CHAPTER IV

THE MITHGAUDAS

OF PERNEM
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About the Village

Location

Agarvaddo is a village located towards the southern part in the Pernem taluka, It lies in the northernmost extreme of coastal Goa. It is situated a few kilometres from the Arabian Sea on the north bank of the Chapora River and is surrounded by three villages – Parcem which is two kilometers away, Mandrem which is five kilometers from it, and Morjim which is three kilometers away. The traveling distance of the village from taluka headquarters is twelve kilometers. The area of the village is 221.1 hectares. The total number of agriculturists is 42. The weekly bazaar is held in Pernem town on Thursdays. It has an independent Panchayat situated in Agarvaddo, but the neighbouring village called Chopdem also comes under the jurisdiction of Agarvaddo Panchayat. The Mithgaudas reside only in Agarvaddo.

Etymology

Agarvaddo, as the name suggests, is a village made up of many agors or salt pans; locally Agar refers to a salt pan and vaddo to a hamlet. This village is one of the ancient salt-production centres on the north-west –coast of Goa. In terms of similar etymologies, Calangute too has an Agarvaddo, which has been known for its salt–pans (D'Souza 1997:7). In Batim village, the gaunkars (village comunidade members) refer to the salt–makers of their area as the people of Agarvaddo, though no ward is thus formally named. Similarly in Calangute there is a ward called Agarvaddo which is full of salt pans and the residents of this ward were once engaged in salt pan operations
Similarly, the Gaunkars of Batim refer to the salt makers of Batim as Agarvaddo people although there is no ward by the name Agarvaddo in Batim.

Map No. 4.1
AGARVADDO: Location Map
Village Settlement

There are eight wards (or vaddos) in Agarvaddo.

- Bagglivadda: The Bagglis reside in this area of the village, and hence it is referred as Baglivadda.

- Rautvadda: The Rauts reside in this ward.

- Naikvadda: The locality of the Naiks.

- Damajivadda: The people who reside here bear the surname Damaji, who are all Bhandaris by caste.

- Maharvaddo: As the name suggests, the Mahars reside in this ward, which is situated on the outskirts of the village. Residents prefer to call this ward as Gaunkarvadda, given the derogatory connotations of their caste name. Village temple rituals don’t usually start without beating the dhol (traditional drum), which is traditionally done by a Mahar. They are considered to be “untouchables”. Typically, untouchable jatis are kept residentially segregated in their villages and forbidden ordinary access to village temples, the homes of the touchable villagers and the wells and tanks that are the sources of their domestic water supply. Touchable villagers relegate them in a lowly place (Stern 1993:75). Although the Agers in Goa belong to the untouchable caste, the Mithgaudas of Agarvaddo who are also employed in the same work are not “untouchable”. Mahars are segregated at one end of the village and disallowed by the Mithgaudas from entering the village temple. The Mithgaudas are large in number in Agarvaddo. They are excellent examples of what M. N. Srinivas calls a dominant caste in Indian society after independence. They have also become political leaders of the village.

- Bethkolvadda: This ward is close to the river and part of Agarpoin, where salt
is being manufactured in Agarvaddo. Locals believe that this part was “hollow” ("To Agarvadeacho khol bag va sakoilo baag thai bhar ghatli ani ghara ubhi keli. Aaste aaste irmith bandhli") and hence it was reclaimed and the Christian houses were built there. Later, a chapel was built, going by oral history of the area.

Map No. 4.2
AGARVADDO : Wards Location Plan
According to an elderly respondent this village comprised of three parts. One that is on an elevated part called as the Dhongor, where the cashew plantation is found. The second on a plain area or the madhlo baag in the village where the Mithgaudas reside- is the prime part of the village; and the third low lying area (Khailo Baag, or the lower part) where a few Christian families reside.

The Mithgaudas

Historical Roots

The origin of the Mithgaudas is shrouded in mystery. Many authors have tried tracing the probable travel routes of this people from their supposedly original homes to Goa in pre historic times. As noted in the third chapter the Aryans were followed by the Dravidians and later by the Asuras who came from Chotta Nagpur and then by the Kol, Mundaris and Kharwas who came to Goa (Bhandari1999). The Mithgaudas probably came to Goa by one or two mixed routes mentioned by Dr. Irawati Karve. Some families of that tribe might have established themselves in the Northern Konkan under the name of ‘Agri’ as well ‘Mith Agri’ or ‘Mith Gavdi’, employing themselves in agriculture and later in salt pans for preparation of salt. In Goa, at present, we find some of these families under the latter designation in some villages of Pernem and Bardez talukas. They entered Goa probably around 3500 BCE or say after the pastoral tribe and after the Kols and Mundaris (Dhume 1985: 78). People of Agarvaddo do not recall if their ancestors have migrated from any other place. Likewise, landlords owning the saltpans are not aware whether they originally migrated in from some other place. In Goa, the Gaudas working on the saltpans are called Mith-Gavdas (Mitragotri 1999:60).
The Mithgaudas are not a subdivision of the gauda or gavda community. In Maharashtra they are known as Mithgavada, but in Goa in Agarvaddo they are called Mithgaude or Mithgavdas. Mith means salt and the name of the community is derived from their occupation.

However, it needs to be noted that the Mithgavdas of Maharashtra claim that they are part of the Maratha community and do not have any connection with the Gaudas of Goa. According to them, Gaude means a villager and, therefore, village people who are salt-makers by tradition are called Mithgauda. They are mostly concentrated along the coastal belt of Maharashtra and in Goa.

In Maharashtra, the Mithgau da are largely found in Malvan, Vengurla, Deogarh, Savantwadi and Kudal areas of Sindhudurg district. In Goa they are mostly settled in the Pernem block of the North Goa district, adjacent to Sindhudurg. They are said to have migrated to Goa – but the date is not clear – from the Konkan belt of Maharashtra. Currently too, they have their relations in Maharashtra.

Social and Demographic Aspects

Age Composition

According to the Panchayat record of the year 2008, Chopdem has a population of 1025, out of which 506 are males and 519 females. Agarvaddo had a total population of 1345, out of which 645 were males and 705 were females. Females outnumber males in Agarvaddo, probably suggesting that there is out-migration from this area. There are 865 children and students in this village. At present there is a lot of migration due to the changed economic life in Agarvaddo.

Among the permanent tenant’s respondents, five belonged to the age group of 40 to 45 years and another five belonged to the age group of 70 to 76 years. However,
there was hardly anyone from the younger generation of the 16 to 40 years age group to be seen working in the salt pans. There was only one respondent who was twenty-five years of age working in the salt pans, assisting his elderly father in the salt-making operations as he had no job and there was no other household labour available.

Educational Background

There is one government high school and one private primary school named the Sateri Primary School, one computer 'academy' (or rural training centre), and four sports and cultural clubs. Very few of the permanent tenants belonged to the group of educated. Some of them were less than S.S.C educated, especially those who belonged to the age group of seventy to seventy-six. Few permanent tenants also got education above the S.S.C. level.

Mithgaudas seldom go for education beyond their S.S.C. or secondary school examination. There are a few graduates. Respondents interviewed were either not educated or educated up to the fourth standard. The level of education of the father or guardian is an important factor while considering the status and position of the household. An illiterate or with only low level of education, the father or guardian is unable to take a rational decision regarding the education of the children in the family, or for he being himself illiterate may not be generally in a position to appreciate the value of education for his sons or daughters (Souza 2005:76). Secondly the nature of jobs in the salt pans did not require formal training; it was a skill that was imparted in the family itself. With the exception of a few who were educated up to S.S.C and one respondent who had done B.P.Ed, who was in this field because of his inability to find a suitable job.
In a patriarchal society, the father or the guardian plays an important and pivotal role as he is the head of the family and takes important decisions (Souza 2005:76). Women do not go for education beyond the S.S.C. But, of late, some women are taking up to higher education. A few educated Mithgaudas also work in the salt pans, as they cannot get jobs easily in the job market. The men folk do not encourage higher education for women – one reason being that there were no high schools in Agarvaddo till a few years back and higher education meant travel to places like Mapusa. One respondent claimed, *chedvank bhiraant distali*, meaning the girls were frightened to go in for education to far off places to seek higher education.

As a Mithgaida respondent explained, “*Sushikhshit zale zalear dusreacher aadharuun ravchi garaz na*” (Instead of depending on others it is better to be educated.) Despite their own low education, there is a strong feeling that their children should get a good education. Therefore they would employ migrant labourers in the salt pans, so that their children are not unnecessarily caught up in such work. They think that the girls, too, should receive education, since they believe, as one elderly respondent put it, that if the girls get educated ‘*tenka sagle kallta*’ (“they will understand everything”).

