

**The *Gawda/Kunbi* Socio-Cultural Identity:  
A Study in Continuity and Discontinuity**

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## **DECLARATION**

I, the undersigned, do hereby declare that the content of my dissertation paper titled *The Gawda/Kunbi Socio-Cultural Identity: A Study in Continuity and Discontinuity* which is submitted by me in fulfillment of the requirement for the award of Degree Master of Arts (Honours) in Sociology, University of Mumbai is a result of my original work. Wherever other sources, primary or secondary are used, due acknowledgement has been cited in the text.

**Kelwin Mateus Monteiro**

21st October, 2015.

## CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the dissertation titled *The Gawda/Kunbi Socio-Cultural Identity: A Study in Continuity and Discontinuity*, which is submitted by **Kelwin Mateus Monteiro** in fulfillment of the requirement for the award of Degree Master of Arts (Honours) in Sociology, University of Mumbai, is a record of the candidate's own work carried out by him under my supervision. The content embodied in this dissertation is original and has not been submitted for the award of any other degree.

Date: 21st October, 2015

Signature      of      the  
Supervisor

**Dr. Joseph M.T.**

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## Chapter I

### INTRODUCTION

'Identity' refers to that which is unique about a person or region. It stands for the distinct characteristic features or traits that distinguish a particular person or region from the other. In the case of a person, it is the individual personality traits, while in the case of a region; it is the community cultural traits that give one an identity. My present paper involves the study of a socio-cultural identity of a particular set of people, believed to be the aborigines of the region or state of Goa, namely, the *Gawda/Kunbi* community of people. Within the general state of Goa, I wish to particularly focus on the taluka of Salcete, where the majority of the population of this tribe resides.

Goa is the smallest state in India, comprising of 3,702 kilometer square with 13.44 Lakhs as its total population of natives as per the census 2001, (Census 2011 puts it to 14.59 Lakhs), which comprises of "Hindus (65%), Christians (30%), Muslims (2%) and Jains, Buddhists, Sikhs (3%) (Government of Goa 2004:9). These natives also include the *Gawda/Kunbi* community, which "anthropologically has been classed as belonging to the *Munda* section of the Proto-Austroloid race," (Mascarenhas 1987: 20), who, today are found to be professing or practicing three different religions, Hinduism, Christianity, and a third minor category called the Nav-Hindu *Gawdas*, those who were converted to Christianity but later got re-converted to Hinduism as a part of the *Shuddi* Movement.

#### **1. 1. Canvas of my Research Study.**

Writing is an art similar to painting. In a painting, an artist has to choose a size of a canvas, a paper or a frame and even though he/she is restricted by space,



he/she ought to get across to his/her viewers the ideas and imagination put into that painting. This too is the case with any author or a poet. Knowing the scarcity of time and the vastness of this canvas [(with three unique separate identities (based on religion)] -- the Hindu, Christian and Nav-Hindu *Gawda's*), I decided to 'cut' only the community of Catholic Christian *Gawda/Kunbi* as my canvas and paint on it their portrait. The Catholic *Gawda/Kunbi* community in Goa is predominantly found in the taluka of Salcete, which spreads over 277.2 Sq. Kms of area and has the highest population of STs comprising of 37,453 persons. It constitutes 23.11% of the total ST population of the state. However, it makes up only 14.41% of the total Taluka population (Government of Goa 2004:70). Though, originally Salcete had a Hindu dominated settlements, the arrival of the Portuguese missionaries which was followed by a rigorous evangelization resulted in Salcete being predominantly Christian.

## **1. 2. Identification of the Research Problem**

While the cultural heritage expressed in various cultural forms by these community of people is very vivid and vibrant, their etymological and social status seems fully shrouded with doubts, divergent views and controversies. Who really are this *Gawda's/Kunbi's* is a question that led me to undertake this in-depth study. Constitutionally since the year 2003, the *Gawda/Kunbi* community is being enlisted as the Scheduled Tribe. Do the ground realities or the living conditions of this community ascertain this fact? Or would they fall under some other category? May be an Other Backward Class or a caste? Are the *Gawda/Kunbi* the one and the same or are they two different ethnic communities, with two different patterns of life? Are they in their origin, Aryans or Dravidians or neither of them? Are they really the first settlers or one among the earliest settlers? Is the word *Gawda/Kunbi* a linguistic construction or based on their profession or patterns of life? The academicians

and researchers are busy trying to unravel these and many such other questions that shroud the etymological and social status of this community with doubts and controversies.

### **1. 3. Statement of the Research Problem/ Hypothesis**

**A.** In the etymological sphere, the word *Gawda/Kunbi* is constructed not linguistically but rather based on the occupation of these people.

**B.** Even though most of the written literature available on the Goan Catholic Caste scenario puts the *Gawda/Kunbi* in the low 'caste' category, yet their living conditions seem to support better the criteria's delineated by the Lokur Committee, set up in 1965, which the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Government of India till date recognizes and adopts in its scheduling or listing any community as a Scheduled Tribe, a category in which the *Gawda/ Kunbi* has been enlisted since 2003.

With these as my hypothesis in the sphere of etymology and social status of the *Gawda/Kunbi* community, I shall venture into finding facts and data so as either affirm or disprove my hypothesis or the statement of the research problem.

### **1. 4. Objectives of the Research Study**

Keeping the above reality in mind, in this paper, I plan to "de-construct" the socio-cultural identity of the *Gawda/ Kunbi*, an attempt at seeing their 'location' in the context of their etymology, social status and cultural heritage. In addition to highlighting the *Gawda/Kunbi's* rich and vibrant cultural heritage, this paper will attempt at throwing some light or trying to unravel the

many questions, divergent views and mysteries that shroud this etymological and social status of this community.

### **1. 5. Field of Sociology and Methodology**

Dealing with a field of the 'Sociology of the Subaltern' or 'Sociology from Below,' the preferred option for the Research Methodology would have been 'field-work' or 'participant observation,' since my study deals with the grassroots, i.e. 'locating' the identity of this community, particularly in the context of their etymological and social status. However, the paucity of time and space does not permit such an exercise. Therefore, I shall content myself with some bit of primary sources and much of the secondary sources.

### **1. 6. Approach Towards the Research Study**

Before I carry out this study over the social location of this community, I wish to first state my own social location. I am not an 'insider' but an 'outsider.' Hence, the present study is from an 'emic' approach, not an 'etic' approach. Having said so, let me state that I intend to do my best at keeping aside all my subjectivity and presenting this paper from a purely academic point of view, trying to maintain to the best of my ability the 'value-neutrality', so that my personal biases, prejudices and judgments do not affect the nature of my study.

### **1. 7. Relevance of Research Study**

The community of *Gawda/Kunbi* is a repository of cultural heritage and folk-art's. However, the older generation of this community fears that the younger generation is losing touch with their original patterns of lifestyle. As a result there is a need of what Franz Boas would call "Salvage Ethnography"--need to gather as much information as possible on the culture of people that may

become extinct due to assimilation or acculturation. Presently, there is not much study done on this community of the people, except two PhD Thesis, both unpublished, one on the economics of this community and another on the ethno-medicine of this community. Hence, this paper is a humble attempt, a drop in the ocean at understanding and salvaging some of the ethnography of this community.

### **1. 8. Chapterization**

This **Introduction** comprises the first chapter of this paper, where I have enumerated the statement of the research problem; the research methodology; and the canvas or the focus of my study.

In the second chapter, the **Etymological Dimension**, I will focus upon the origin or the etymology and the ethnology of the *Gawda/Kunbi* and deal with the divergent views that shroud its real meaning or status.

In the third chapter, the **Ethnographical Portrait**, I will briefly describe the 'life expressions' or the 'distinctive way of life,' the vibrant cultural heritage of the *Gawda/Kunbi* community.

In the fourth chapter, the **Framework**, I will focus on the theoretical and conceptual concerns which would include criteria's that define, describe and characterize a class, a caste or a tribe. Employing these as my guide or tool, I will map out or locate the social status of the *Gawda/Kunbi* community.

The fifth chapter, **Continuity-in-Discontinuity** will deal with the continuity and discontinuity, i.e., the changes that have evolved over a period of time in the socio-cultural ethos of this community.

Interpreting and analyzing the theoretical stands based on the observations or the views expressed in the second, third and particularly in the fourth and fifth sections, in this sixth chapter, **The Location**, I will construct or state the position on the aspect of the social status of this community, vis-a-vis, either affirm/prove or disprove my hypothesis.

Finally, in seventh chapter, **The Conclusion**, this study will find its culmination in the form of a few concluding remarks on the etymology and the social status of the *Gawda/Kunbi*, vis-a-vis the socio-cultural identity of this community.

## Chapter II

### ETYMOLOGICAL DIMENSION

The historical records state the '*kols*' to be the earliest settlers of this territory (Correia 2006:30). The '*kols*' at the time of their settlement chose to settle on the hilly terrains, from where they carried out farming as a means of survival and "practiced a primitive form of swidden agriculture, commonly called as slash and burn cultivation, known as *kumeri* or *kamot marop* in Konkani, the local language of Goa. This is indeed the oldest form of cultivation known to man. It dates back to a time when man first learnt to collect seeds and plant them together, close to his place of habitation" (Government of Goa 2004:16).

Mr. Vinayak Khedekar and Mr. Devidas Gaonkar, the authors of the books, '*Kunbi*' and '*Govyatil Adivasi*,' respectively, both in Marathi, held a view that those who carried out the above form of cultivation were called as *Kulambis* or *Kunbis*. Over the period of time, these hill-dwelling communities, they held, moved down to the plains and began to reside in the interior villages and established *ganv* or *gaon*, a common term in Sanskrit, the parent to many Indian languages, meaning village, hence came to be called *Gawda*, one who established the villages.

The origin or the etymology of these two words, *Kunbi/Gawda* has always posed an intriguing challenge to the historians. The scholars are divided in their opinions over this issue. How and based on what were these words derived? What is the real meaning of these words? From where did these people arrive? Are they really the earliest inhabitants of this region? Do any artifacts provide us the historical timeline of their arrival? Questions such as these are still being debated or discussed in some quarters among the intellectuals. These are questions shrouded with doubts, controversies and

divergent views. Certainly, I am not the authority to unravel this mystery; however, my attempt here is only to explore the divergent views in existence on this issue of the origin and the etymology of the *Gawda/Kunbi* community.

In view of the above, I have divided this chapter into two sub-sections. First, in brief I will deal with the etymology of the word, *Kunbi/Gawda* and second will dwell on the ethnology of these people.

### **2. 1. The Etymology of the Word.**

Etymology refers to the study of the origin of a particular word, its history, its formation of meaning or change of meaning over a period of time.

According to the Anthropological Survey of India, the term *Kunbi* is derived from *kun* and *bi* meaning 'people' and 'seeds' respectively. Fused together, the two terms mean "those who germinate more seeds from one seed". Another etymology states that *Kunbi* is believed to have come from the Marathi word *kunbawa*, or Sanskrit *kur*, meaning 'agricultural tillage'. Yet another etymology states that *Kunbi* derives from *kutumba* (family), or from the Dravidian *kul*, 'husbandman' or 'labourer.' Thus anyone who took up the occupation of a cultivator could be brought under the generic term *Kunbi*. ([wikipedia.org/wiki/Kunbi](http://wikipedia.org/wiki/Kunbi)).

