Interview Method**

The in-depth Interview method was adopted to collect detailed information of the *Mitagar* community, which is a repository of a high proportion of opinions, attitudes and personal experiences. The objective of such an interview was that the respondents should be able to discuss at length a subject which was of equal interest to them and the interviewer. Key respondents were selected, on the basis of the personal experiences and observations of the researcher, and these key respondents were contacted several times to update gaps in information.

**Secondary Data**

*Secondary data was collected through library work done in various libraries...*
such as (i) Mumbai University Library, (ii) Centre for Communication, Education and Documentation (CED) Suleman Chamber Regal Street behind Regal Cinema, Mumbai, (iii) Elphinstone College, Mumbai, (iv) Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai, (v) I.I.T Powai Mumbai, (vi) M. S. University, Baroda, (vii) JNU, Delhi, (viii) Lucknow University, (ix) Karnataka University, Dharwad, (x) University of Madras, (xi) ISSEC, Bangalore, (xii) Rajasthan University at Jaipur, (xiii) Kuvempu University, (xiv) the American Library at the US Consulate, Chennai, (xv) Xavier Centre for Historical Research, Porvorim and (xvi) Gomant Vidya Niketan Library Margao. The information was also sought from various college libraries of Goa, and from the internet, magazines and newspapers. This researcher also visited the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Deonar Mumbai with some interview schedules and got them examined at the computer centre (EDP section) of the TISS to understand the validity and relevance of the questions asked. Work was done under Ashish Govekar, who instructed in the process of feeding data into the computer using the SPSS software package.