The various reasons they felt for promotion of education were: it will keep crimes away; if people are educated they will become independent; the educated person was more respected. Some respondent’s i.e. fathers, mothers and young adults were in favour of female education but others felt that if women get education there would be *prem prakaran*, meaning the girls would be susceptible to falling in love. There are currently no girls in the community having a college education but nowadays this trend is slowly changing.
An elderly woman from a Mithgauda family, during a religious ceremony at Agarvaddo, in December 2007

An elderly Mithgauda couple, in their traditional clothes in front of their house in Naikvaddo, Agarvaddo

Saltworkers at a religious function - the regular bhajan - in Agarvaddo

An elderly Mithgauda key respondent in Agarvaddo

A woman salt-vendor who carries salt in a basket for sale in Mapusa town, seen before the Ganesh pandal, during the Chaturthi season
Elderly Mithgauda men are being felicitated by the villagers

The landlords feel that the Mithgauda community should get education. The Government of India—run Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, working on universalization of elementary education, helped to improve the educational scene. Girls too should get education since nowadays there is no difference between girls and boys. Some landlords interviewed by the researcher were however of the view that once they are educated; there is a trend where the common folk do not work in the field anymore.

Linguistic Background

The Mithgaudas of Agarvaddo speak Konkani. The other languages that are known to them are Marathi and English. The Konkani dialect of Agarvaddo has been influenced by Marathi, on account of its geographical closeness to Maharashtra.

Marathi, being a language long used particularly by Goa's Hindu community for literary and religious purposes, was also the language used in school and the local schools run in the Marathi medium. Marathi was also the language used for official
matters, and local newspapers read are mainly in Marathi. However, Konkani and its dialects dominate the spoken discourse.

Most respondents were not members of any political parties but two respondents were members of the Maharashtrawadi Gomantak Party and the Bharatiya Janata Party, respectively. The MGP is Goa's former ruling party (1963–1979), while the BJP is currently the main Opposition in Goa, having ruled the state (initially in alliance) between 1999 to 2005. One respondent’s father and party workers inspired the respondent to join politics. Another respondent contested panchayat elections thrice. The landlords who were interviewed were not in politics.

Religion

Religion may be said to be a system of belief about the individuals place in the world, providing an order to that world and a reason for existence within it. It has been institutionalized over the centuries (Jayaram 1987:150). Since Agarvaddo village lies in the areas of Goa known as the New Conquest the influence of Christianity was less. The New Conquests were not under the suzerainty of the Portuguese, except at the fag end of the Portuguese regime when the activities of the colonial State had dwindled considerably. Secondly, the Portuguese wealth and power in the East had greatly diminished and this factor had a sobering effect on their proselytizing activities. As a result, the people of the New Conquests and Agarvaddo which is one such example were spared the coercion of conversion and the terrors of the Inquisition, as noted earlier. Moreover, a proclamation was issued by the Portuguese Governor guaranteeing to the people of New Conquests the right to follow their own rites and customs (D’Souza 1975:97).
The Goan village of olden times (as elsewhere in India), did not refer merely to a street or group of buildings as in urban Europe today, but it included both the cluster of houses and the surrounding lands, cultivated as well as uncultivated. The village community members in Agarvaddo were all Mithgaudas.

“Such a group had a local name and known limits. The land was collectively owned by a body of persons thereon. The body of persons formed the village community. The villagers lived in the central place outside the dwelling site was an open place for the village, assembled in the evening and where the village artisans produced handicrafts. There was usually a common tank or a pond or a well for general use. There was also a village temple or shrine where the village deity (gramdevata) was worshipped. Usually there was a small grove or at least a spreading tree with a raised platform around it on which the village council (gauponn) met” (D’Souza1975:27).

The landlords and all the salt makers of Agarvaddo were Hindus. This is their original religion. As far as the Gods and the Goddesses worshipped: Goddess Sateri was the village God of the salt-makers, and the family God of the Naik and Parab’s was Ghumkaar, while Satpurush was the family God of the Baggli caste and the Pai Purush or the Alvo was the family God of the Rauts.

They usually did fasting on Ekadasi and Vinayaka. They had annual vaad divas (celebration) of the village God in December. The family God of the landlords was Goddess Bhagwati. They also worshiped Ganesh, Laxmi and Maruti. The landlords visited religious places like Swayambhu and Vani in the area of Nasik, in the adjoining Maharashtra State.

Nagnath temple is originally from Bardez taluka (Nagoa). But during the Portuguese time, the temple was brought to Agarvaddo almost several years ago (by
the temple *mann kari* (persons who had the right over the temple) that is, by the Parab family.

There is one chapel named the Immaculate Conception Chapel and eight temples in the village – The village temple of Agarvaddo is dedicated to Goddess Sateri. It is known as *Jagrut Dev* (“*jagrut*” means *wakeful*) it is believed that the presence of the God is felt in the temple. Goddess Sateri is a village Goddess of the people of Agarvaddo and this folk deity is also a very popular local Goddess elsewhere in Goa. Sateri is also called Ela or Bhumika in parts of Goa such as Pernem taluka and the nearby Sattari taluka.

When the temple was built, they also constructed a *thikaannn* – residence for the temple priest – in Agarvaddo. Ancestor—worship is common in Agarvaddo. Kalapurush, Gramapurush, Mulapurush, Adipurush are forms of ancestors worshipped in Agarvaddo. The heroic man of the family was idolised as Kalapurush; it is believed that a heroic man would have some spiritual powers even after death to protect the living from unwanted evils. Blessings given by the elderly, according to them, were required to protect and safeguard their lives.

Ancestor worship takes place in the form of a small plaque or stone in some places in Goa and the ancestors like Grampurusha, Adipurush, Kanadipurush, Satpurush occupied the position of *Parivaraddevata* (attendant of the chief—deity) presiding over the family welfare in some temples in Goa (Rao 2003:83).

The village temple is dedicated to Sateri Devi. There are four subsidiary temples dedicated to the *kul dev* (family God) which were affiliated to the three *maankaris* of the village based in Agarvaddo. These were the Pai Purush or Alvo affiliated to the Rauts, the Ghumkar temple affiliated to the Parabs and the Naik caste, the Sath Purush related to the Bagglis and the Maharingan temple in Maharvaddo.
Maharingan belongs to the Mahars of Agarvaddo. Locals see Maharingan to be the guardian of the village. This temple of the Mahars is located at the village outskirts.

Two other temples were re-built in this area, after being shifted from elsewhere during the time of religious intolerance during a phase of Portuguese rule in Goa. The deity of Nagnath was brought in from Arpora. The old Xetrapal temple has been closed for the last 50 to 60 years and its devotees are believed to have migrated or fled away to Shiroda in Maharashtra.

Agarvaddo village also has sati stones which have a fixed area outside the village temple, since the practice of sati were in vogue in upper castes before this was stopped during Portuguese rule. Sati is the custom of Hindu widows being burnt on the funeral pyre of their husbands (D’souza 1975:65, 66). People of Agarvaddo are generally aware that these are sati stones, but do not have any memories of sati being practised locally or when this was done in the village.

**Feasts and Festivals**

Ritual behavior concerning food preparation, marriage, worship, fasts and festivals provide some of the most significant indicators of the Mithgaudas traditional position. Some festivals and rituals being observed in the area which are specific to the Mithgaudas like Naagpanchami, Lalita Panchami, Saptah, Devaachi Poonav.

Historical evidence shows that the earliest known settlers of Goa belonged to a Dravidian clan, linked to areas peopled by those whom we would now consider Kannadigas. These were the descendants of the Naga tribe. It is known that the Kuntala country – which included parts of Karnataka and the western Deccan (probably including Goa) – had been ruled by the Nagas. (D’Souza 1975: 14). On the day of the Nagpanchami festival, the Mithgaudas of Agarvaddo do not worship the
Mhoorti or the idol of the Naag or cobra. There is a legend by which the salt makers believe that their ancestors killed the naag (cobra) and did not bury it. As a result of which they, were not allowed to worship a clay Naag. So, dhurons pujpaak suru kelem (worshipping of the image of the snake was started instead). (see photo). They worship the picture of the Naag which is painted on the wall and worship it on the Naagpanchami day.

**Devaachi Baskaa Ceremony:** Baskaa takes place annually over a period of three days. Baskaa is an occasion where the village Goddess enters a human body and people go to seek solutions to their problems with the possessed person in the village temple.

On the first day, all the people gather in the temple and two people get possessed and then on the second day which is called Maandri ghalap meaning they laid the mat and some more get possessed or fall into a trance (locally called the 'bhaar'). On the third day, some more get possessed.