The Portuguese, "designated different ethnic groups of a lower professional status, who provided the bulk of agricultural labour as *Curumbis*, derived from the Konkani word *Kunbi*, a corruption of *Kulambi* and *Kulvadi*. Both these words are derived from the word *Kul*, which in Kannada signifies 'a definite area of land' and in Sanskrit 'an area which is under the plough with a pair of bullocks' (Correia 2006:34).

Rev. John Wilson, the well known Indologist, after whom the Wilson College is being named in Mumbai, held that the word *Kunbi* was a corrupt form of the ploughman, *Krishini*, derived from the Sanskrit root *Krishi*, i.e. ploughing.” (Marco 1969:14) While, Dr. Gustav Oppert, in his learned treatise, *On the Original Inhabitants of Bharatvarsha* (India) held that *Krishini* could not produce *Kunbi* which in his view is only a contraction of *Kurumi* from the Dravidian root *Ku* or *Ko* meaning mountain, just as the *Gawda* is derived from the Sanskrit root *gau* or *go*, meaning a cow/shepherd (Ibid.)

The etymology of the word *Gawda* is equally shrouded in the realm of speculation, as scholars are divided in their opinion over this word too. Some scholars maintain that *Gawda* has its origin in the Kannada word '*Gavunda*' meaning original *gaocar* (settlers) of Goa. It is also postulated that in Tamil there are references to *gamundas* as well as *gamund-wanis*, the word '*gamund*' denoting *gaocars*. The Kannada word, '*gavunda*,' some scholars believe, has changed to *gamunda*, a semi-Sanskrit form derived from Sanskrit word *grama* meaning village (Correia 2006:36). Very much in keeping with the above stated view of *Gawda's* as the ones who established villages. In fact, "some linguists trace the origination of the term *Gawda* to village, '*Ganv*.' (Gune 1979: 233). While, one tradition holds a view that “they are called *Gaudas* as it was considered that they have come from Gauda Desh” (Ibid.), while another ascribes the etymology of the word, *Gawda* to a colloquial language once spoken by them which is now extinct (Ibid.)

While, Dr. Oppert held a view that the *Kunbis* are of the Dravidian extraction, coming from South derived from the Dravidian root, *ko* or *ku* meaning mountain; some others held a view that the *Gawdas* are of the Aryan breed, coming from north, derived from the Sanskrit root, *gau* or *go* meaning, cow/shepherd. (Marco 1969:15) Another group of scholars altogether rejected both these opinions stating that they neither belong to the Dravidian stock nor



the Aryan as “it is definite that they were the first to settle in Goa even before the Dravidians and Aryans arrived.” (Gune 1979: 234). Moreover, the *Gawdas* are pre-Dravidians and not pre-Aryans and hence the reference to cow in the tribal name of *Gawdas* sounds ambiguous, since cow is associated with the Aryan settlers. Besides, the *Gawdas* were not a pastoral community and hence the reference of ‘*go*’ meaning, i.e., cow sounds absurd (Sakhardande 2000: 4).

The above stated observations thus prove my first hypothesis, namely that in the etymological sphere, the word *Gawda/Kunbi* is constructed not linguistically but rather based on the occupation of these people, that is, their occupation being cultivators or agriculturists.

## **2. 2. The Ethnology of the People.**

Ethnology refers to the study of a particular set of people, from the perspective of its issue of the origin of their arrival, or the similarities and dissimilarities they share with others, etc.

Finding the original home or the origin of the different tribes that settled in the territory over a course of history is an intricate problem. Dr. Irawati Karve admits that the movement of the people from North to the South and vice-versa took place long ago and mentions five ancient routes along which this movement occurred (Dhume 2009: 47). Of these five ancient routes, the second and the fifth route to me seem most plausible for the *Gawda/ Kunbi* to migrate into the Konkan territories.

**The second route** starts from the plateau of Chhattisgarh runs to the junction of the Veinganga and the Warda Rivers. By this route from Magadha (Bihar), Wanga (Bengal) and Kalinga (Orissa) one may enter Maharashtra or from eastern Maharashtra one may pass to the North. This is the route through

which the *Santal*, *Munda*, *Ho*, *Korku* and other tribes speaking Mon-Khmer language migrated, not only to other parts of India but also Maharashtra.

**The fifth route** passes along the sea-shore. Starting from northern Gujarat it runs through Lata-Desha (southern Gujarat) and then through the northern Konkan, crosses the Western Ghat on the East and enters the Deccan Plateau. One of its branches running along the sea-shore goes to the South, the main route starting from northern Gujarat has two branches at its North, and one moving to the West and crossing the Rana of Kaccha goes straight to the banks of the Indus River.

Marco believes the *Kunbis* to be the offshoot of one of the great races of South India, the *Kurumbars* (Cf. Ketkar, History of Caste in India), who descended on the Konkan from Karnataka across the Ghats, brought the lands under the plough, built wells, ponds and bunds and established the ancient system of village communities, known to the Portuguese as *Comunidade*" (1969:14).

According to Mascarenhas, the *Kunbi/Gawdas* have been ushered into Goa by some scholars from Ratnagiri and Sawantwadi and by others from Assam, Orissa and Kerala (1987:10). S.S.Desai in his '*An Ethnological Study of Goan Society*,' speaks of the '*Kunabi*' communities which descended from Maharashtra and settled down on the slopes of Sahyadri ranges, and are farmers by profession (Shirodkar 1993:37). Dr. Antonio de Braganca Pereira, in his two volumes of '*Ethnografia da India Portuguesa*,' where he extensively deals with the history of the castes and communities in Goa, holds a view that the majority of the castes and communities in Maharashtra are to be found in Goa, which implies and supports the above stated view that they might have migrated to Goa from Maharashtra. Some believe them to be the ancestors of the present day *Gauda* of the Western Ghats (Singh 1993: xiii). Some others have linked them to the *Gowda* community of Bengal merely on the basis of a

few customs or some terms used by them which are similar to those of the *Gowdas* of West Bengal (Bhandari 1999:136).

With regards to the similarities and dissimilarities that the *Gawda/Kunbi* share with their kinds spread in other parts of India, it is very interesting to note that even though they share the same name, the same occupation, even to some extent same cultural roots, yet one sees a lot of differences among them, specially on the grounds of their social status.

According to V. R. Mitragotri, “*Kunbi* is considered to be a sub-caste of the Marathas, and they are primarily engaged in farming. (Mitragotri 1999: 59).

Besides, Goa, the communities of *Kunbi's* are largely found in the state of Maharashtra, Gujarat, Karnataka, and Kerala. In Maharashtra, they are quite widely concentrated in the districts of Ratnagiri and Vidarba. In Gujarat, they are largely found in the districts of Dangs, Surat and Valsad. In Karnataka, their presence is seen in the coastal districts of Karnataka. While in Kerala, the largest *Kudumbi* settlement is in Vypeen near Kochi, besides having their presence in places like Cranganore, Cochin, Kayamkulam, Alleppey, and Quilon ([www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kudumbi](http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kudumbi)).

The two prominent reasons that could have led to the presence of this community in these regions could be; first, historically, before the Portuguese set the physical or geographical boundaries of Goa, Goa was a part of larger Konkan region, with Gujarat, Maharashtra and Kerala being part of it and secondly, the religious persecution that the Goans experienced under the Portuguese regime, which was further worsened by the installation of inquisition that forbade any open practice of the Hindu faith on pain of death, which led the many *Kudumbis*, along with Gouda Saraswat Brahmins, who wanted to preserve their identity, migrate from Goa along the west coast of

India, primarily through sea voyages in search of a safer regions ([www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kudumbi](http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kudumbi)).

While the *Kunbi's* of Goa are included in the Scheduled Tribes list, since 2003, the *Kudumbis* of Kerala are still fighting for their inclusion. Despite all their efforts, since 1967, the inclusion of *Kudumbi* community in the SC/ST still remains unfulfilled. Unfortunately, the same attends with the *Kudubis* of Karnataka and Maharashtra who still continue to be non-scheduled tribes ([www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kudumbi](http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kudumbi)).

Amidst the above stated multiple divergent views expressed over the issue of the etymology and ethnology of the *Gawda/ Kunbi*, one thing that seems to be generally accepted by the historians or a majority of scholars is the fact that, even though there is no definite record of where, when, how or from which direction these people may have migrated to Goa, the fact that they indeed are the earliest settlers or inhabitants or the aborigines of Goa seems most agreeable.

## Chapter III

### ETHNOGRAPHICAL PORTRAIT

Culture, which forms the core of any community's heritage or identity, in a simple language, refers to a life expressions or the distinctive way of life of a particular set of people. In this chapter, I will particularly deal with the cultural heritage of the *Gawda/Kunbi* community in a form of a descriptive ethnographical sketch or portrait of this community, its characteristic features, typical way of life or cultural ethos that gives it a distinct identity.

#### 3. 1. Demographical Profile

One of India's prominent anthropologists, B.S.Guha classifies the entire Indian Population (which is widely accepted by scholars) into six racial types, namely (a) Negrito; (b) Proto-Australoid; (c) Mongoloid; (d) Mediterranean; (e) Western Brachycephals and (f) Nordic. Out of the six types, he says that the first three races are the oldest inhabitants of India. The scheduled tribes of Goa belong to the Proto-Australoid race. This makes them the second oldest inhabitants of the Indian peninsula (Government of Goa 2004:15).

The Survey Report on the ST's conducted by the Directorate of Social Welfare, Government of Goa has declared the population of the Scheduled Tribes in Goa to be approximately 1, 62,056. They are spread out in 35,798 Scheduled Tribe households scattered in and around 256 settlements or zones. This amounts to 12.06% of the total population of the State (as per the 2001 census, i.e. 13, 43,998). The male ST population comprises of 80,333 (49.57%) and the female comprises of 81,723 (50.43 %). The taluka of Salcete has the highest Tribal population comprising of 37,453 and Pernem taluka has the least, 36. The Hindu population of the ST's is 63.42% and the Christian

population of the ST's is 36.58%. The sex ratio of the male and female among this community is pretty balanced. The female infanticides are unheard of. The women take part in the social, political, religious and economic activities equally with men. A female member from the community also represents at the Village Panchayat elections (a local form of governance). The women go to work to augment the family income. (Government of Goa 2004:2).

### **3. 2. Their Features**

"Stephen Fuchs has described the Proto-Australoids as having medium built, scanty body and facial hair, dark skin, and pronounced cheekbones. They are most widely distributed in Central India. They have also absorbed some elements from the Negritos. This can be seen in the extreme curly hair and Negroid appearance among some of the tribal people of Goa (Government of Goa 2004:16).

Dr. C. Mascarenhas in his booklet titled, "*Os Curumbins de Goa—Estudo Antropo—Social*," presents some of the anthropometric characteristics of the *Gawda/ Kunbis* of Goa, namely that they are "Mesocephalic (round-headed), Leptoprosopic (thin-faced) and Platyrrhine (flat—nosed), shorter than both the Saraswat Brahmins and the Marathas" (Marco 1969: 14).

