

An experiment in social engineering

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Let me begin with the cautionary note with which Mitragotri begins his history of Gaud Saraswat Bramhans (GSB). "A writer on the basis of the genealogy and chronology of Puranic sages has mentioned that Aryans reached Goa during 2,500 BCE. This is based on preconceived notion that Aryans and Saraswats were identical." [Mitragotri, 1992: 'A Socio-Cultural History Of Goa From The Bhojas To The Vijayanagara', 50] In the context of what we are discussing, it translates into: we cannot assume that GSB arrived in Goa along with other bramhans.

Now coming to the itinerary of GSB. According to 'Sahyadrikhand' the original home of GSB was Tirhut (that is where they had moved when Saraswati began drying up around 3,700 BCE - 2,200 BCE) Tirhut comprised of the districts of Champaran, Darbhanga, Murutapur, and Sargri in North Bihar. The section of 'Sahyadrikhand' in which the Tirhut is mentioned has been tentatively dated to 1,400 CE. Even after settling down in Goa, they remembered that they had migrated from elsewhere. [Mitragotri, 1992: 50] We have already said that after leaving the Saraswati Valley they had settled in the Ganga-Yamuna doab. But what, or who, brought them from Tirhut to Goa?

It is often claimed that Mayurvarma or Mayursharma (circa 345) who founded the Kadamba Dynasty at Banvasi, brought some bramhan families from Tirhut and settled in Goa. But we do not know for certain, when and why. When, could probably be guessed from the period of his reign. The settlement could be in the form of aagrahara or several aagharas; but we do not know. However, I do not think it could be so, given the type of settlement; the reason will soon be obvious. But, that the bramhans were settled there with a royal fiat is almost a certainty.

According to 'Sahyadrikhand', 66 such bramhan (GSB) families were settled in eight villages of Goa: 10 each in Kushasthali (Cortalim) and Kelosi (Quelossim) belonging to Kaushika-Vatsa Kaundinya gotras, six families each at Mathagram (Madgaon; probably Benaullim is to be taken as a part of Margao), Veranya (Verna), Lotali (Loutolim) and Kudatari (Curtorim), 10 families at Chudamani (Chorao) and 12 families at Dipavati (Divar). [Mitragotri, 1992: 50]

I have said it was not an aagrahara type of settlement, like what Madhav Mantri, the Vijayanagar prime minister attempted centuries later around Govapuri. It was a mass settlement of entire villages; replacing the entire ksatriya population of each of the concerned village, by GSB population - translocating each family. Before I pro-



ceed let me state the provisos to this statement; lest it sounds sinister. The settlement did not happen in all villages of Salcete; only in the following villages: Cortalim, Quelossim, Madgaon, Benaullim, Verna, Loutolim, and Curtorim. I do not have authentic information on Chorao and Divar; there may be some apparent inaccuracies on account of subsequent merger and splitting of villages.

The second proviso: only the ksatriyas were moved out of the village, not shudras (fishers, mhar, etc.) and kunbi/gavddi. So, eventually, each of these villages which underwent 'translocation' of population had either GSB + shudras and kunbi/gavddi or ksatriya + shudras and kunbi/gavddi, but never GSB + ksatriya. Well, in two villages which underwent relocation, there arose a possibility of GSB and ksatriya having to cohabit: Benaullim and Verna. Here the ksatriya families were not relocated; the village was split into two. An enclave of ksatriya was carved out into an independent village: Cana out of Benaullim and Nagao out of Verna (so two exclusively ksatriya villages were created.) If I am right, the ksatriya families in these villages resided in an exclusive territory; so that helped.

Why was this exclusive treatment given to these villages? That is again a chapter in Goan history which has remained unresearched: the ksatriya in these villages, like in some more villages in Salcete were different from the rest of the ksatriya. For want of a better label, I have called

them 'kathiyavadi caddi'; ksatriyas are called 'caddi' in Salcete dialect.

Now who were, or are, these kathiyavadi caddi? My hypothesis is that they were the families of the 'navvitaks' (large traders and ship owners) who came to Goa in search of alternative ports after Kathiyavadi was submerged at the end of the last ice age; and settled in Goa and began plying their trade at the then existing ports of Goa. Or who came for 'trying green field' ports along the west coast. "The term navvitak, interchangeable with the Arabic term nakhuda (master of the ship), stands for a person whose wealth is associated with ships; in other words, the term stands for a ship-owning merchant." [Chakravarti, 1998: 'Coastal trade and voyages in Konkani - The early medieval scenario', in The Indian Economic and Social History Review, Vol 35, No 2] Why were they given a special treatment? Because they were affluent and a landed gentry, at par with later GSB; even the Portuguese government and the Church of Goa treated them so. (When locals other than Bramhans were not admitted in religious congregations, the kathiyavadi caddi were.) "These ship owning merchants can be considered as elites in the ports of coastal Western India." [Chakravarti, 2,000: 'Nakhudas and Navvittaks : Ship-Owning Merchants In the West Coast Of India', in The Journal of The Economic and Social History of the Orient, 34] Interestingly, they seem to be ethnically different - they are usually tall, fair and have brown

eyes. This could be because they carry a different mix of ancestries. Till very late they have been endogamous - marrying only within their group. A recent study based on interviews with some families, revealed the thoroughness of this network and confirmed their exclusivity. They own large mansions with high plinths (a mark of aristocracy) and private chapels in their mansions - they seem to have been the 'nobility', almost matching the later GSB.

We have referred to them in the context of the settlement of the GSB, so I have restricted myself only to the concerned villages. But such kathiyavadi caddi families can be found in several other villages. They are found around the ancient ports - Valipattan (not in Velim, but in Assolna), Camdrapur (Chandor), and Gopakapattan (Goa Velha and the surrounding villages). They are also found in several coastal villages of Salcete like Betalbatim, Cansaulim, Arossim, etc. I have still not been able to find out why this is so.

Just for illustration, some families around ancient ports: Valipattan-Menezes (Dr. Julião Menezes) in Assolna; Camdrapur- Menezes Braganza and Braganza Pereira; Gopakapattan- Menezes. Coastal villages of Salcete: Nagao (Machado), Orlim (Vaz), Telaulim (Mergulhão), Colmored-Navelim (Gomes), Chinchinim (Cota, Furtado), Assolna (Monteiro), Carmona (Amarante, Dias), Cana (Gonsalves), and Cuncolim (Fernandes). Most of these villages were trading hubs.

The largely endogamous nature of the community makes it possible to trace the spread of the community from the web of family relations through marriage. For instance, the Cunha of Cuelim are related to Menezes of Chandor; and the latter are related to the Furtado of Chinchinim. The Gonsalves of Cana, Benaullim, are related to Amarante of Carmona and Vaz of Orlim.

My reason for diverging so much from discussion on GSB is to show the probable source of the social and economic clout of the kathiyavadi caddi at the time. The clout was so much that it forced Mayurvarma to adapt his 'social reengineering' plan to the existence of kathiyavadi caddi. Even I am surprised that they have had this clout as early as the fourth century CE; assuming that this 'relocation experiment' was undertaken by Mayurvarma. This is an enigma of history of Goa that definitely needs to be researched. This relocation was already a part of oral history when Ignatius Arcamone wrote 'De Sasatana Peninsula - A commentary on the Peninsula of Salcete' (1664); as he states it in his description of the population make up of Salcete.