Mithgaudas offer coconut in the temple and consult the person who gets possessed, to settle their problems. The person who is possessed becomes supreme. He has the authority even over the temple bhatji or priest. They believe that the person who enters into a trance will attain the power and wisdom to settle all their problems.

When the Mithgaudas get possessed in the temple, the Mahars tend to get possessed outside the temple; even in the possessed state they are not allowed to enter inside in the temple.

The researcher witnessed this event for three days in the village temple. On the first two days there were only males in the temple and not a single female in the
temple except the Bhavin (traditionally, a menial servant) temple servant and this event takes place only after ten p.m. On the third day, the possessed persons have the authority even over suspected wrong doings of the temple priest. If the temple priest does not perform his duty properly in the village temple, the possessed people will advice the temple priest. Sometimes, if the villagers have some problems of health, family disputes, unemployment problem, or any other problem, the person who is possessed (enter into a 'bhaar') will advise the person who is in problem. The people of Agarvaddo, till today, prefer to get their problems settled in this manner.

Devaachi Poonav: During the time of Poonav the Goddess Bhagvathi, visited Agarvaddo temple tisaal aan ek dhaa once every three years in Agarvaddo and stayed with her "sister" for one day bhaini bhainicho maan aso ho moolcho rivaaz meaning to respect the sister, she visits her every three years this is an ancient tradition. Bhagvathi was the village deity of the landlords from Parcem, and is considered to be the elder sister of Goddess Sateri which is the village God of the Mithgaudas of Agarvaddo. The Goddess Bhagvathi also goes to Tuem in Pernem for one year and for one year she remains in the temple at Parcem. The people from Tuem had stopped taking over the Goddess for the last hundred years, but in the year 2007 the researcher witnessed, the Devaachi Poonav this tradition had been revived again.

The people from Agarvaddo go to Parcem to get the deity Bhagvathi, and return back the same night walking to Agarvaddo; so by the time the procession reaches Agarvaddo it is dawn. The Goddess Bhagwati is kept in Agarvaddo village temple and the next night she is reached back, walking the entire journey back. On the first day the entire road is lit up in the night and the Goddess gives her blessings in each and every house. Married women and the others fill Votti on the way.
In the temple, the deity is given befitting hospitality by the host village. At the end of the day, she refuses to leave her sister on the next day. So the devotees take the permission from the Goddess before departing by taking prasad and then letting her go.

This money is deposited in a bank and, after three years, food is served to the guests from Parcem at the time when the Goddess Bhagvathi is brought back to the village. This food is called Neveidh. On the next day, an Adesari is offered to all the people who have gathered in the temple from Parcem. Deva kadde lok eilele The sevekari, i.e., the people who are in the services of the temple at Parcem, would also earlier be given rice by the people of Agarvaddo, but some years ago there was not much rice grown in the village so they started giving a fixed sum of money to all the sevekari and the committee members including the members of the former untouchables castes (Dalits) gathered in the temple.

There is a Koulacho Kungho literally meaning the salt pans belonging to the temple or the saltpans which were donated to the temple. The money generated from such saltpans was spent for the temple maintainance. Earnings generated out of the ‘Devaachi thikaana’ i.e. from saltpans, fields and cashew plantation kept aside for the Gods, is called as Paagvath.

Saptah in Agarvaddo: Amidst the lush green beauty and the light showers of rain in the Shravan month, the Hindu festivals begin. The first festival of the year is Nagpanchami. On the next day of Nagpanchami comes the sixth day of the Shravan month of the Hindu calendar.

Besides devotees from the village, devotees from other neighbouring states of Maharashtra also visit Agarvaddo to pay homage to the deity of the village and to celebrate all seven days in glory. Besides other devotional programmes, the main
celebration is the singing of ‘bhajans’ (devotional songs). Women from the village married outside also attend this function.

On the day of the Saptah, the Goddess Sateri is taken in a pallkhi (palanquin) procession around the temple by the people of the village.

In the month of Shravan (roughly corresponding to the month of August), the fifth day is called Nagpanchami. Bhajan Saptah starts on the Nagpanchami day at about 3 p.m. and is continued for 24 hours. The Bhajan Saptah ends at 3 p.m. the next day. There are four participants who take part in the bhajan Saptah – one each representing the Naik Parabs, the Rauts, the Bagglis and the Nagvenkars.

The first three hours of the bhajan sees a Naik Parab holding forth, followed by the Rauts for three hours, the Baggl for the subsequent three hours and the Nagvenkars for the next three hours. This cycle is repeated. At the end of the Saptah, a pallkhi (palanquin) ceremony is held. The Pallkhi takes one pradakshana (circumambulation) around the temple followed by the visarjan (ritual immersion/bathing).

At the end of the whole programme, there is an auctioning of clothes and fruits offered to the deity. Money collected out of the auction is used for the devasthan (temple) committee funds. Married daughters visit their parents' homes and come and worship the village God.

The Saptah is a tradition which is of the Sateri Goddess and is an annual traditional festival. Before starting the saptah, the samai (traditional lamp) is worshipped thoroughly in front of Goddess Sateri. While the bhajan continues, this lamp is lit throughout for twenty four hours, signifying that offering the oil lights the premises of God and God in turn takes the responsibility to light one’s life, education, children, or business.
Other festivals in Agarvaddo like Dussehra, Diwali and Holi are celebrated in the same manner as in the rest of Goa. The Goan Hindu community mainly celebrates Ganesh Chathurti, Gudi Padwa, Diwali, Dassra (Dussehra), Holi, Rakshabandhan, Ramnavmi and Krishnajanmashtami.

**Shigmo Festival:** In the New Conquests, the *Vodlo Shigmo* is widely celebrated and commences with the Holi Pournima (full-moon day of the month of Phalguna of the Hindu calendar) and continues for five days. Shigmo festival occupies an important place in their cultural life.

**Devachi Parab:** On these days, all the *ganvkars* (village community members) bring one coconut. This *Parab* is important because they say the *garane* (prayers) for each family and pray to God to protect the village. The *devachi parab* is considered to be important by the villagers because it asks God for protection.

**Dussehra:** Dussehra day is considered the most auspicious day. There is a belief among the Mithgaudas — as with other sections especially of Goa's Hindu population — that if any new venture is started on this day, it is bound to be successful. Hence, any auspicious undertakings like buying of new house, new consumer durables, laying — in of foundation of a new building, opening of a new commercial establishment.

Also, on this day, tools and implements of salt making, agriculture, machines, household articles, and even children's school books are placed before the idol of Durga and worshiped.

Navarati, or the Festival of Nine Nights associated with Lord Rama's Defeat of Ravana, the "demon" King of Lanka, culminates in the grand festival of Dussehra. Dusshera is celebrated by devotees of the Mother Goddess as her festival. The Sri
Bhagavati Temple in Pernem town has a fortnight's festivities on the occasion. Special celebrations for Navaratr Utsav are also held at the Santeri temple in Agarvaddo.

**Divali:** Another festival of Mithgaudas in Agarvaddo is the *Deepawali* or Diwali festival, which is also celebrated with lots of enthusiasm and happiness all over India. This festival is celebrated for five continuous days with the third day being celebrated as the *Dhakkti Diwali* (Small Diwali) or the 'Festival of Lights'.

Fireworks are closely associated with this festival. The day is celebrated with people lighting *diyas* (oil-fuelled earthen lamps) or, less often, candles all around their houses. *Lakshmi Puja* is performed in the evening to seek the blessing of the Goddess of Wealth. Diwali gifts are exchanged among all near and dear ones. Then is followed by *Vhoddli Divali* (Grand Diwali) or the *Tulsi Lagn* (Tulsi's Wedding).

**Zatra:** Agarvaddo's temple has its annual local feast in honour of Sateri Devi each year. Devotees from other parts of Pernem and from Agarvaddo come to participate.

Celebration begins with the worship of Goddess Sateri: early morning with different religious rituals. Later, the *palkhi* (palanquin) procession of Goddess is carried out. When the statue of the Goddess Sateri: the village deity is carried in a huge wooden chariot around the temple, the crowds of devotees follow in a procession. The Mahar beats the drum early in the morning. This is done to inform the people about the occurrence of the local feast. In the night, the Dashavatari *natak* (drama performance) is held in the temple premises. This also provides recreation to the village.

It is a festive and colourful occasion in the temple complex, with thousands of devotees taking part in the celebrations and the *palakhi* (palanquin) procession. All
the people later participate in the Garanhe (a prayer to God usually in the local dialect).

A small local fair, including stalls selling everything from imitation jeweller to eatables, is setup in the temple ground in Agarvaddo. People from the village living outside it, as well as the married daughters of Agarvaddo settled elsewhere, come in especially for the village fair.