The *Gawda/Kunbis* are a very hardworking community of people, who toil in the fields round the year. In their features, they are short of stature; but strong of build. They have a very sturdy looks, dark complexion and chiseled body. They are "robust and jovial people in spite of the depressed condition they find themselves in" (Gomes 2004: 334).

One very important characteristic feature of this community that defines their identity is the aspect of their community spirit. In other words, the community

spirit forms the essence of their very existence. They have a strong sense of community, equally strong ties of blood relationships expressed in their unity and solidarity. All their decisions pertaining to the tribal identity and their wellbeing are made and executed in the communitarian spirit. They are a close-knit, ritualistic and attached to the land community. They have a deep sense of belonging to their tribe, clan and village. Their society is a very egalitarian society. You would not find a rich *Kunbi* and a poor *Kunbi* in a typical *Kunbi* village. This of course applies to those villages that have not yet come under the grips of the mainstream culture.

### **3. 3. Their Dressing Patterns**

The *Gawda/Kunbi* men traditionally wore a red checked *cashti (langoti)* - “a square piece of cloth first passed at the front by its corner from the waist-cord or girdle and its corner then drawn tightly between the divide of the buttocks and tucked behind. The surplus front portion may be allowed to dangle loose or is passed behind the legs and secured cleverly so as to cover the buttocks” (Gune 1979:234). “On the shoulder they put a *kambol* or a coarse country woolen blanket, and carry in their hands a *koyto* or sickle and a *chenchi* or tiny cotton bag containing betel nuts, leaves, lime and tobacco. Only when they move outside the village they wear a half-shirt or a banyan” (Phal 1982:38).

“The *Kunbi* women traditionally wore a red checked eight yard sari (*Kapod*) and decorated their hair with flowers.” (Sakhardande 2000:4) “The mode of wearing the *lugade (Kapod)* favoured by them is with the hind pleats tucked into the waist at the back centre and the ornamental end (*padar*) of the sari passed from the back of the waist under the right arm drawing it across the chest and over the left shoulder” (Gune 1979:234). “One corner of the upper end of the sari is tied in a knot (*dentli*) tightly below their left shoulder” (Phal 1982:38). They would not wear any other cloth or a blouse to cover their

chest, in other words, "these were not accustomed to using a *choli* (bodice). However, in 1940, the Portuguese Government, under a decree, prohibited these ladies to attend the bazaar or to move in public places without wearing a *choli* (bodice) or blouse" (Gune 1979: 234). The women "comb their hair neatly using coconut oil and tie them behind in a bulky knot. Except widows, all women, young and old, deck their head with plenty of flowers preferably of red colour. They also use several items for decoration and ornamentation. They pierce their ears and nose and decorate them with gold ornaments" (Phal 1982:38).

### **3. 4. Their Food Habits**

Like the rest of the Goans, the staple food of the *Gawda/Kunbi* community is '*xit-codi*' (rice-curry). They are non-vegetarian and eat pork and beef. Fish is eaten regularly. Coconut consumption is very high and it is used in almost all food preparations. (Singh 1993:23). "Rice prepared out of parboiled rice (*Ukdo*) and fish curry (*codi*) constitutes their main food. They also eat *ambil* or ragi gruel prepared by mixing *ragi* flour and jaggery" (Phal 1982:40). While their morning meal consists of *ambil*, "they have *pez* (Canjee) at 11 a.m. along with dried fish like *suko bangdo* (dried mackerel) with a *tor* (raw mango slice)" (Sakhardande 2000:4) and the mid-day and night meals include rice and fish curry" (Phal 1982:40). Besides, "smoking homemade *beedies* (cigarettes) of banana or jackfruit leaf and tobacco among the men, both sexes eat the betel leaves and nuts" (Ibid.).

### **3. 5. Modes of Livelihood.**

The *Gawda/Kunbi*'s are the hard-working sons and daughters of the soil. "It is traditionally believed that this community brought along with it crops such as rice, coconuts, areca nut, plantains, black pepper, *nachni*, etc., into Goa"



(Sakhardande 2000:4). With farming as their traditional occupation and the main source of livelihood, the *Gawda/Kunbi* engage themselves in "tilling, manuring, sowing, weeding, threshing and harvesting work" (Xavier 1993: 44).

Being cultivators or agriculturists by origin, the *Gawda/Kunbi* had a unique style of cultivation, especially before they moved down from the hilly regions and settled on the plains. This form of cultivation was called the shifting cultivation, locally called as *kumeri* or *koliyo* cultivation. "A piece of land on a sloppy mountainside is cleared of its vegetative cover. Thereafter, the slash (of firewood) is allowed to dry at the spot and subsequently set on fire. The ash thus collected is spread on the entire patch before the onset of rains and it acts as manure in the *kumeri* field. When the soil becomes soft, the seeds are dibbled or planted in the soil with the help of an age-old implement, called *guduli*, an iron stick, which is pointed at one end and rounded at the other. However, the small seed-grains like *ragi* (*coix barbata*) are scattered in the field. Raised crops are protected against the ravages of wild birds and animals. Thus the crop is cultivated. The cultivation is shifted to another plot after every two or three years and the *kumeri* or *koliyo* returns to the original plot after the completion of a cycle. Thus the *kumeri* cultivation is used to move in a rotational circle around the settlement, which forms the permanent nucleus." (Phaldesai 2011:150-1)

The chief economic activity of the *Gawda/Kunbi* is horticulture called *Kulagar*, meaning farm of the indigenous communities. As farm cultivators, they undertake cultivation on plain lands known as *xett* or *bhatt* and also on mountains called *Kumeri* cultivation. "Traditionally, they were farm labourers and would live as *mundkars* (tenants) of the *Bhatkars* (big land-holders)" (Singh 1993:26). They would cultivate paddy in the owners land as share-croppers giving the owner a one-sixth of the crop. On account of rainwater

being the main source of water, the *Gawda/Kunbis* normally have one crop (paddy crop) in a year. They also look after the owner's coconut, mango and cashew plantations and receive a share of crop (Ibid.).

They adopt simple means of cultivating their fields by employing the biochemical way of farming in which cattle dung was used as a main fertilizer; ash was used as anti-bacterial and salt was sprinkled to keep the bugs away. The ploughing is usually done with locally fashioned ploughs drawn by bullocks. If they are very poor and cannot afford to buy bullocks then they dig the land with a 'pickaxe.'

Unfortunately, addicted to the local drinks, cashew or coconut *feni*, the *Kunbi* men folk after their strenuous labour spend most of their meager earnings on liquor.

### **3. 6. Their Settlements<sup>1</sup>**

The *Gawda/Kunbis* live in small huts built with mud walls, a cow dung floor and thatched roofs made of coconut palm leaves or straw and bamboos (today they use small clay tiles known as *sulche nodde*). Their houses were often a one room apartment where food is cooked in one corner and the family members eat and sleep in the other corner. Inside the room, on the clothesline, one would find a *cashti* (traditional loin cloth) for man and a *kapod* (a red checked sari) for women. Their houses often have a small courtyard in which one finds a mud bench and a small pit in the floor where rice was pounded with a *kandon* (pounding bar). Some also have an open forecourt neatly plastered with mud and cow dung. This is used for drying paddy and sleeping during the warmer nights. The *Kunbis* are very fond of music and dance often

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<sup>1</sup> The ideas are borrowed from the guide brochure for the tourist-sight, 'Ancestral Goa,' which has life-size statues depicting how life used to be in the Goan villages 100-years ago.

performed at their weddings and festivals. Hence, one also finds in their houses a *gummot* (country drum) and the *cansalo* (A musical instrument) which are often hanged from the roof to protect them from rats.

Many of their houses also have a cattle shed built outside their house about 500 yards away where one often found a haystack in a fenced area besides the traditional plough, the muzzles and other farming tools or equipment. Hanging from the roof of the cattle shed is a special mud pot which is used to carry *canji* (rice boiled with water) and a raincoat made of coconut leaves. Normally, their huts are clustered together into several *wados* or hamlets in a village. Their household utensils are made of mud. Other articles of daily use include the winnowing fans and baskets. A *mudi* is used for storing paddy, which is kept inside the dwelling. The *Koito* or the sickle is an extremely useful tool, used for diverse purposes—both in the field and at home. It is used for cutting, scraping or prying, opening something. Most of the men carry it with them at work, hung from a sling made of wood which is tied to the waist by means of a rope or a waistband. The sling is held on the waist at the back and is easily reached whenever required.

### **3. 7. Their System of Medical Care**

The *Gawda/Kunbis* on account of their direct interaction with nature have a rich repository of the knowledge of medicines from plants and animals--Ethno-medicine. This purely includes herbs, plants, shrubs and trees, their fruits, barks, flowers, etc., which are found on the hills and extensively used by them to cure many illnesses such as cold, fever, stomachache, headache, etc. In the local language, Konkani, this practice of traditional medication is called as *gauti vokodd* (local medicine).

The *Gawda/Kunbi* doctor, who acts as both, a physician and a chemist in the local language, is called as the '*gauti dotor*' (local doctor). He or she identifies variety of medicinal plants for each sickness and diseases and prescribes definite dose of either roots or powder of roots or leaves after diagnosing the symptoms of diseases. Some of these herbal medicines and traditional methods of curing and healing prescribed by these *Gawda/Kunbi* doctors are so powerful and effective that no allopathic medicines can cure these diseases, such as diabetes, skin diseases or the hepatitis/Jaundice, *Kamin* in local language. The *Kunbis* still practice the traditional method of curing the jaundice, *Kamin lasop*, which is done by burning the hand with a hot spoon.

### **3. 8. The Folklore**

The term 'folk' connotes the people, bearer of a particular culture and 'folklore' refers to the wisdom of these folks. The origins of any folklore are rooted in the *Sitz im Leben*, the daily life settings. Hence, many of the sung expressions (folk songs) of the *Gawda/Kunbis* depict their hardships and the simple and innocent life that they lead (Phal 1982:41) and all this is done through the medium of their native language, Konkani in the *Gawdi* dialect.

The *Gawda/Kunbis* have a rich colourful folklore in the form of **folk-music, folk-songs, folk-dances, and folk-theatre**. They have a variety of beautiful songs and dances, ritual, seasonal or functional in character. Whether it is at the marriage celebrations, or a moonlight night when the paddy has been harvested, either on the open space or on the threshing grounds, one often finds the *Gawda/Kunbis* engaged in song and dance. Their dance forms present a meaningful expression of their community spirit—holding one another's hands or waists or shoulders and dancing with simple and repetitive steps to the tune of the *Gumat* and *Manddlem*.

### **3.8.1 Folk Music**

The *Gawda/Kunbi* is known for their love for music, song and dance. In fact, they have their own indigenous creation of a musical instrument called *Gumat* that provides melody to their song and dance. In addition to this, they use two other percussion accompaniments, namely *Mhadalem* and *Kansalem*.

#### **i. *Ghumat***

"*Ghumat* can be called the 'gift of the *Gawda/Kunbis* to Goa" (Kedekar 1983:139). "*Ghumat* is one of the most ancient percussion instruments in existence. It is an earthen pot having two mouths out of which one is big and the other one is narrow. The bigger mouth is covered with monitor lizard-skin (*Varanus Spp*) and fixed with tree-gum and cotton string. The *Ghumat* is suspended from the neck or tied to the waist of the player and played with the right hand controlling the air-pressure within the pot when the right-hand fingers strike on the membrane." (Phaldesai 2004:59-60).