**Dashaavtari Natak:** It is a folk play staged through music and dance greatly influenced by the South Indian traditions. The dancing style and martial art patterns are the specialties of this theatre form. Actors are hired from outside the village (often from the neighboring state of Maharashtra) to entertain villagers, helping them to stay up through the night for the wake.

**Divjaanchi Zatra:** As the festival of Diwali comes to end one well-known religious festival is the "Divjanchi Zatra". The Divaj a set of five lamps made of terracotta, a copper, brass or silver metal. The Divija fair is mostly celebrated on the occasion of new moon day of Kartik, the eight month of the Hindu calendar or on the first day of the Hindu month of Margashirsh. In some parts of Goa and in Agarvaddo, having the Divaj is considered to be a prestigious symbol. On this day, women light the divaj in front of village temple and pray for a long life of their husbands. A full day fast is observed mostly on this occasion.

Divja are lit as darkness falls, and five rounds are taken around the temple. Extreme care is taken to ensure that the lamps stay continuously lit for at least some time. If the wick extinguish before the stipulated time, it is considered to be a bad omen. The researcher witnessed such an event in Agarvaddo.
Styles of celebrating this occasion tend to vary from place to place. Agarvaddo, a beautiful village located in Pernem taluka, is well known for its own style of divja celebration from other parts of Goa. A woman who attends the divja ceremony has to maintain a strict fast throughout the day. The fast starts at sunrise and ends only after the divaj celebration. One cannot consume even single drop of water during the fast.

Male folk light the divaj in front of Goddess idol and hand it over to women outside the temple. Women then take five rounds around the temple by holding the divaj on their hands, with drums in front of the queue played by people belonging to the community of the Mahars. In some parts, a newlywed couple carries the divaj hopping for the arrival of prosperity and happiness in their future life.

By sunset, the womenfolk start gathering near the Nagnath temple wearing traditional navwaari (nine yard) saris, ornaments, and deck their hair with a lot of flowers on this occasion. Three gents light the divaj in front of the God's idol after breaking two coconuts and filling it with oil and insert a wick and light their divaj. Immediately after that, the women start lighting their divaj outside the temple. Women then take the five rounds, mentioned above, around the temple.

The beating of the drums is done during this time in front of the queue by the mahar or the former untouchable of the village. Holy water is offered to the God, and the fast ends. Women have to burn out the entire oil in the lamp, or wait till it is over. But nowadays, a special area is demarcated wherein the women may just dump the oil instead of waiting to complete the burning.

Landlords celebrate a grand local festival in Parcem called as the Lalita Panchami, and they also celebrate Ganesh Chaturthi and the Ramnavmi festival. Landlords from Parcem celebrate the Lalita Panchami, another name for Durga Puja.
Panchami is a day in the Hindu calendar between full moon and new moon. In Parcem, the puja (religious rites) are performed in three landlords’ houses. This is the only feast where non-vegetarian food is cooked. Large amount of fish is bought by the landlords. Around two hundred people are called to have lunch in the landlord’s house. Another festival is of Sima Ullangan, held during the Dussehra, where the warriors cross the border, they clean the swords cut the head of a fowl and then touch it with the sword.

On the ninth day, they chop the head of a goat. But nowadays, they cut a *ganvtti* (local) cock. The head of the cock is chopped off and cooked and placed in boiled rice. Then, rice is sprinkled around the house as protection for the house.

Puja is performed by the Mithgaudas each day and devotees do not remove the flower garland that is put each day on the idol or image of the deity. After nine days, all nine garlands are removed together. Young girls who have not attained puberty are invited to eat, play games, dance and sing. Then they are fed a meal of their choice.
Villagers touch the feet of the Brahmin temple priest, on the deity Bhagvati reaching Agarvaddo early morning.

Members of the Mahar community beat the drums at a religious procession in Agarvaddo.

A man creates a 'dhurorrn' on the Nagpanchami day (see explanation above).

Dalit Mahars, on entering a trance, lie prostrate outside of the garbagraha (sanctum santorum) of the temple, which they are never entitled to enter even in normal times.

The Taranga ('Umbrella') Festival, which sees the Goddess Bhagvati being brought from Parcem to her "younger sister" Sateri's village of Agarvaddo, via an overnight walk. Photo shows the procession at night.

Nagnath, the deity at Agarvaddo.
Women wear their traditional nine-yard sari, and go with the lamp around the Nagnath temple during the 'divzachi raat' (the night of lamps). Both salt-makers and the Bhandaris take part in this festival.

In Agarvaddo, Mithgaudas carry a typical brass-made plate, called the 'podgo', in which the wicks are lit with oil for the 'divaz' ceremony. Photo shows the temple of the Naiks at the Dev Ghumkar temple.

A Christian devotee (as obvious from the clothes) comes in to take 'prasad' (an offering) from the Nagnath deity, whom she sees as her family God.

A 'pathir' of brass, used by the jogi (religious functionary of the Mithgauda community), who visits the Mithgauda families and accepts a donation of paddy during Dusserah festivities.

The 'palkhi' (palanquin procession) takes the deity around the temple perimeter during the festival.

The 'Zamballeo', a zamblam (Syzygium jambolanum) tree, which is considered as the salt-pan protector by the Mithgauda.
Rituals, Customs, Festivals, Fairs and Practices in Relation to Salt Making

Durkheim initiated sociological analysis of religion as a “unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things”. In his formulation, religion involves a set of beliefs and practices that are uniquely the property of religion— as opposed to other social institutions and ways of thinking. The *sacred* encompasses elements beyond everyday life which inspire awe, respect and even fear. People become a part of the sacred realm only by completing some ritual, such as prayer or sacrifice. Believers have faith in the sacred; this faith allows them to accept what they cannot understand (Lamm1999: 416). In the Mithguda society too there are many beliefs and rituals to appease the sacred.

During the time of *Mirg*, the festival which marks the start of the monsoon in Goa around early June, the salt makers brought a local cock and offered it to the Gods. They kept it near a jamun (*Syzygium cumini*) or *zamball* tree in the salt pans. (See picture). They then placed some liquor and home-cooked chicken for the *Devchaar* (local protective spirit or deity) so that the *Zamballeo* protects them. This
practice can be traced to the original Goan practice of appeasing the zageiavoilo or the deuchar till today. He is supposed to protect them in their life. The elderly Mithgaudas had full faith in the Devchar. ‘Zanttiacho visvas baslelo asa’ (The faith of the elders is in place.)

The salt makers light agarbathi (incense sticks) and perform a puja and keep salt, coconut and sugar in the salt pans. Local belief also subscribes to the existence of a bandhacho dev (the 'God of the bund') and to please the God, the Mithgaudas cook chicken and serve it to their friends.

In addition, there is also belief in a Thallacho Brahman also called Thallacho Maalak. To propiate him, the temple priest cooks vegetarian food in the saltpans, the temple priest prepared food according to his custom. He charged a fee of Rs 50 to 100 for performing this custom. It is believed that if this ritual is not performed, the Mithgaudas will have problems. Interestingly, landlords of the Agarvaddo saltpans had never seen the practices that are followed in the saltpans neither do they knew the stages of salt making.

With the majority of the population being Hindu in Agarvaddo, it had many festivals that were celebrated all around the year, in keeping with both festivities from the overall Hindu calendar, and local festivities. All these festivals are not celebrated on fixed dates of the contemporary calendar year, since they are based on the Hindu (lunar) calendar, and the date on which these fall varies on a year-to-year basis.

**Folklore, Drama and Dance**

The folklore of Agarvaddo includes folksongs, nataks, fugdi, folktales, the shigmo etc. all of which are related to socio-religious concepts.
Many of the folk dances in Goa are performed in and around the month of *Phalgun* (the last months of the Hindu calendar) and also around the time of harvesting (Majik 2002:63).

Among the three *Maankaris* (the main castes) in Agarvaddo, the Rauts were at the top level followed by the Naik–Parab and then by the Baggli. One Baggli respondent has narrated his version as to how the Bagglis got the lowest status.

They wanted to decide who should get the highest *Maan* (status). So each *maankari* decided to grow a coconut sapling and the sapling which bore fruits first would get the highest rights. The coconut sapling which was grown by the Bagglis bore fruits first. The Bagglis would not usually go out in the night. So the Rauts cut the *maadaachi poim* or coconut sheath borne on the Bagglis’ sapling in the cover of the dark and put it for their coconut sapling. The researcher asked how this legend continued, and they said that it was not possible to change since whatever was written was transferred down the generations. ‘*Asso amcho maan ukallo,*’ ("Our rights were thus snatched from us.") He later said this same thing was continued in the field of politics too, suggesting a feeling of disempowerment felt by those on the lower hierarchical rungs.

**Folk Drama**

Kalo and Dashavatari Natak: In Agarvaddo, the Dashavatari *natak* is a popular form of folk drama, besides being a source of entertainment. Its name Dashavtar refers to the *Dha avatar* (ten incarnations) of Lord Vishnu.

The *natak* (drama) is performed on the modest stage of the village temple. The artists are usually from Maharashtra. These *nataks* are based on religious themes and artists play the personalities of rajas (kings). Most of the *nataks* performed are in
Marathi and are centered on incidents in the Ramayana and Mahabharata, Puranas and on different incarnations of Gods and Goddesses.

Village artists direct their own dramas but the village girls do not participate in the same. Girls are brought from outside the villages to act in the dramas. It is considered demeaning for the village girls to act in dramas. The researcher witnessed a theater rehearsal in the Agarvaddo temple premises. The actress who had come from another caste and from another village to take part in the natak because such a role was below the status of local girls (but this was not considered so in the case of local men).

The researcher noticed that this theatre group was trying to revive Hindu traditions. In a world where change has become the norm, it appeared to be a return to the past and to local identities to 'batten down' as if in a storm and to resist the uprooting forces of change. These dramas start after midnight and end at dawn, little children and older women sleep in the temple premises itself when the nataks go on.

**Fugddi:** Fugddi is an important folk dance performed during Ganesh Chathurthi (also called the Chovoth festival in Goa). It is a group dance performed by women and girls only. Fugddi songs are based mainly on a religious story, especially those from the Ramayana and Mahabharata, the two great epics of India, and their songs are in the Konkani and Marathi language.

This dance has two major variations. In one, it is danced in a circle or in rows, a few fixed steps, while hand gestures and handclaps are associated with it. The other is characterized by the absence of any accompaniment. Besides the epics, the songs also centre on Puranic stories, family life, complaints, rivalries, people or customs (ibid 2002:65).
Caste System

The salt makers of Agarvaddo who are in a majority belong to the Mithguda caste that was of traditional salt—workers. However there are an insignificant number of families belonging to other castes like one Devlli family (also known as Bhavin, whose traditional role has been to assist the temple priest) and a few Gosaavi or Jogi, some Bhandaris, Dalit families and a few Christians exist in this village. The Dalits live in the outskirts of this village. The numerical strength of a caste influences the kind of relations which it has with the other castes, and this is one of the reasons why each multi—caste village to some extent constitutes a unique hierarchy (Srinivas
1987:100). The Mithgaudas of Agarvaddo are numerically larger than all the other castes as a result they exert a larger influence than the other castes.

The *Mithgaudas* claim to be higher in the social hierarchy than the *Gaudes* and say they belong to the *Kshatriya varna*. They are not classified as a backward community. They form an endogamous group, divided into several exogamous clans (*kuls*) (Singh 1993:165).

The Mithgaudas of Agarvaddo and the Gauddis of Arpora are placed at a much higher rank in the caste hierarchy as compared to the other three castes of the salt-makers in Goa. In such cases, a discrepancy crept in between their traditional local caste rank and their higher but newly acquired secular position. Acquiring economic affluence might account for this changing status. One way of resolving this has been by Sanskritizing their way of life and claiming high caste status. Bailey has shown how the board distillers of Phulbani in Orissa rose up from their previous position as one of the "low Hindu" castes, below the barbers, to the "high Hindu" category, disputing with the warriors for the second place. Sanskritization, then, restored the equilibrium, and traditionally it has been able to do this in the case of all castes except the Harijan (Srinivas 1987:72, 73).

They considered themselves as belonging to the Kshatriyas stratification of the four-level Hindu caste structure. One Mithgauda respondent told me of a belief that they got a *‘khali darzo’* meaning lower status in the caste system since salt gets formed with the *suryakiran* or with the sunrays. *‘Mhannon khali theile’*, meaning, that's the reason we were kept in the lower rungs.

*‘Aple barobar amkam bhamnaani kurchi diunk na,’* means, "We do not get the same status as the Brahmins". The Harijans *‘ap aple siment ravle’* (*stayed within their own boundaries*).
During the time of the conversions, they believe, the Mithgaudas provided *aasro* meaning shelter to the Nagvenkars who came from Nagoa in Bardez probably during the sixteenth century and the phase of religious intolerance in Goa. As I was told, ‘*Bhata bhatti zalle tednam ami Nagvenkaarank aasro dilo’. *Bhatta bhaatiche velar ushte takith and te samaann ani dev gheun Agaravaddear eile ani ami tanchea adarak pavle* meaning they converted us by throwing their left over’s so the Nagvenkars took their belongings and family God and came to Agarvaddo where the Mithgaudas provided them with shelter and the latter the Nagvenkars too began extracting salt in Agarvaddo.

One member of the Naik family got converted during the time of conversion to Christianity, so the Mithgaudas do not give their children in marriage to that particular converted family. However this family still comes and participates for the religious functions in the village temple at Agarvaddo.

**Marriage System**

Marriage is an aspect, which determines ones position in the society. It also determines ones role in the society and is closely linked to parenthood and head of the household (Souza2005:71). In fact, the marriages in Agarvaddo are governed by the rules of endogamy. Due to a common occupation that the Mithgaudas performed, the network of kinship relations developed by families in Agarvaddo are undisturbed. Behera(1990:74) has highlighted the importance of kinship relations in the social life of the people. He opines:”kinship relationships in any society are central to its social structure, patterned interactions, claims, obligations and sentiments are determined in a society by kinship relationships. Kinships have to do with relationships of consanguinity and affinity. In simple societies, every individual is related by kinship
or affinity to everyone else and affiances are limited for practical purposes to a selected few”.

In the present study, all Mithgaudas respondents were all married in Agarvaddo itself with the exception of a few who were married in the southern Konkan of Maharashtra where their relations existed. The average age of marriage was from thirty to thirty five for males and nineteen to twenty eight for females.

However, probably due to the spread of education and the socio economic changes taking place, the Mithgaudas have now started getting married outside their sub caste. In keeping with the general trend prevalent in Goa, here too the custom of early marriage did not prevail among the Mithgaudas. The average age of marriage was from thirty to thirty five for males and nineteen to twenty eight for females. Among the respondents interviewed, non—marriages and late—marriages were not reported. Similarly, there has been not a single case of divorce among the Mithgaudas. Among the Mithgaudas, the norms of endogamy and the decisive role of parents in arranging the marriage have been very strong. Mithgaudas children used to get married only with others from the same Mithgaudas community, but there is a restriction on a Raut—Baggli marriage, as the Rauts and Bagglis were seen to have a relationship of being “brothers”.

Although Mithgaudas nowadays have started getting intermarried with the Bhandarlis, there has not been a single case of a Raut marriage to a Baggli.

All the Mithgauda respondents that were interviewed did not favour inter—caste marriage especially when it involved getting married to someone of a “lower” caste. If at all, the respondents felt that a marriage could be with someone from “higher” than one’s own caste while half of them felt that it should be from any caste.
The Mithgaudas felt that they should get married within one’s own caste, but the landlords felt that their marriages could be from one’s own caste or any other caste. Half of the respondents felt that if economic incentives are given, there would be inter-caste marriages while half of them felt that even if economic incentives are given, there would not be a growth in inter-caste marriages. They said they maintain relations with the people who are married outside their caste. They permit widow remarriage and approve of divorce. They felt that the ideal number of children should be three to four per family.

Landlords said that no one should get married outside boundaries caste and religion. One of the respondent who was a landlord- his wife’s brother got married to a French lady.

Mithgaudas were not in favor of conversion to other religions. Both the Mithgaudas as well as the landlords felt that election increases a person’s prestige.

Some landlords however say they are not in favour of the intercaste marriage since the person’s links get severed from the family. So long as such marriage works, its okay; workability is very important. They felt that marriage should be within one’s own caste, or if the caste is similar than it is better.

If economic incentives are given, and then also there may be no increase in inter-caste marriages, it was felt by some of the young adult respondents who were interviewed by the researcher. If both are educated, the person is more acceptable and nobody should be against the same, it was felt by the older respondents interviewed. Widow remarriage was favoured by the landlords, but they did not approve of divorce as stated by them in the interview schedule. They felt divorce had significant ill effects on the children, so it was better to compromise on certain issues. They were
not in favour of conversion to any other religion. They felt that participation in politics increases a person’s prestige.

**Marriage rituals:** The salt makers perform traditional Hindu rituals and local customs during the time of marriage. These are as described below. Marriages are usually arranged by family or neighbours. In addition, there are also love marriages nowadays within the same caste and the same village.