#### **ii. *Mhadalem***

"*Mhadalem* is perhaps the most ancient of all the percussion instruments. It is commonly used by the *Gawdas/Kunbis* as an accompaniment to the *Ghumat* during *Zagor* performance as well as other songs (*cantaram*) presented at their wedding time. It is an earthen baked cylinder of 50-70 cms in length and diameter of each opening is 25-30 cms. Monitor lizard skin (*Varanus Spp*) is stretched tight over both the openings with the help of cotton strings which passes along the length of the cylinder interlacing the leather braces. The player applies a thick paste made of boiled and baked rice at the middle of the left side which thereby lowers the tone to the expected pitch. While playing the player strikes with full hand or with fingers which is either clamped or

released. The alteration of sound between the two openings of the *Mhadalem* further enriches the tone" (Phaldesai 2004:60).

### iii. *Kansalem*

"*Kansalem* are big gongs made of *kashem* (bronze). These big gongs are used for rhythmic purpose especially while performing the traditional Goan folk orchestra called *sunvari*. The gongs are thick and flat usually attached with a block of coir or cloth passed through the hole at the centre. This helps the player to hold the heavy gong. The *Kansalem* produces flat sound to match the pitch of the percussion instruments like *Ghumat* and *Shamel*. Some expert *Kansalem* players produce amazing rhythmic variations. The ancient stone sculptures at Konark shows figure of women playing the cymbals called *Kansya-tala*, which is similar to *Kansalem*." (Phaldesai 2004:66).

### 3.8.2 Folk Songs

The *Gawda/Kunbi* songs are full of vitality and sing of life outdoors and the hard work that they are accustomed to. They also have a fling at the *bhatkar* (landlord) who has exploited them through the centuries (Menezes 2000:15).

These are the vigorous songs of the *Gawda/Kunbi* community engaged in hard works like mines, field cultivation, roads and building constructions. With the syncopated rhythm of the *Ghumot* and the clang of the cymbal, these hardy labourers burst into a song of joy. "Their songs, though full of joy of living, bristle not infrequently with social injustice, irony and satire" (Rodrigues 1982:87). They sing songs or brief "musical stories" while they labour in the paddy fields during the sowing, weeding, transplantation and harvesting seasons which keep them cheerful and alive cutting down the boredom and their tedious and repetitive hard work (Sequeira 1996:138). They sing songs at

different times, for example at different stages of cultivation of rice, such as *Nondnni* (weeding), *Mollnni* (threshing), *Luvnni* (harvesting); they also sing songs with reference to the rain and its bounty (Braganza 1964:48).

The recurrent "theme of their songs varies from romantic love to bitter resentment and satire couched in suggestive language against their landlords, *bhatkars* who, they have a gnawing feeling, have usurped their lands and are exploiting them" (Gomes 2004:335). "The melody of the *Kunbi* songs is lively, exciting and piquant" (Barreto 1995:79). "These are songs truly born from our own soil, marked with vigorous rhythm and heavy percussion, quite graphical and pregnant with realism." (Sequeira 1996:138).

### 3.8.3 Folk Dances

This is one of the popular dances belonging to the cultural heritage of the *Gawda/Kunbi* community of Goa. It occupies a prime place in the Goan traditional folk dances. "The *Kunbi* dance is danced only by the women folk while the men folk assist them with the beats of their *Gumott* and *Maddlem* (barrel-shaped clay instrument). Before the men folk begin the *Kunbi Geet*, their indigenous musical instrument, namely *Gumott* and *Maddlem* are tuned with the heat of the low, cow dung fire burning in the centre of the ground where they squat in a semicircle, while the female prepare themselves for the dance." (Rodrigues 1977:36).

"As the air pierces with the melody of the favourite song beat on the *Ghumot*, under the intoxicating influence of the music, the women folk begin to dance with a slight shrug of the shoulders, they hop on each foot alternatively, half-twisting their bodies, now to the right, now to the left. Unlike the *Deknni*<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The *Deknni* dancers dance with their arms rise in a serpentine movement overhead, sometimes one hand rests on the hip while the other moves round like the hood of a cobra.

dancers, their arms always point downwards in the direction opposite to the movement of the feet. These contrary motions of hands and feet, alternating in quick succession leave an impression of criss-cross weaving in a pattern. There are no histrionics, only a full-throated *Hoi—Hoi* the finish of a phrase is marked by a catch of the breath and a lift of the shoulders, giving for the movement an impression of a sculptural panel" (Rodrigues 1977:37).

"For the *Kunbi* dance, the men folk are found with the waists wrapped in long red *cashttis* (loin-cloth) and the forehead tied with a bright-coloured kerchiefs, squatting in a semicircle position under the shade of a coconut tree, outside the brown mud-houses. While the women folk wear a white folded *palou* lying across their shoulders. Their bodies are covered with short-sleeved *cholis* and bright, checked *capodds* leaving bare their dark-brown hands and feet and falling a little below the knees" (Rodrigues 1977:37).

One of the important dimensions of the *Gawda/Kunbi* community folkdances is the communitarian spirit. It presents a meaningful expression of their community living - holding one another's hands or waists or shoulders and dancing with simple and repetitive steps to the tune of the *Gumat* and *Manddlem*.

#### **3.8.4 Folk Theatre**

*Zagor* and *Khell* are two most popular folk-theatres among the *Gawda/Kunbi* community of Goa. Carnival, Easter and Christmas are traditional occasions during which these folk plays are performed.



### **i. Zagor**

Zagor traces its name to the Sanskrit root, *jagr*, which means 'to be awake.' This dance-cum-drama has a distinct character. The *Zagor*, i.e the *Jagran* or wakeful nights of the *Gawda/Kunbis* is a socio-religious festival. During this festival, the devotees' stay awake, and invokes their sacred beings that in turn protect the village from all sorts of calamities, social conflict and health problems (Noronha 1999:1). This exercise could well be rooted in the ancestral belief that the *Gawda/Kunbi* had, namely "that the caretaker, called *devchar*, moves around at nights with a light to keep an eye on the village and protects them from evil." (Haladi 1999:175-6).

"The *Zagor* does not have a hard and fast story line or theme. It is made of many brief skits presented together, performed by two to four people at a time. Women are not allowed on stage. Men themselves perform even the part of a girl or a woman." (Ibid.)

This religious ceremony is then followed by a social celebration, a moment of "an open-air, lewd form of amusement where music, singing and revelry would go on unchecked, without any respect for private feelings." (Rodrigues 1982:82). It had the contemporary village life as its theme and so "nothing was held sacred in private life. Every scandal was made public and individuals put up, as it were vivisection before large audience" (Ibid.) Hence, "social changes and major events that affect the people find room in this dance-cum-drama" (D'Souza 1987:36). "All the *Gawda wados* (hamlets) had the conventional *Zagor* without fail but the women did not participate in it. It was more a musical skit, a play of fantasy" (Khedekar 1999:10) "devoid of a consistent text or storyline, but consists of series of unconnected small skits, enacted by the same characters" (D'Souza 1987:36).

## ii. *Fell* or *Khell*

*Khell* or *Fell* as they are known in the whole of Salcete taluka, are a special feature of the Christian Carnival celebration. *Khells* are like an improvised operetta, with distinctive songs known as *Intruzachim gitam* or simply *Fellam gitam*.

A group of villagers, particularly belonging to the *Gawda/Kunbi* tribe or other *Mundkars* (peasants) would invent or improvise an original story based on some aspect of social life which would be acted out using dialogues, folksongs and dance. The accompanied instruments were the trumpets and drums. “The subject-matter of these *khels* was the exposure of landlords in their abuses of *mundkars*, paradoxically these *khels* would be performed in the courtyard of the landlord, and even though they were highly critical or even abusive, the landlords not only overlooked on with tolerance, but would favour them with presents of cash, coconut and *feni* (Barreto 1995:82). It is normally satirical in style and one that presents or throws light on the social and contemporary problems and issues that affects their lives.

*Khell* or *Fell* was much more improved, more systematic and more organized compared to *Zagor*. *Khell* was staged on the ground itself. There was no stage, no settings, and no curtains. It was performed either in front of the *balcao* or under the shade of the tree of those who could pay the piper and call the tune. They were often played at Carnival, Easter and Christmas. The *mestri* (producer) had 4 to 6 plays on his card, which like a menu he would show to the customer. The whistle of the *mestri* served as the curtain-puller to the play. While the clarinet and the trumpet provided the melody and helped in enlivening the dialogue” (Ibid. 82-3)

### **3.8.5 Folk Festivals**

The *Gawda/Kunbis* like any other tribal's are a celebrating community of people. One finds the *Gawda/Kunbi* community spirit at its best during the time of festivities. Whether it is harvest festival or the religious feasts, either of the parish church or their traditional *Zatras* in honour of their pre-Christian deities, occasions such as these calls for a community gathering in an open space, once called the *Mand* where one finds this community bond being given an expression to in and through the sharing of the meal, music, songs and dances. With everybody involved in active participation, there are no spectators to these occasions.

#### **i. Dhalo**

*Dhalo*, a night long song-cum-dance performed only by women is an important annual festival of *Gawda/Kunbi* women, which is celebrated on moonlight winter night in the courtyard of the house. It signifies the flowering season. As many as 24 take part in this dance-cum-song form, where the women split up into two parallel rows of 12 each, facing each other and forming a closely knit unit by linking themselves with arms around the waist, swaying, bending, moving forward and backward and singing in unison songs which are locally composed from memory and revised extempore with addition or change of words and lines here and there to suit the occasion (Gomes 2004:345). "The dance steps are very simple, they move five steps forward, go back and moves back (5 steps forward) in a wave like swaying pattern. The movements are accompanied by singing a line of a song. The other group picks up the second line and moves forward in the same manner. Performances culminate in a circular movement without disturbing the original formation of rows of arms linked women dancers. (Phaldesai 2011:15).

“Though the *Dhalo* and *Fugddi*<sup>3</sup> are similar in character, yet the Konkani expressions used for both are different. Goans will say *Dhalo Khellunk* (as in to play), while they will say *Fugddi Ghalunk* (as in to put)

## ii. Shigmo

"*Shigmo* is an important celebration for the men folk. It signifies the arrival of the new seed of paddy. It's a spring festival, beautifully coincides with the Holi festival in the rest of the country. It is a tribute to nature. It is normally celebrated for a minimum of five days with presentations of various folk art forms. Varied cultural expressions of an indigenous nature are depicted through folk music, dance and drama during these celebrations all over Goa." (Phaldesai 2011: 25).

Interestingly, the *Shigmo* festival follows immediately after the all-female *Dhalo* festival in Goa. *Shigmo* is the only occasion for the men of all ages to show their talent and creativity in the form of music, drama and crafts. It is a common platform for village elders and newcomers to share knowledge of traditional rituals, folk songs and dancing styles. *Shigmo* is a dynamic festival which blends heroic and comic elements in almost equal balance. (Phaldesai 2011:27).

The dancers wear a colourful dress and local flowers around their neck, hands and on their turban. They wear the traditional men's garment of the *dhoti* and *pairan* (shirt) and vermilion on their foreheads. (Phaldesai 2011:29).

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<sup>3</sup> *Fugddi* is a popular song-cum-dance, often danced by the women folk in circle formation. A few fixed steps and handclaps are the element. No instrument for musical accompaniment is found with the dance.

## Chapter IV

### THE FRAMEWORK

As the title suggests, this chapter comprises of the framework, the context and the theory within which I wish to study the statement of research problem or the hypothesis of my present paper that deals with the social status of the *Gawda/Kunbi* community.

The context or the reason that prompted me to take up this issue or theme for my paper was the huge controversial write up that appeared on the front page of the Times of India, and almost every other national news papers as an aftermath of a massive violent rally that was held in Gujarat. I was shocked to read its content, namely that the Patel's of Gujarat, who are believed to be high, mighty and well-to-do community of people, which even had four former Chief Ministers of Gujarat, including the present one, were actually demanding to be included or to be notified as an SCs. In other words, they wanted to be placed into the category of or be provided with the benefits of 'protective discrimination.' This is not an isolated case, as earlier the *Gujjars* of Rajasthan held violent protests demanding for the STs Category. No one can rule out such contexts in the near future too.

In such a context or scenario, a question that disturbed me quite a lot was if any and everybody would demand for such rights of 'protective discrimination,' which can very easily be granted if one has power and political clout on their side, would the rightfully and justly deserved ever get their share of these benefits?

Coming from Goa, which has only one community (with two nomenclatures), namely the *Gawda/Kunbi/Velip* (belonging to one racial stock, *Munda* section

of Proto-Australoids) categorized under the list of the Scheduled Tribes, I thought, why not put this community to test against my above made statement, namely is *Gawda/Kunbi* a rightfully and justly deserved community to be categorized as ST?

My approach in handling this question would be quite simple. At first, I will dwell upon certain theoretical stands on 'caste,' 'class' and 'tribe,' in which I will attempt to highlight a few criteria's which perform the task of identifying these strata's of society, to which I will then compare and contrast or put to test the living condition of the present day *Gawda/Kunbi*, which ultimately will either affirm or disprove the hypothesis of my present study.

#### **4. 1. A Theoretical Stand on 'Caste.'**

When we talk of caste, the first thing that comes to our mind is the "*Purushasukta*," a 'sacrificial' hymn found in the book of *rigveda*, that ascribes castes or *varna* system as having a divine origin. It not only states that each *varna* originated from a particular body part of the creator god, '*Purusha*,' but also ascribes each *varna* a particular social position or rank, which again depends upon which part of the body it came from. Besides, prescribing a particular rung or a place on the social ladder, it also identifies or gives each *varna* a particular duty. The duties gradually developed into the professions or the occupations of each of these orders over which they had a monopoly or sole right. (Gaude 2009:72-3).

The multi-dimensionality and complexity of the caste system, makes it extremely difficult to give a precise definition of caste. Caste as a cultural system is viewed differently by different scholars. L. Dumont understood it in terms of prominence of the ideas of pollution - purity and notions of hierarchy, segregation and corporateness. Bailey viewed caste as a "classed system" of

stratification, while Beteille considered caste system as both 'closed' and 'open.' These analytic variations hinder a common definition of caste. However, these variations also explain the fact that caste is like all other systems of stratification in some ways, while it is quite unique in some other respects (Sharma 2001:22).

Dr. G.S. Ghurye has given six outstanding features of Hindu society that was ruled by the social philosophy of caste. There are: (a) segmental division of the society; (b) hierarchical order of society; (c) restrictions on feeding and social intercourse; (d) civil and religious disabilities and privileges of the different sub-castes in society; (e) lack of unrestricted choice of occupation; and (f) restrictions on marriage. (D'Souza 1975:63).

Caste refers to inequality, difference, discrimination in both theory and practice. Theoretically, caste is more than a state of mind of an individual rather than an ideology dictating collective action. However, in practice, individual members of a caste may appropriate their caste identities in their own favour or against the interest of others. (Sharma 2001:11).

The caste system is governed by the twin principles of division and hierarchy. The former refers to the divisiveness of Hindu Society into a number of groups and subgroups with certain characteristics, while the latter refers to the arrangement of these groups or divisions into a graded order of high and low. (Shah 1996:178). This hierarchical order had the Brahmin at the top of the social pyramid, and all other castes and sub-castes falling in a definite scheme of social precedence until it reached the lowest *Mahar* or untouchable. (D'Souza 1975:64). Such a social stratification of the society based on the Hindu caste hierarchical structure which was determined by birth into a particular caste led to a practice of social discrimination. It also consequently led to a lot of other disabilities, such as the practice of untouchability that led

to inhuman treatment meted to these downtrodden and marginalized communities of people (Parvathamma 1984:2). According to Irfan Habib, caste system remained an important pillar of the system of class exploitation in the medieval India. The British colonized the caste system along with the entire country by putting one against other, by issuing norms of social distance. (Sharma 2001:8).

Contextualizing the Hindu Caste system to the local Goan Catholic caste scenario would present a pretty interesting portrait. Those who were converted to Christianity were already members of various caste groups as the Hindu social structure demanded it, hence after their conversion, they continued to observe the caste system that was prevalent among them, although Christianity did not believe in it or theologically had no ideas linked to it. The Portuguese clergy too did not discourage the caste distinction as they thought that the caste distinction corresponded to their class system of nobility, clergy, partisans, plebian or common folks, etc. (Gune 1979: 238). "Intermarriages between various (Catholic) castes are not forbidden but they rarely take place. No Catholic would consider himself polluted by dinning with a member of a lower caste; but members of different castes do not habitually meet for dining. These bear names of Christian saints, like Peter, Paul, etc., and Portuguese surnames, like Saldanha, Coelho, Monteiro, etc." (Saldanha 1904:81)

Unlike the multiple sub-castes of the Hindu Brahmins, among the Goan Catholics they are all fused into one single caste called *Bamonn* (Brahmin) in local language, Konkani. The other two main castes are *Chardos/Chardi* and *Sudirs (shudra)*. Besides these three main categories of castes, there are a host of other castes "that are linked to their original occupation and were considered as sub-castes among the *Sudras*," (D'Souza 1975:243), namely the *Madvals* (washer men); *Gawda/Kunbis* (cultivators); *Sutar* (carpenter); *Render* (toddy tappers), *Kumbars* (potters), *Kharvi* (Fisherfolks), etc." (Ibid: 61).



"The leading castes among the Goan Catholics are the *Bamonns* and *Chardos*. The latter do not correspond exactly to any Hindu caste known by the name *Chardos*." (Saldanna 1904:91) Neither "there is any trace of the *Kshatriya* caste among the Hindus in Goa, nor did the caste of *Chardo* exist among them. Prof. Moraes accepts the view propounded by Shri Varde Valaulekar that the Rashtrakutas, the overlords of the Shilaharas were *Chaddos* from Lottli in Salcete for the reason that they styled themselves Sattalapura-Varadhisghvarnam or boon lords of Lottli." (D'Souza 1975:243).

Considering the reality that "the castes of the pre-Portuguese Goan society got transferred to the Christian converts," (D'Souza 1975:242), without a doubt, the *Gawda/Kunbi*, who belonged to the *Shudras* on the Hindu caste hierarchy would have inherited the same position after their conversion, a fact well proven by the above mentioned list of the castes, together with what Mgrs. Sebastiao Dalgado, a Goan scholar had to say, "the appropriate translation of the word '*Kunbi*' in Portuguese is *Curumbim*: a member of the agricultural *Sudra* caste in Western Indian caste." (Pereira 2003:79). However, even though the written literature ascribes *Gawda/Kunbi* as belonging to the sub-caste of *Sudras*, yet this doesn't seem to resolve the shroudedness over the exactness of their social status. For example, some hold a view that the *Gawda/Kunbi* in itself is a separate caste group. Pereira, for example firmly asserts, "The *Gawda/Kunbi* are the same caste and are erroneously classified as *sudras*, despite being a separate category" (2003: 77).

It is interesting to note that there is a special category of caste in Goa, which is often confused with the *Gawda* of our present study. It is spelt as *Gaudde* and well-known as *Mith-Agri* or *Mitt-Gaudde* called so because of their ancestor's involvement in the industry of extraction of salt from salt pans (*mitt-salt*) by way of evaporation. They were also cultivators, who brought the land under cultivation by building bunds for irrigation. The difference between this *Mitt-*

*Gaudde*, who does not belong to the *Gawda* of the aboriginal stock, is that, while the former, essentially found in Bardez taluka is treated as one of the higher castes, in the full gamut of the caste hierarchy prevalent in Goa, latter belongs to a lower status. (Pereira 2003:76).

#### **4. 2. A Theoretical Stand on 'Class'**

The majority of the people believe that the word, "class" in Article 16(4) is used in reference to or to mean a 'social class' and that it has nothing to do with the Marxist jargon. Class society is believed to be characterized by personal and familial mobility, where birth does not have the same lethal effects on the life chances of an individual as caste. Caste is believed to be extremely rigid, birth determining everything, and characterized by 'untouchability.' Religious ideas such as purity and pollution play a crucial role in caste (Srinivas 1996: xxxiv). In other words, 'class' is an open category while 'caste' is a closed category, that is to say which while the class status of an individual may vary during his lifetime, caste status, an attribute of birth, will not change (Sivaramayya 1996:227).

In view of the above understanding of the word, 'class,' the Central Government has specified a certain groups of people as belonging to the 'Other Backward Classes.' Article 15 (4) refers to them as 'socially and educationally backward classes of citizen' and Article 340 as 'socially and educationally backward classes.' Article 16 (4) mentions 'backward class of citizens,' while Article 46 refers to the 'educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people' (A.M.Shah 1996:175).

It is interesting to note that the British administration or the British officials from the very beginning of the 20th century, widely used the term OBC to indicate low-status backward castes, 'Other Backward *Castes*.' While they

used the term 'depressed classes' to mean the former 'untouchables' or Scheduled Castes (now Dalits)" (Srinivas 1996: xxxiii). However, as mentioned above, the Constitution of India uses the term OBC to designate all backward classes other than the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (A.M.Shah 1996:175).

While the Government of India Act, 1935 has made the identification of the SCs and STs relatively easy, the identification of the OBCs has always been faced with problems and difficulties, although the Article 346 of the Indian Constitution allows the Government, with Presidents consent, to appoint a commission to identify the OBCs at an all-India level. In keeping with the Article 346, a first ever Commission was appointed in 1953 with a respected Gandhian, Kaka Kalelkar, as its Chairman and ten other members. The commission submitted its report in March 1955. It listed 2,399 communities as 'backward,' with 837 of them being classified as 'most backward' (Srinivas 1996: xxvi).

The Kalelkar's commission set the following criteria's for determining the OBCs (a) occupying a low position in the Hindu social structure and caste hierarchy of Hindu social organization; (b) lack of general educational development amongst the major section of this community; (c) inadequate representation in Government service (d) inadequately represented in the field of trade, commerce and industry; and (e) suffering from social and physical isolation from rest of the community. (Parvathamma 1984:7). The Government of India however was not satisfied with the reports of this commission, as more than half of its members submitted dissenting notes, including the chairman, who strongly expressed his dissent over caste being made the criterion for determining backwardness (Srinivas 1996: xxvi).