Sometimes, marriages take place outside the village. A young woman from the neighbouring State of Maharashtra married in Agarvaddo is considered as ‘*Englezintle cheddum Portuguezant lagn kelam*’. (Literally, a girl from a British–ruled region wed a Portuguese–ruled one. Of course, neither Maharashtra nor Goa is ruled by the British and Portuguese any more, but this manner of speaking continues) Marriage negotiations are initiated by the family or neighbours. When the bride–seeing takes place the groom gives the bride saris, money or a *shalu* (an expensive sari).

**Prasad Pakhli:** Hindus in Goa, during the difficult times, consult or seek advice of the oracles and the Gods. This is done in many temples of Goa. Specialists perform the *Prasad Pakhli* (is a process of conversation with God through a mediator to seek the approval of God over the concept of marriage or whatever ails the devotee). And seek advice on how to deal with special problems and during the settlement of marriage, unemployment, sickness, any such difficulties etc. The people of Agarvaddo consult or seek the advice of Gods during the difficult life situations. This applies for marriage too.

At the time of engagement, they invite close relatives. They exchange rings and sometimes give them *pattle* (bangles). *Mavodde sakricho puddo fodop ani*
vaantap is another practice; a cone of sugar is opened and distributed (refer to the photograph). Five coconuts, one sari and flowers are distributed. The Votti is filled. (This refers to a tradition wherein traditional sari, flowers are offered and reverently received in the palla or on the lap.) Coconut pieces are distributed to all those who assemble there.

During the marriage, the rites meant for bride and bridegrooms are followed. So far no one from the Mithgaudas family has married outside their caste. The Hindu priest officiates the marriage ceremony. The rites meant for the bride and the rites meant for the groom are performed during the marriage. None of the respondents gave dowry to their daughters since they say this is comparing them to being like ‘dhoovek vikap’ (selling their daughter). Some respondents said that dowry was not given when there are love marriages or sometimes if they are poor. Marriage was usually arranged by the parents, married brothers and sisters, wife’s brother or friends.

The Mithgaudas invite friends, relations and all the people they know for their marriage and other religious festivals. They invite the Dalits too for their festivals but there is a taboo for the Dalits to enter into the temple.
Family

The most common form of family prevalent among the Mithgaudas in Agarvaddo was the joint family. However, in recent years, the joint family system has disintegrated, giving rise to nuclear family. Each joint family is split into several nuclear families. As each joint family normally has one salt pan, salt making is done on rotation basis by the split nuclear families. Joint—families hardly exist anymore.

Each family is given its turn based on the number of families that are there in each family. For example if the joint family consists of three sons, then each son will get his turn every three years. Salt making is normally a family—based occupation, where the whole family works in the process. This working together builds a bond within family members, as visible from their close dependence on each—other and also the willingness to fit into the traditional family structure largely without questioning its logic. Elderly parents join their sons and daughters (who have not yet married and moved out) in their salt pans. School—going children also accompany their parents and sometimes carry tea and snacks for their parents to the salt—pans. Grandparents keep children occupied or offer distractions and blandishments by way of pocket money.
during the salt season- is a unique aspect which the researcher has not observed in the other two villages. (See photo)

Family ties are stronger in this village than the other two villages. As one respondent put it, getting embroiled in needless controversy and unnecessary disputes at home would only mean extra trips to the police station. ("Vaad noko, ami sushikshit maansa barobar firle, police stationaar vaad korun gele zalear kuthre kaxe lomkavunk patta").

Some of the Mithgaudas live in joint families and others live in nuclear families. But for certain occasions, the latter too gather under one roof. This is explained as Kaslia sannak ekeshini ravtat, meaning an occasion on which all get together as a common family. During Ganesh Chathurthi, the most popular Hindu festival in Goa, the whole family gets together. The men women and children dine together for Ganesh. On the first day of Ganesh Chathurthi Gauri pooja is performed and then Lord Ganesh is venerated. Gauri pooja is performed as a mark of respect to Lord Ganesha’s mother. They celebrate Ganesh for five days in Agarvaddo. First two years the idol may be immersed on the second day and in subsequent year i.e the third year tisaal it has to be compulsorily immersed on the fifth day only.

The landlords also have big houses in Parcem. They mostly work and live in the towns. The landlords do not remember whether their ancestors worked in the salt pans. Since inception, people lived like landlords and felt it that it is below their dignity to work in the salt pans. The landlords remember times when their grandfather used to travel in a palanquin to see their salt pans.
Status of Women

In a society like India gender plays a very important role. There are markers which give a hint of the lower status of women in Agarvaddo. Pregnant women are permitted to visit the family village temple till four months into the pregnancy. Newly born girl babies are brought inside the temple on completion of three months and boys have to wait to complete six months. Distinction was thus made between girls and boys from a tender age. While this particular example may not underline the inferior status of women, it does indicate that boys and girls are treated differently from a very tender age.

The women in Agarvaddo were allowed to pluck coconuts with a long bamboo stick, which was a job once performed by the men. They even smashed cashews with feet — to extract juice that goes into the making of cashew feni — by wearing gumboots, which was a task once performed solely by the men. But as far as politics is concerned, men feel that if women go out for political meeting there would be no one left to “do the cooking”, as one respondent put it. It is a patriarchal society. Women are also not encouraged to speak out in public, as is the case in Agarvaddo. They feel that women should be confined to domestic tasks like cooking and looking after the children. Women have worked alongside with men in the fields and saltpans, but are not encouraged to similarly venture into fields like politics in Agarvaddo.

As noted earlier, the men folk felt that if girls take up to higher education there will be prem prakarn (love affairs) and so girls are not allowed to go for education above the secondary level. A handful of girls are now however countering this trend of thought and taking up higher education in Agarvaddo.
Economic Life

Occupation

Traditionally the economic condition of the Mithgauda family had been bad. Salt making was not the only source of livelihood of the Mithgaudas. It provided income and employment to the Mithgaudas. They have supported their families by salt making, agriculture, selling vegetables, cashew cultivation and rearing cattle. The main economic activity of this village consists of farming, cashew cultivation, the Kaath business and manufacturing of natural salt.

Salt work is done on the basis of rotation. So each married son – since daughters move out in marriage – gets a turn once in so–many years, depending on the number of sons in the family. The Mithgaudas feel that ‘Tinsaan takh thallmallunk zai’ or they have to slog for the whole day in the salt pans. As far as employment of the Mithgaudas is concerned, they get their salt production for three months only. The remaining nine months they have to remain idle due to climatic reasons. Sometimes salt–making is undertaken by one person and the cashew plantation is done by the uncle or cousin. This is explained as: “Choolto dongor karta.” (My cousin works the hill.”) They have to save the money they get on the salt
production because their turn for farming could come only once in three to four years. The head of the family, or the eldest male, usually delegates jobs to the others in the salt pans. Some landlords do not get any income from their salt pans. By way of rent from the trees in the property; the landlord stands to get rupees twenty thousand to thirty thousand depending of course on the size of the property.

The people of Agarvaddo, till recently, used to rear cattle too. The (Kaath) business involves the Khair tree, from which juice is extracted, then boiled and hardened to make vaddi used to make for betel leaf, add color to tea and for color in clothes. This business is undertaken by these people from Agarvaddo who are based in Rajapur in Maharashtra. In Goa licenses are not given for this business. The Kaath business requires an investment of around four to five lakhs. They would undertake this business from February to May and the rest of the year they would carry out agricultural operations).

But, over the last few years, there have been other economic activities which have begun in this village. For example, there is cashew nut processing unit which has begun over the last 17 years on the Agarvaddo–Mandrem junction.

Previously, in the year 2005, when the researcher had begun her study, there were very few shops but according to the village Sarpanch, there were only two shops in the year 2001 in Agarvaddo; but because of the road widening today there are a total of 48 shops in Agarvaddo today. There are 20 self-help groups and two bus owners belonging to a Raut family. There is one Goa Dairy branch at Naikvaddo in Agarvaddo near the village panchayat. The milk is supplied to this dairy by the locals who own the cattle in Agarvaddo. There are two cooperative societies i.e. The Pernem Taluka Farmers Cooperative Society situated at Naikvaddo and The Camp Urban Credit society (comprising of Chopdem, Agarvaddo, Morjim, and Parcem villages in
Pernem) Urban credit society situated at Rautvaddo. All this indicates a growing monetization of an economy, which a few decades ago also depended a lot on barter, and the local produce.

This village is close to the beaches — include Morjim, Ashvem, Mandrem, Arambol — there has been a growing number of foreign and domestic tourists who visit and has added to the improved economic life of the Mithgaudas. The main road that runs through the Agarvaddo village is connected to Arambol beach and other side to Morjim beach — both popular tourist destinations — thus attracting tourists, shacks and restaurants to the vicinity. Various tourists from India and people or picnickers from Goa especially visit to partake in the peace and tranquility of these two mentioned beaches.

During the tourist fair–weather season, all tourists pass the main Agarvaddo–Chopdem road where all the new shops have been set up by locals. Nearby banks are situated in Parcem, Mandrem and Morjim. Agarvaddo itself has no bank in the village.

**Sources of Income:** The Mithgaudas have supported their families by salt making, agriculture, cashew cultivation and rearing cattle and sale of milk, growing paddy, and vegetables for sale in the local market, coconut crops, work in nearby companies and factories and have their own business. Their income has barely provided sustenance to their family. However, in recent years, some of the economic changes and new measures might have helped them to access monetary earnings. *Paixe rakhun thevunk zai,* as one respondent put it, meaning we have to save money and keep to spend for the rest of the year.
Huge catch of fish of fine varieties is made in the salt pans. Fish is available, when the water level is low. Perhaps the increasing salinity and the lack of space for free movement makes the life of the fish in the waters uncomfortable. In the local language one refers to “agor marlo” implying that the large scale fishing operation has taken place in the saltpan. The local market is full of tasty fish in those days (D’Souza:1997:53).

“They add that if they take fish from the salt pans we have to pay an extra amount of fees to the landlords. There are only two seasons when we get money from our salt one is when the Gabit lok mitt vartaa tednam mitt khaptalem ani May mhaineant meaning the fisher folk community take salt for drying fish from the months of November to January and the other time is in the month of May. So we have to save money for the remaining months to pay electricity water bills, food, clothing and other essential needs that we have.

Annual Income from the Land: When respondents were queried about the income from the salt pans they were working on, they preferred not to reveal the same. When the researcher tried to convince the respondents that this would be used for academic purpose only, a few respondents answered by saying that the annual income on land is between rupees twenty thousand to rupees one lakh rupees. Some feared that the researcher might relate or report this figure to the landlord.

Others were reluctant to mention the total income of their land. They would generally keep quiet. When the researcher persisted, suggesting they could state any figure, since this would not come in for verification, and neither was it in any way linked to an Income Tax query, they would suggest they earned Rs 50,000 per season.
Most salt farmers were entirely dependent on this occupation alone. They continued working on the pans even after riverside walls (bunds) and sluice-gates were damaged, and water flooded part of the pans. There is no alternative for them besides salt making, apart from seasonal cashew plantation work for some. There are no other means of livelihood in this village. Thus, this occupation gives each member a sense of belonging since each member of the salt-making family finds it necessary to undertake the tradition and family-ascribed job of salt making as part of the family.

This occupation of extracting salt demands a lot of hard work. Villagers have to work round the clock during the salt season as they cannot take a break. The community of salt makers has been faithful in pursuing this work for ages now.

The seriousness of the unemployment situation is evident from the fact that some educated graduates were also found working on the salt pans. Some had become graduates and one respondent had even done a B.P.Ed (Bachelor in Physical Education) degree but could not secure a job suitable to the qualifications.

Among the original owners, a majority of them were from the age category of 40 to 45, 55 to 60 and 70 to 75 years. They were mostly graduates and were holding good jobs like that of a director, politician, and bank employee, working for the government or teachers.

**Occupation-preference for Children:** Occupation is hereditary The Mithgaudas felt that their children should, if possible, take up prestigious jobs like those of being a doctor or mechanical engineer. One respondent said, when asked about what occupation the children should take up: *Bhurgim zodtitt tim khavshit. Paim Mai Ghoo Khatith.* (The children should earn decently to eat; their parents eat crap!).
**Assets and Liabilities:** The Mithgaudas have assets in the form of the land (Dhongar). They take loans from the bank when they face problems like a *Vhodlem Khaavte* (big breech in the bund). Although the landlords own the saltpans, some of them do not know how much of land they own. The hold over land by landlords has been diminished since the 1960s in particular, due to steps like the agricultural land-tenancy laws.

**Duration of Work:** The Mithgaudas work from 7.30 am to 9.30 am and then from 2.30 pm to 6.30 pm. The peak salt producing season is from February to May, due to there being the right temperatures for evaporation, and no interruption by the monsoons rains.

**Spending Habits**

Salt makers usually spend their income on food, clothes, investment on their children etc. Landlords spend their income on family life, children’s education, transportation and food. The saving habits of the landlords are good. They usually spend on mutual funds, fixed deposits etc. They are of the opinion that unless one saves, the money will not grow. They feel that they produce more than their needs.

**Special Schemes for the Salt Workers**

There are no special schemes for the salt makers in Agarvaddo, from either the State or Central governments currently available or being availed of.
Division of Labour in the Salt Pans

The Mithgaudas do the digging, level the floor by smashing the earth with a *sallnem* (an instrument used in salt-making) and then use the *pavni* to flatten the floor. Women perform simple tasks like filling the salt and carrying it on the bundh. They also collect the *shimpi* (shards of broken shell) from the saltpans. The women usually do the jobs like *shello kadap* (removing moss out from the saltpans) and *shipio ani gunne kadop* (removing tiny stones and shells) from the saltpans. The women also carry the salt by the head load.

The Ownership Pattern and the Current State of Salt Pans

There are altogether nine agars (*bogaatto*) meaning one salt pan is further divided into parts in Agarvaddo. Of these, there are five salt pans in operation. The names of the different agars are; *Naanaacho agar, Gaanvcho agar, Saabaacho agar, Aagurli agar, Aadnumber agar, Raasvoll agar, Kaanso agar, Baapaacho agar* and *Pednekaracho agar.*

The four agars which are not in use are: *Aagurli, Raasvoll, Aadumber agar* and *Naanacho agar.* There is one called the *Gaanvcho agar* for which a tender (*leelanv*) was put out. It is owned by the Sateri temple in Agarvaddo.

Of the nine saltpans in the village only five are presently used for salt production and four are practically damaged. Damage has occurred due to destruction of outer protective embankment and sluice gates i.e. *manos* since 1987–88. This caused a loss of Rs. 8.9 lakhs per year (http://www.peacefulsociety.org/env/salt.htm). Four large breaches have wreaked havoc by incessantly flooding the saltpans with saline water. This saline water entered in the salt pans and then reached the fields resulting in damaging of the fields too. Such breaches were in olden days repaired by
the landlords but nowadays landlords do not take interest in the salt pans since they do not earn much out of it. When the researcher had registered for her Ph.D. in the year 2006, this problem of the breach sharply affected the area, so much so that the people were even reluctant to speak to any outsider regarding the same. But towards the end of the Ph.D., by 2008, this problem had been solved and villagers could once again extract salt in the salt pans.

The landlords from Parcem own the salt pans in Agarvaddo. In the New Conquests, there were large number of Marathas as well as Desais who have been gauncars or members of the land—controlling comunidades (D'Souza 1975:29).

While part of Goa was already under Portuguese rule, the other areas ('New Conquests') had not yet been colonised by the Portuguese. During the rule of Yusuf Adil Shah, the Hindus enjoyed religious freedom and were also appointed to important civil and military posts. Lands were given in the charge of, and for the collection of revenue, to loyal Hindus, chiefly Brahmins, Lingayats and Marathas with the titles of Jagirdaars (estate holders) or Deshmukhs. These appointments were made on the basis of hereditary principles. Some Hindus were also given the titles of Desais and Sardesais, and placed in charge of revenue collection of some lands. Hindus who distinguished themselves in the king's services were given Hindu titles of Rajah, Naik and Rao. A number of Marathas were recruited into the Bijapuri army and Hindu garrisons were stationed in many hill forts (D'Souza 1975:22, 23).

Land was then not a commodity to be purchased in the market. Land was owned by the village communities or the dominant sections of it. During the Kadamba rule, one–sixth of the produce was considered to be the king's share. This was raised by the subsequent Muslim rulers to one–fourth. Revenue was mostly paid in kind. It was collected by the village council and passed on to the taluka officials to be
siphoned off to the king. The other sources of revenue were the taxes on oilmen, oil mills, betel leaves and salt. The Adil Shah appointed Desais and Sardesais to collect the revenue of certain lands. These men began to demand exorbitant amounts from the peasants and used a part of it to satisfy their own avarice. In course of time, they even expropriated community land. (D’Souza 1975:25, 26).

Landlords whom the researcher claimed that because of the services they performed in the Adil Shahi army, and since they had shown their bravery, five villages had been given to the Desais from Parcem as a gift. The villages are Parcem, Agarvaddo, Mandrem, Morjim and Carsarvornem. Earlier, the Tuem village was also a part of Parcem. Villagers who are not the landlords however have a differing oral history to narrate. They feel that it was their hard work, but the award went to the landlords. ("Amcheani vasailem ani bhatkarank inam mhunn dilem"). An elderly respondent felt that since the villagers lacked education then, the ownership went to the landlords.