Although, the use of 'caste' in the classification of the 'class,' might sound ambiguous or even contradictory, yet, today more and more scholars think that it's a time for adopting "caste-class nexus approach as an alternative, rather than caste-class dichotomy." (Sharma 2001:11). Sharma further adds that "to consider 'caste' mainly as a rural phenomenon and 'class' as a reality of towns and cities is a myth." (ibid: 20) He held that the 'class' functions within the context of 'caste.' 'Caste conflicts' are also 'class conflicts' as the gap between the upper and the lower castes is the same as one finds between the upper and the lower class. (ibid.30). Therefore, "Both caste and class are a real dimension of Indian social formation, hence inseparable." (ibid:30)

The above reality is quite well affirmed by the Supreme Court through its many judgments for example in the Rajendran case (1968), it stated that "If the caste as a whole is socially and educationally backward, reservation can be made in favour of such a caste on the ground that it is a socially and educationally backward class of citizens.' In another judgment given in 1971 the Supreme Court went a step further when it stated that a caste may be a 'Backward Class' notwithstanding the presence in it of a 'few individuals (who are) both socially and educationally above the general average.' In other words, the homogeneity test need not be met to the fullest extent. Thus, the courts are unanimous in pronouncing that caste can be one of the relevant factors, though not the sole factor. In other words, according to the courts, a caste unit can be an OBC if it has certain backward features, including that of backward caste status. (Shah 1996:177).

On account of the dissatisfaction on the part of the government over the reports of the first commission, when the Janata Government came to power in Delhi, in 1977, Moraji Desai appointed a Bihar leader, the late B.P. Mandal, to head a second commission to identify backward classes and make recommendations for their advancement. Mandal submitted his report in 1980,

but by that time Indira Gandhi had returned to power and neither she nor her son, who succeeded her, Rajiv, thought of implementing the Report. However, in January 1990, when V.P. Singh was elected as the Prime Minister, on 7 August, 1990 he announced the implementation of the Mandal Commission's recommendation, reserving 27 per cent of jobs in the Central Government for the backward classes. This caused a big stir in the Hindi region with many young men from the upper castes committing suicide by setting themselves on fire. (Srinivas 1996: xvii).

J. Sawant, one of the members of the Mandal bench, strongly rejected the idea of poverty being a only test of backwardness, for he held that "if poverty alone is made the test then the socially and educationally advanced sections will "capture" all posts in the reserved quota, while the socially and educationally backward classes would be left high and dry." In other words, he held that the reservations should be allotted for 'socially and educationally backward classes and not for the poor from the 'advanced' classes. (Srinivas 1996: xxxi).

It is also interesting to note that the Mandal commission besides categorizing the 'backward classes' into 'backward' and 'more backward,' so as to protect the more weaker sections/groups; has also excluded those falling under the category of 'creamy layers,' from allotting the 'discriminatory protection' or the reservations, so that the denoting factor of OBC i.e., the 'social and educational' backwardness' would be maintained in all its fairness. The broad criteria's identifying the 'creamy layers' include the children, whose parents are holding constitutional positions, Class I and Class II officers, Colonel and above in the defense services, families owning irrigated land equal to or more than 85 per cent of the state land ceiling laws, and parents having a gross annual income of one lakh or more. (Srinivas 1996: xxxi-i).

### 4. 3. A Theoretical Stand on 'Tribe'

The tribal population in India, though a numerically small minority, represents an enormous diversity of groups. They vary among themselves in respect of language and linguistic traits, ecological settings in which they live, physical features, size of the population, the extent of acculturation, dominant modes of making a livelihood, level of development and social stratification. (Government of India 2014: 24)

Tribes are considerably distinct from the non-tribes. But then the question is: What is so distinctive about the 'tribe' that makes it distinct from other entities such as caste, class and race? Some Indian scholars felt that describing the tribe as '*jana*' or 'communities of people,' a term borrowed from the ancient Buddhist and Puranic texts, to indicate an opposition to the term *jati*, thus stating that the tribes were outside the *jati* or hierarchical caste system would differentiate tribe from 'caste.' This view, however, was not universally accepted, since other scholars point out that the categories of *jana* and *jati* do not neatly overlap with that of tribe and caste respectively. (Government of India 2014: 51) 'Tribe' may be distinguished from 'caste,' but it is not that the 'tribe' is a homogenous entity and 'caste' is characterized by complexity and heterogeneity. Although, tribes are not 'organically' related to each other as castes are under a common principle, yet they are also not exclusive systems as they are not small in size and bear a great deal of heterogeneity. (Sharma 2001: 169).

There are 427 tribes in India and they can be classified on the basis of language, religion, degree of their isolation, the pattern of livelihood. The tribals are hunters, fishers, shifting cultivators, settled agriculturists, plantation workers and industrial wage-earners, hence some of them may even resemble with the non-tribal people. The large tribes such as *Bhils*, *Gonds*, *Santhals*,

*Oraons* and *Mundas* are not only settled agriculturists, some of them are found in modern occupations which are carried out by the members belonging to the Hindu caste system. (Sharma 2001:169).

The tribes are also distinguished into five broad regional groupings based on ecological, social, economic, administrative, and ethnic factors (although many overlap): (a) Himalayan Region; (b) Middle Region; (c) Western Region; (d) Southern region; (e) Island Region. There are many differences between these regions as well as differences from tribe to tribe. For example, while the Northeast is often viewed as a singular and homogeneous entity, the region is highly diverse with over 200 tribes and sub-tribes, each of which have their own language, culture and political structures. The tribes can also be differentiated on the basis of population size since communities like *Gonds*, *Bhils*, *Santhals*, *Oraons*, *Munda*, etc., have a population that ranges from one million to a little over seven million people (Government of India 2014: 34-5)

In the more recent times, tribes were identified largely in terms of what they were not: they did not practice Vedic Hinduism, they were not Muslim, their societies were marked by the relative absence of economic and ritual stratification, and they were not integrated into the “modern” economy or civilization. (Government of India 2014:52). The Census of India has also played a critical role in shaping the modern understanding of tribe through its efforts at enumeration and classification. In the 1901 census, tribes were identified as those who ‘practiced animism’ thus placing religious practices at the centre. Therefore, while those practicing animism were labeled as tribes, those practicing Hinduism were viewed as castes. However, today this does not hold much weight as the Scheduled Tribes practice any religion, including Hinduism and Christianity (Ibid.).

One of the earliest attempts to create a list of tribes in the sub-continent was during the 1931 census which identified 'primitive tribes'. This was followed by a list of "backward tribes" for the provinces made under the Government of India Act, 1935. In the 1941 census, tribes were identified not in terms of their religion but according to their 'origin', that is, tribes were those who have a 'tribal origin.' The 1950 Constitutional Amendment order with the full list of Scheduled Tribes recognized at the time was largely based on the list of "backward tribes" prepared by the colonial administration in 1936. (Government of India 2014: 53)

Groups and communities identified and enumerated as tribes during British rule came to be re-classified as Scheduled Tribes after the Constitution was adopted in 1950. The Constitution, however, did not define the criteria for recognition of Scheduled Tribes, a vacuum that was filled by the Lokur Committee, set up in 1965, to look into the matters relating to the scheduling of groups as Scheduled Tribes. The criteria's it delineated for scheduling are still prevalent and operative to this day. It recommended the following five criteria for identification, namely, (1) primitive traits (2) distinct culture, (3) geographical isolation, (4) shyness of contact with the community at large and (5) backwardness (Government of India 2014: 25).



## Chapter V

### CONTINUITY-IN-DISCONTINUITY

Identity does not have a closed definition and is open to changes brought about by the ongoing historical processes. Across a period of time, Goa has witnessed a sea of changes in her very make up. Culture being dynamic, this reality is inevitable. From the records of pre-history and history, we also know that the patterns of culture of every human society are constantly changing. The rate and type of change may be slow and gradual, as it was during the Paleolithic period, or fast and drastic as it is in contemporary society. The *Gawda/Kunbi* of Goa, believed to be the aborigines seem to have pocketed much from these ‘sea of changes’ that Goa has witnessed, unlike the many other tribes of Northern India that have often been the victims of change.

One must not forget the reality that *within* every change, there is continuity; *within* every transformation, there is perseverance; *within* every problem, there is a solution; and *within* every chaos there is harmony. In fact, it is of paramount importance to understand that as in the case of the *Gawda/Kunbi* tribe of Goa, anywhere on this earth there is neither a ‘pure culture’ nor a ‘pure religion’. Every culture or religion is born out of an interaction with the other cultures or religions, respectively leaving behind some traits or facets of the original or native culture or religious identity. Though with the emergence of new generations and the changing socio-cultural circumstances, the understanding of these concepts might take a new form, but the core will always remain the same. Their new way of understanding these realities would never be a total and complete break-away from the past, but rather an inter-play or a dialectical play between the past and the present. This dialectical play between the past and present forms an important aspect or basis of

understanding the formation or the evolution of any socio-cultural identity, in our case that of the *Gawda/Kunbi*.

This process, which involves maintaining some aspect of the old or past intact and simultaneously in the midst of it, some changes or newness transpires within them, this is what I mean by continuity-in-discontinuity (i.e. change).

### **5. 1. Continuity-in-Discontinuity in Religion**

One of the most important aspects of the *Gawda/Kunbi* life that experiences this dialectical play between the past and the present, a little of the old and a little of the new--the continuity-in-discontinuity is their religious heritage.

Originally, the *Gawda/Kunbi* was an animist, a community that worshipped natural elements or nature. However, historically they became the targets of various crusaders aspiring for religious conversions. At various stages of history, Hindus and Christians tried to convert them. On the one hand, the arrival of the Aryans got them converted to Hindu religion, while on the other; the advent of the Portuguese got them converted to Christianity, while still others, the later Brahmanical forces tried to counter these conversion practices by initiating their own movement towards converting them into Hinduism.

On account of being simple, poor, backward and disparaged, these tribal, more often than not could not understand the subtle nuances of Catholicism. They also grew up in an atmosphere of many superstitious beliefs and practices that made them to believe that a particular problem would be solved if they offer sacrifices, may be a chicken to a particular deity which the Portuguese would consider paganism. They could neither free themselves fully from their traditional way of life to which they were accustomed nor did they find it easy to assimilate the Portuguese ways of worship, prayer and living. (Xavier

1993:44). The kind of force and punishment adopted by the colonizers perhaps made this transition even more of a bitter and resentful experience, not to forget the Church or the clergy that must have equally contributed to this pain and agony that has led to a dented religious psyche in the *Gawda/Kunbi* community. However, the truth is that amidst and in spite of many of these difficulties, the *Gawda/Kunbis* have progressively moved from the practice of Animism to polytheism and finally to monotheism—belief in One Trinitarian God, a belief which often finds its expression in many of their socio-religious celebrations.

As Catholics, at different periods of their life-cycles or 'rites of passage,' from the stage of infancy till death, the *Gawda/Kunbis* follow a host of elaborate religious rites, rituals, practices, customs and traditions, which bring out various values held sacred by the group. Religious celebrations are made special with songs sung to the accompaniment of dance and drums. As Catholics they also receive the Seven Holy Sacraments. However, despite the centuries of Christianization, over and above practicing the basic tenets of the Christian belief, the *Gawda/Kunbis* of Goa still hold on and practice their age old deep rooted ancestral Hindu traditions. The fact that today one finds remarkable similarities between the 'rites of passage' followed by the Christian *Gawda/Kunbi* and that of the Hindus aptly demonstrates the above reality of continuity-in-discontinuity.

In times of distress, misfortune or sickness or for finding solutions to their personal problems and family matters they still consult the *Gaddi* (witch doctor) and visit Hindu temples for the deities blessings" (Correia 2006:36). "They believe that sickness is caused by some evil spirits and along with the traditional herbal treatment the patient is also treated by a *Ghadi* (witch doctor) or soothsayer for the extortion of the evil spirit" (Phal 1982:38). Following the instruction of the *Gaddi*, they often perform certain rituals to

nullify the effects of the 'evil eye' cast upon their sick child/adult. In their language this is known as *dixtt kadunk* (to drive away or ward off the spell). Thus, in addition to their worship and open practice of Catholic belief in the Trinitarian concept of God, they also at times practice their age old traditions and customs, including their visits to the temples of their pre-Christian ancestral deities and the offering of their sacrifices to the Goddess therein, besides their consultation with the *Gaddi*—a clear indication of their continuity-in-discontinuity.

## **5. 2. Continuity-in-Discontinuity in the context of *Mand*.**

Prior to their conversion to Hinduism or Christianity, and consequently their prayer and worship in the temples and churches/chapels respectively, as Animists, they had a very important religious institution called the *Mand*. "There is conclusive evidence that *Mand* in Goa dates back to over 5000 years." (Gaude 2009:50) "The *Mand* was roughly about a hundred meters square space for religious observances of the village." (Xavier 1993:44).

Every village, sometimes every ward in Goa, had its own *mand*, where the village folk gathered to sing, dance or play music as part of their ritualistic performances. The concept of the *Mand* is complex, as far as rituals are concerned. (Phaldesai 2011:14). While as Animists, their religious songs were sung invoking the supreme power in the form of five elements--Earth, Water, Fire, Wind and Sky," (Gaude 2009:50-1) after conversion, their invocation to the sacred and divine beings brought in the element of their Christian world, *Poilo noman Deva Bapak, dusro noman Deva Putrak, tisro noman Deva Spirita Santak—soglle Dev Ekuch re* (The first salutation is to God the Father, the second to God the Son, the third to the Holy Ghost. All three are one God.) (Khedekar 1983: 139)

"The villagers are to maintain the sanctity of the *Mand* through the observances of different taboos. No participant is allowed at the place while wearing footwear. Participants can neither consume alcohol nor enter the place under the influence of liquor. Woman who are menstruating are not permitted to enter the *Mand*. No quarrels, betting and abusing is allowed within the boundaries of *Mand*" (Phaldesai 2011:78). Although after their conversion to Christianity, they were forced by the Portuguese to destroy their *Mand*, which they thought was a pagan practice, yet after their conversion, they chose their *Mand* as spots to built small Crosses or turn them into meeting places, for example, according to Mr. Joseph Vaz, the Sarpanch of the village panchayat of Ilha de Rachol, Salcete, Goa, a village that has a 100% Catholic *Gawda/Kunbi* population, the *Mand* in the local language, Konkani is called as *Khuris-Vangonn*, meaning a Cross-courtyard. In some places, they still have the *Mand* left untouched and during their festive occasions they have their peculiar dance known as the *Gawda/Kunbi* dance, often performed on this old *Mand* spot, besides the two most popular cultural festivals of the *Gawda/Kunbi*, namely the *Dhalo* and *Shigmo*, commence from this spot where the old *Mand* existed. Indeed some form of continuity-in-discontinuity.

### **5. 3. Continuity-in-Discontinuity in the context of Land**

From the times immemorial, land, earth or soil occupied a very central place in the tribal worldview. This has always been closely linked and associated with their identity; hence a loss of land for the tribal's is equivalent to a loss of identity. Unfortunately, today, amidst this continuity of land being an essential component of their life and existence, which they try to maintain and protect under all circumstances, yet when faced with big land sharks, such as the industrialists, the real estates, the SEZ's, the Mining's, etc., they become vulnerable, their ability to fight falls flat.

Although, the *Gawda/Kunbi* still continue to remain closely connected to the land, for example, no farming or cultivating activity can ever take place without their contribution, yet the discontinuity part lies in the fact that from being one time, the owners or possessors of land, tilling their own land, today they are landless labourers or cultivators. Besides, today the many big land sharks have snatched away their lands, while the Government has justified these injustices citing development and progress as reasons for allowing such unjust acts to be carried out right below their nose.

#### **5. 4. Continuity-in-Discontinuity in their Choice of Livelihood**

By the very fact of being called *Gawda/Kunbi*, as seen in the section of etymology means cultivators or labourers connected with seed, land or soil, they still undoubtedly continue to carry on with their traditional occupations. However, in recent times this reality is more vividly seen among the older generation, while a new set of trends are visible among the younger generation, who today feel ashamed of carrying out such works and start throwing their weight around a little and wanting to get into professional careers or opting to work in gulf countries and some have even gone on passenger and cargo steamers. While, on the one hand, some still continue to work as road and house building labourers, on the other, some have now become road and house building contractors, indeed a form of continuity-in-discontinuity.

#### **5. 5. Continuity-in-Discontinuity in Settlement and Literacy.**

The two direct consequences or fallout of the above mentioned change, namely the setting in of new trends in matters of choice of livelihood has now equipped them with finances to built better houses and to educate their children, even though they themselves have very little or no education at all.

On the one hand, some *Gawda/Kunbi*, particularly in the remote villages still continue to built and live in their small huts made of mud, with cow dung floor and coconut thatched roofs, while, on the other hand, some of them on account of their improved financial position are able to purchase land and built modern lateritic, terraced houses for themselves, even to the extent of having a marble floorings.

So also, on the one hand, some section of this community still continue to remain low on the literacy index on account of their poor socio-economic conditions, while, on the other, there are those, who are able to afford to pay for some quality education, unlike their grandparents and their parents, so much so that they have not only completed the basic schooling, but a few of them are also graduates and post-graduates.

#### **5. 6. Continuity-in-Discontinuity in Matters of Politics**

One of the reasons why the *Gawda/Kunbi* remained backward for a long period of time is probably because they lacked the political power and clout. Even though some section of this community still lacks political consciousness, yet there is a large chunk of this community that have now not only become politically conscious and aware of the political scenario and its effects or impacts on their lives, but have also entered into the local village panchayats and state legislative assembly as elected representatives and thus have begun to assert themselves. They have now come to realize their power to organize and conduct their lives as they wish. Even though in the Assembly elections there is no reservation (local panchayat elections provides it) meant for the *Gawda/Kunbi*, for which they have been fighting for long, yet, so far there have been ten *Gawda/Kunbi* MLA's sent to the Legislative Assembly, from among whom, a few of them have even risen to the heights or position of getting a cabinet berths or ministerial posts.

On the one hand, the older generation of the *Gawda/Kunbi* is happy to see the changes and the advancement among their community members, while on the other, they regret at the thought of the younger generation not ready to follow their own unique culture and their customs and practices. They are also worried about the younger generation imitating the western and Hindi filmy songs and dances and neglecting their own cultural folk songs and folk dances. They don't resent changes but opine that changes should not take place at the extent of loosing once own culture and values.

To sum up, on the one hand, the older generation of the *Gawda/Kunbi* had internalized the domination and dependence on the landlords, as if to say that it was written in their fate to be so (what the Critical Theorists of the Frankfurt School are questioning today), while on the other hand, the younger generations are very assertive. They articulate their dreams and apply their educational qualifications to make them come true. Hence, the discourse of the younger generation is quite different from that of the older generations. They want to form a different identity from what their forefathers have had for centuries. They believe that the landlords or the higher castes managed to keep their ancestors under their thumb because of the ignorance of their ancestors. But, not any more is their discourse. They want to form a new identity, a new personhood.



## Chapter - VI

### THE SOCIAL LOCATION

This chapter will be drawn from the previous two chapters, namely, the chapter IV, the 'framework,' and the chapter V, the 'continuity-in-discontinuity,' where I briefly focused upon the present day living conditions of this community. With these two chapters as my guide-map or blueprint, I will briefly make an attempt at coming to some conclusion over the social status of the *Gawda/Kunbi*, through which I will either affirm my hypothesis or disprove the same.

Keeping in mind the statement of research problem or the hypothesis of this paper, namely even though most of the written literature available on the Goan Catholic Caste scenario puts the *Gawda/Kunbi* in the low 'caste' category, yet their living conditions seem to support better the criteria's delineated by the Lokur Committee, set up in 1965, which the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Government of India till date recognizes and adopts in its scheduling or listing any community as a Scheduled Tribe, a category in which the *Gawda/Kunbi* has been enlisted since 2003.

#### **6.1. Analyses/ Interpretation of First Framework - 'Caste.'**

Focusing on the first 'framework,' where I dealt with the 'caste,' if one would analyze the *Gawda/Kunbi* within the 7-points suggested by G.S. Ghurye or the elements of the purity-pollution and karma-dharma that are prescribed as features to identify a 'caste,' in the Hindu Caste system, one would realize that none of these can be seen among the Catholic *Gawda/Kunbi* community of Goa. Yet, as my hypothesis suggests, I have extensively enumerated my point in my chapter IV, where I have quoted some written literature that places the

*Gawda/Kunbi* community in the category of the low 'caste,' to be more precise, the sub-caste of the *Sudir (Shudra)*.

## **6.2. Analyses/ Interpretation of Second Framework - 'Class'**

Focusing on the second 'framework,' where I dealt with 'class,' particularly, the Other Backward Class, I believe that since the *Gawda/Kunbi* community was already enlisted in the category of OBC, since 1987, they have fairly benefited from the 'protective discrimination,' granted to them for more than one and half decade, hence, today baring one criteria, i.e. occupying low position in the caste hierarchy, the other criteria's set by either Kalelkar or Mandal Commission don't really suit their present scenario.

## **6.3. Analyses/ Interpretation of Third Framework - 'Tribe'**

Focusing on the third 'framework,' where I dealt with 'tribe,' I believe that the *Gawda/Kunbi* do live under the criteria's as delineated by the Lokur Committee, set up in 1965, which the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Government of India till date recognizes and adopts in its scheduling/listing of any community as a Scheduled Tribe. Having said so, I need to state that since this community had already been for more than one and half decade under the provision of the 'discriminatory protection' in the category of the OBCs, it has done some good to them, though I must confess not to the extent they deserved.

Criteria's such as 'primitive traits,' 'distinct culture,' and 'geographical isolation,' are still seen among them. However, the other two, namely the 'shyness of contact with the outside world,' and the 'backwardness,' would be found to a lesser degree among the Catholic *Gawda/Kunbi* as compared to their Hindu counterparts. The reason behind this being, as stated in my chapter

V, 'continuity-in-discontinuity,' the new set of trends that are seen in the recent past among the younger generation of the former (Catholics), which are not really much encouraged among the latter (Hindus), namely that unlike their ancestors, many of them today are working in the gulf countries or on the international cruise boats or have acquired the Portuguese passports and are working in the European countries, especially the UK.