This happened in 1924, according to an old respondent. He feels that since they were not educated, it leads the landlords getting the salt—pans from the rulers. Another theory that has currency in the local oral history is that since they didn’t pay the leilany or tax, the villagers might have lost their salt pans in auctions, maybe four centuries back (Dasth na farik kelo mhunn paooni haddli chaarsim varsam adhi).

**Reasons for Abandoning the Salt Pans**

One reason is the embankment which was not repaired for a long time led to the destruction of the salt pan and indirectly also affected their fields and their pasture lands, which was used for the grazing of the cattle. They have had to either graze their cattle on the hill or abandon them. There have been no developmental activities in the
salt pans in Agarvaddo. Salt pans not damaged by breaches are used only for salt extraction. Secondly the people are leaning on too other sources of income like taking up jobs outside their homes, starting of new business ventures shops etc.

Modern Technology and its Effect

Social problems like alcoholism and poverty exist in Agarvaddo, as in other parts of Goa, particularly rural Goa. The landlords believe that there are problems in the neighbouring Parcem village like alcoholism; acute and visible poverty, to some
extent, has been wiped off. But to imagine that such problems do not affect the area is unrealistic.

If midday meals are not provided to less-affluent children attending government and government-funded schools, the children studying there find it difficult to concentrate on their studies. Poverty and malnourishment, besides unemployment (sometimes disguised unemployment or seasonal unemployment) cannot be overlooked. Consuming alcohol is one way of a poverty-striken's person out of coping with strenuous work.

There are no new technological changes adopted in Agarvaddo since to employ the modern techniques of production that are employed in the other parts of the country like Gujarat require a large area. Due to the peculiar ownership patterns in the area – in part caused by Goa's higher population density, and also the fragmentation of land ownership here due to legal and other reasons – it is not possible to employ these techniques when the size of the salt pans is small. However there has been an attempt to consolidate the size of the area of salt pans. Multi-national companies had come and met the salt-farmers but offers were at rather low rates, so these were not accepted. Such a sell-out of the salt pans would also have an impact of their ownership structure.

A meeting was held with all the salt makers of the whole of Goa in Panjim wherein the multinational companies wanted to take over the salt pans, but the rate offered by the companies was comparatively less too.

The Mithgaudas feel that it is not necessary to add iodine to our salt since they feel that they have been consuming it for the past five hundred years. Amche nadik ghaann na (our river is not polluted), was the rationale of respondents queried. They felt that if iodization of salt plant was formed than there would be a chairman,
secretary and other officials working on the plant. *Ami pikaitale ani te aple kishe bhartale* meaning we would produce the salt and they would feel their own pockets. *Khatalean khaanvche ani na khatalean na khaanvche* meaning whoever wants to eat may eat.

A team from Gujarat had come to train the Mithgaudas. Sakaraam Parab and Uttam Balla Baggli were to be taken for training to Gujarat but they felt that *mazoorek manaai theile zalear khoop paixe modhunk zai* meaning if they go to Gujarat and keep labourers to work here we would have to spend a lot.

The *bund* (riverside protective wall) breaking has caused a great deal of losses for the salt makers of Agarvaddo, displacing a number from their traditional livelihood pattern. The bunds have since been repaired.

Local salt makers use the old outdated methods of salt production. The production of salt has improved the material conditions of the people.

**Competition in the Market**

Agarwado Salt, being purest of natural Salt in Goa, with less silt and sand is highly prized (http://www.peacefulsociety.org/env/salt.htm).

Of late, there has been more of a demand for superior salt. Consumers prefer the Agarvaddo traditional salt since the suppliers from Tisvadi also come to Agarvaddo, since the colour of this salt is whiter than all the other traditional salt that is available in the market.

It is however priced costlier than the salt from the two other villages looked at in this study. Incidentally, a sample of the salt was sent by the elite Mithgaudas of Agarvaddo to the Excise Duty Officer at Shiroda (Maharashtra) and later sent to Delhi where it was rated high. *Mhaal ek number mhunn saangle* our product was rated
number one. *Ami tin khepo mero laita teka laggon amche mith barem asta* means we prepare the bunds for three times as a result we get superior salt in Agarvaddo. However, there is no minimum price support policy for locally manufactured salt. Agarvaddo salt-makers feel that their salt should fetch a higher price. Growing competition in the sector leads to dumping of sub-standard, adulterated with sand at cheaper rates, forcing the Agarvaddo salt-producers to lower their prices ([http://www.peacefulsociety.org/env/salt.htm](http://www.peacefulsociety.org/env/salt.htm)). The Mithgaudas of Agarvaddo take more trouble in the different stages of salt-making as compared to the other places in the rest of Goa.

**Opinions on the Future of Salt Making**

Some pressures facing the salt-producers of Agarvaddo make their outlook gloomy for obvious reasons. These include:

The main hurdles that the salt-makers face is the problem of transportation of salt, since the salt pans in Agarvaddo are not connected by road. They have to carry the salt on their head or bring it across on bicycle, meaning that a lot of family labour is required to get the salt from the salt pans to the road.

The *khavtte* (breech) in the *bunds* (riverine protective walls) is another problem that the salt makers face in Agarvaddo. Each time there is a breach in the bunds, the repairs is done by the family members themselves.

However, there is a positive side too. None of the salt makers are planning to give up the jobs of the salt pans. None of the salt pans have as yet been converted into real estate zones for non-agricultural zones or for express highways. Likewise, salt pan land has not yet been taken or acquired for any other purpose by the government in Agarvaddo.
Use of Traditional Implements

The Mithgaudas do not deploy the electric pump. Water is taken out of the salt pans using traditional means of letting the water out. During the low tide, a pipe is inserted to let the water out and during the high tide this opening is sealed. Thus minimizes the flow of water into the salt pans. The time required for preparation of saltpans before the actual salt crystals are formed is three to four months. This long wait-period is mainly because of non-availability of diesel pumps for removing water from the saltpans.

The Agarvaddo salt-pans have been constructed at below sea-level to allow the easy intake of water, while at the same time ensuring that during high tide there is a protection to block the water from entering in the salt pans. Provision of diesel-pump on subsidised basis would surely help in reducing the currently long pre-production period.

Labour, Storage and Transportation

Goa being a land interspersed with many rivers, the easiest and most economic means of conveyance was the alameda (a local canoe). A number of alamedas bringing native goods called at the city dockyard. There were carts and coaches to take passengers from one place to another. Oxen and horses were used either to pull carts and coaches or to carry riders (Xavier 1993: 222).

The mode of transporting salt in the earlier years was by the use of vaddi is a canoe or the small country boat. In olden days, the salt used to be transported by tempo, bailgaadi or bullockcart taken by vadient or canoes to Menkurem, Saal, Pernem and Bardez. But since this sort of transportation system is no longer in use today, the Mithgaudas face a lot of problem to move salt from the salt pans.
Oldest means of transporting salt using canoes (vadi) and ghaddiakar (one who sells with the help of bullock cart).

Saltpans are inaccessible from the main road, and thus marketing becomes expensive. The people either carry one bag of salt on the head or bicycles are used to transport salt since there is no approach road. This leads to wastage of labour. The cost of transporting one bag of salt from the saltpan to the road is roughly Rs.6 which is about the same as the cost of transportation from Agarvaddo to Banda in Maharashtra. *Maal shilakh aasa thaich maal paddun urtaa mhunn maangor bandoon thaich vevasthin theilo* meaning since the salt remains idle in the salt pans and gets washed off in the rains, we constructed godowns in the salt pans.

An approach road from the Agarpoim embankment in Chopdem would solve the problem, since when the repair work of the *bandharo* or embankment was underway, the *manos* in between were filled with mud. This embankment, if widened for the road and properly developed from the embankment, is likely to solve the problem of the Mithgaudas. This will facilitate the transport of light–goods vehicles for speedy, cheap transport of salt from the salt pans. *Maanso sarke bandhunk zai meaning* the sluice gates which exist do not allow to transporting the salt by road.
unless there are culverts on them. From the bandharo, there could be bridges or culverts which will help the salt makers to transport salt from the salt pans.

Storage of salt is another factor which leads to the decrease in the salt if not stored properly. There are five khopi (huts) to store salt in the salt pans. Four to five Khandi (measure of weight, three khandies made one deadweight ton) salt gets stored in each of these huts in the salt pans at Agarvaddo.

Association of the Mithgaudas

The Mithgaudas had a salt-producers association called as Pernem Taluka Mith Utpadhak Sangha (http://www.peacefulsociety.org/env/salt.htm).