Considering the criteria of 'backwardness,' the above mentioned scenario would put the Catholic *Gawda/Kunbi* in a better position in the sphere of the 'economic backwardness,' but not much on the index of the 'social and educational backwardness.' Even those that I have mentioned above as working abroad or on international cruise boats are not because they are educationally highly qualified or socially well positioned, but rather out of dire need for employment, which is vividly seen in the C-class type of jobs or blue collar jobs that they are involved in, such as working in ware houses or stores or go-downs; or as drivers; or as house maids/keepers; or as waiters; or as cleaner/sweepers and so on and so forth. Hence, even though they may have finances coming into their wallets, yet 'socially and educationally' they still suffer from 'backwardness' and need to go a long way.

The reality that vividly justifies the *Gawda/Kunbi* as the Scheduled Tribes are the features well expressed by Mrs. Parvathamma in the following words, "the STs by and large, are landless agricultural and casual labourers. They are mostly engaged in menial jobs which add to lower their social and ritual status further. From times immemorial, they have been serving the upper castes and are economically dependent on them" (1984:2). These features best suit the *Gawda/Kunbi* of Goa, thus once again reiterating the claim of this paper.

The above claim best finds its expression in the petition submitted to the Lok Sabha on 14th August, 2001 regarding the inclusion of the tribal communities of Goa in the list of the Scheduled Tribes, which states, "the *Gawda/Kunbi* community of Goa does not fall into either the *Chaturvarna* System or *Pancham Varna* like Scheduled Caste or Out Castes. Rather, historically they have been categorized as tribes by sociologists and historians. Social historians and researchers on Goa have emphasized that the customs, rituals, and religious patterns of these are similar to the *Gonda* and *Kol* tribes and other descendant tribes in other parts of the country. Moreover, the Portuguese, who ruled over Goa for over 500 years, considered these communities as *Tribu*, which means tribes."

The effect of this petition was seen in the constituting of a committee to do an on-the-spot study of the community mentioned in the petition, which was done on 17 October 2001. After following a due course of procedures, the Winter Session of the Parliament in January, 2003 passed a bill of the ST & SC Orders (Second Amendment) Bill 2002 which was notified in the Gazette of India as Act No. 10 of the year 2003.

Finally, "by order and in the name of the Governor of Goa," the head of the state, on 22<sup>nd</sup> April, 2003, Mr. A.K. Wasnik, the Director of Social Welfare and Ex-officio Joint Secretary passed a Notification No.13/14/90-SWD (Vol. II) 191 by which the *Gawdas*, *Kunbis* and the *Velips* were included in the list of the Scheduled Tribes in the State of Goa. (Government of Goa 2003: 25<sup>th</sup> April)

## Chapter VII

### CONCLUSION

Let me at the very outset once again reiterate that my analyses and interpretations drawn from the theoretical 'framework,' and from the data collection, clearly affirms or proves both my hypothesis.

I would here like to make two significant points. First, that a very noteworthy truth about this community of people is that although it cannot be traced as to when they migrated to Goa, it is definite that they were the first to settle in Goa, much before the invasion by the Dravidians or the descent of the Aryans. They are the *Adivasis* of Goa (*adi*=Original, *Vasi*=inhabitants). Secondly, that perhaps one of the proves that could justify that the *Gawda/Kunbi* indeed belong to the racial stock of the *Munda* section of the Proto-Austroloid, whose vocabulary could probably have given Goa its name. Historians hold a view that the word Goa, in local language, Konkani, *Goem* has its roots to this tribal community of cultivators, who started the cultivation of rice paddy, which produced heavy and broad ears of grain that would incline to one side, which ultimately gave rise to the word *Goem*, which forms a derivative from a *Mundari* word *goem*, meaning an inclined and broad ear of paddy (Correia 2006:33).

Even though this community of people comprises of three distinct religious identities, I particularly chose the Christian category of the *Gawda/Kunbi* community. This is my personal choice made on the grounds that among the three, I feel that the Christian community has suffered a lot and still continues to suffer, first, in the sphere of sacred, at the time of conversion, and now in the sphere of secular, when it becomes increasingly difficult for them to avail the schemes and benefits that they deserve. Even though, they have been

enlisted as Scheduled Tribes, they are yet to receive all the protective benefits reserved for them. These have still remained only on the paper, injustice is done to this people.

After conversion, on the one hand, they were forced to cut-off from their original roots, while on the other hand, instead of experiencing a filial feeling of hospitality, they experienced an atmosphere of hostility from the higher caste section of the mainstream Catholics. Many therefore felt betrayed and falsely allured into embracing Christianity, no wonder a section of this community for the second time chose to get re-converted to Hinduism, now called the *Nav-Hindu Gawda*. Undoubtedly, the present day *Gawda/Kunbi* community's disgust towards the people of higher castes has its roots in this experience, which perhaps has been handed down from generation to generation. Even to the present day, this atmosphere of hostility and disgust is very much prevalent and vividly seen among these two sections of Catholic communities, both in matters of secular as well as sacred, one could compose a thesis on this.

The treatment meted to them by the higher castes saw no change in it for the castism equally existed in the Catholicism of Goa and hence they were going through the same treatment that was meted to them as erstwhile Hindus belonging to the lower caste. In fact, the higher caste people would put spanners in every plan of their attempts at upward mobility. One of the reasons, that could have led the *Gawda/Kunbi* community to seek for a status where they would be protected by the Government policies could perhaps be the existence of the 'caste conflict' that was visibly prevalent among the *Gawda*'s (then the OBCs) and the Brahmins (the all dictating higher castes). Undoubtedly, the provisions under the 'discriminatory protection' as STs would help them to brace up better in their plans for life enhancement, rather

than be puppets in the hands of the community of higher castes, who always wanted to dominate over them and make them utterly dependent upon them.

Some argue that many of these converts remained merely on the paper or records of the church, as many continued to carry on with their original practices and performances of their old rites and rituals and even held on to their Animists pantheon of gods and goddesses. This angered both, the colonizers and the clergy, who firmly denounced these practices and religious habits of these converts, the records of which are preserved in the archives of the Goa Archdiocese in the form of letters written by the clergy to the secular and church authorities.

As a student of Anthropology/ Sociology, I would like to differ on the stand taken by these clergymen of the bygone era and even those who hold similar views in the present contemporary era. I firmly believe that since these customs, traditions and practices were fundamental to their original identity, abandoning them all of a sudden demands a strong will and conviction, which does not come overnight, but over a period of time, which certainly the *Gawda/Kunbi's* have shown down the ages, in fact some of them being more spiritual and religious than the so called 'pious' Catholics.

Having made a few personal observations, there is something very unique, I wish to share about this community, as my concluding remarks of this paper. I firmly believe that no matter what the controversies or how divergent the views or the claims about their origin or status be; no matter what religious beliefs they practice; no matter what differences or divisions among them exists; yet they ALL hold on to ONE THING. This above all becomes an unifying and binding factor for all the *Gawda/Kunbi* community, which also undoubtedly forms the core of their socio-cultural identity. That ONE THING is LAND or SOIL.

If I were asked to choose one symbol or a myth that could probably describe and even perhaps in a better manner unveil the socio-cultural identity of the *Gawda/Kunbi* community of Goa, I would choose the symbol/myth of *gantón*<sup>4</sup>

*Ganton*, in the language of the locals, Konkani implies a single string that runs through a shoal of fish holding them all together. In the case of the *Gawda/Kunbi*, I believe, the land, soil or earth forms that ONE THING, one single string that holds together the entire *Gawda/Kunbi* community, an aspect that finds a vibrant expression in their socio-cultural identity.

The deep-rootedness in the soil or earth is very vividly visible among the *Gawda/Kunbi* tribe of Goa, from their origin, i.e., prior to their conversion to Christianity, whereby they worshiped *Santeri* (an ant house which originates from the soil or earth) to their final end, whereby they were/are buried under the soil or earth. In fact the earth or soil and the *Gawda/Kunbi* tribe are inseparable. Every facet of their life is rooted in the soil. In fact being agriculturists or farming community, their very survival depends on the soil or land. The varied etymological descriptions of the *Kunbis* too are based or rooted in the soil or land.

Their characteristic features of being strong of built and hard working is also rooted in their daily toil in the cultivation of the fields. Their staple diet—*Xit* (Rice), *Ambil* (Ragi Gruel) and *Pez* (Canjee) are all products of the soil. Their cooking stove is plastered by earth, they use earthen pots and pans as utensils for cooking, they have a special mud pots to carry their food when their work place is away from their home, they even have earthen pots, locally called *Gulgulat*, from which they drink cool and refreshing water. They are so

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<sup>4</sup> *Ganton* is used when big fishes of the same kind or different varieties are strung together with a dry outer skin of the Plantain tree stripped in a form of long ribbon just like a string`.



closely united with the earth that even their houses and the roof over their head or the floor below their feet is made of soil or earth.

Their practice of ethno medicine for good health and medical cure is also rooted in the soil or earth. They have a deep ecological sensitivity as a result of which their lives are closely bound in a deep relationship with the nature and ecology. As farmers or agriculturists, their means of cultivation are purely bio-chemical in which cattle dung is used as a main fertilizer; ash as anti-bacterial and salt is sprinkled to keep the bugs away.

Their folklore and their popular folk art also originate from their profound familiarity with the land, earth or nature and the soil. Every feast and festival of theirs, for example the harvest festival, the *Dhalo*, the *Shigmo*, are in harmony or unison with the nature, soil and ecology. This harmony ruptures and explodes itself in their colourful songs and dances—one that sings of their daily toil and joy of living expressing their close relationship with the nature, earth or soil, for example, “My name is Laurenceo, a *Kunbi* lad. I dig deep. My harvest is rich.” In fact, they have songs sung at every stage of harvesting—sowing, weeding, transplantation, threshing and harvesting. The *Gumat* and the *Manddlem*, their indigenous musical instruments are both made of clay or earth.

All these are but a few illustrations, the list could go endless. This clearly goes to prove, how, irrespective of all sorts of differences that this community may have among themselves, the soil, land or earth becomes one reality that not only gives a common socio-cultural identity or defines and characterizes this distinct community, but also acts as a unifying and binding factor that shows its power, whenever and wherever their land is under the threat of being degraded or being snatched away or destroyed by the land sharks, the real estates.

I would like to conclude this paper with an extract. These are the words from the reply of the Indian People's Chief, Seattle to the American President in 1854, who offered to buy a large area of land from the Indian People. His reply has been described as one of the most beautiful and profound statement ever made on the Land, Soil or the Earth. The wisdom emanating from this reply is mind blowing.

"How can you buy or sell the sky, the warmth of the land? The idea is strange to us. If we do not own the freshness of the air and the sparkle of the water, how can you buy them? Every part of this earth is sacred to my people. Every shining pine needle, every sandy shore, every mist in the dark woods, every clearing and humming insect is holy in the memory and experience of my people. The sap which courses through the trees carries the memories of the red man. The white man's dead forget the country of their birth when they go to walk among the stars. Our dead never forget this beautiful earth, for it is the mother of the red man. We are part of the earth and it is a part of us....."

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