

CHAPTER FOUR

SUMMARY AND COCLUSIONS

4.1 INTRODUCTION:

This Chapter presents a summary of the statistical data presented in the preceding Chapter. After presenting this summary, the Chapter also records some observations about the Gabit community's social, cultural, economic and religious characteristics.

For the purpose of simplifying the presentation of the summary, the data has already been divided into five sub-groups, viz.

- (1) Demographic peculiarity,
- (2) Standard of living,
- (3) Awareness about formal education,
- (4) Economic activities,
- (5) Socio-cultural values.

A summary of the findings under sub-groups is now presented herebelow:

4.2 DEMOGRAPHIC PECULIARITY:

It is seen that the male:female ratio among the Gabits is nearabout 1:1. The reason for this fine balance is that the community does not discriminate between sexes and accords equal

treatment to both. An outcome of this indistinction is that despite male presence, about 50% of the households are headed by females, which is quite an achievement in a tradition-bound community. The analysis of the marital status statistics shows that the Gabit persons in the marriageable age-groups get married and stay married.

4.3 STANDARD OF LIVING:

If the collective orientation of a community towards changing lifestyle were to be judged on the basis of their houses, facilities and amenities in the house and other conveniences, it could be inferred from the data available that the Gabits are working hard at changing their lifestyles. If luxurious lifestyle is taken to be as an indicator of modernization, many among population have shifted into reasonably decent houses, have electric power, use atleast some basic home appliances. They, however, are less aware of the social hygiene aspect of the improved lifestyle.

4.4 AWARENESS ABOUT FORMAL EDUCATION:

Surprisingly, about 80% of the Gabits were literate, 11% actually had a college degree and another 13% on the way to get one. These statistics go on to prove the perceptual change in the community's collective consciousness about the importance of formal education in the changing times. They

appear to have been convinced that education gives one an edge to get ahead of the others in the world. The Adult Education Programme (to make literates out of the remaining 20%), however, has failed dismally to make any inroads into the community; the reason, probably, being that because of the daily changes in their work hours (connected with the changes in the timings of sea's tide and ebb, according to which they have to go out for or come in from fishing expeditions), adult Gabits are not able to attend the Adult Education classes at fixed hour.

4.5 ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES:

The economic activities of the Gabits revolve around sea-fishing and the activities incidental and ancillary thereto. For approximately 70% of the households surveyed, however, the yearly income from these activities was below Rs.6,000/-, indicating the unremunerative nature of the traditional fishing practices they follow. This is so because the Gabits are caught up in a vicious circle of circumstances, 'unable to invest in technically superior fishing equipment, unable to derive more income from the efforts put in and better their lot economically'. This impoverishment has already driven a few to engage themselves into occupations like horticulture, market-gardening or even working as land-labourers. At the same time, a majority of the Gabit fishermen have displayed an aversion to get themselves trained into modern fishing

techniques or even in organizing themselves into a union or working alliance, to act as a pressure-group whenever necessary. Further, inspite of following a traditional occupation for 200-odd years, about 1/3 of the fishermen are so deprived economically that they do not even possess their own fishing gear and are compelled to work for others. The fishermen's lives are replete with occupational hazards (like risks on the high seas, both to life and to health), but they are simply unable to invest in a life insurance policy, and regular savings are rather difficult to accmulate in their already strained circumstances. Looking at the broad spectrum of all their economic activities, one realizes that these are a people with a fine sea-going tradition, but the lack of commercial orientation in their economic activities has reduced them to the state of eking out the living on a day-to-day basis. Their instinct for survival has inculcated into them the importance of formal education; but at this crucial juncture, they lack proper counselling and help to assimilate their education with their traditional occupation to an economic advantage.

4.6 SOCIO-CULTURAL VALUES:

The community has moderate feelings about the observance of the caste system and nearly half the population would even tolerate a bride or a groom from another caste into their fold. It is an indication that they are not averse

to a change in their original ethnic stock. Moreover, the rejection of caste system and the acceptance of intercaste marriage also symbolize the changes that are afoot in the deeply held inhibitions and taboos of the community as a whole.

The Gabit community is deeply religious and God-fearing, though their reverence for the Supernatural appears to be more because of the economic necessity than a finely-honed sense of 'good' and 'evil'.

4.7 OBSERVATIONS ABOUT TRADITIONS AND CUSTOMS:

As stated in the methodology, the researcher witnessed the major events on the Gabit community's social and religious calendar for one complete year and the observations about the socio-cultural side of the community's life are recorded below.

The present study of the Gabit families in four selected centres shows that they perceive themselves as Konkani Marathas and also claim to be of superior caste. It was found that Maratha surnames like 'Bhosale', 'Jadhav', 'Tawade', 'Shinde', 'More', 'Nikam', 'Tandel', 'Manjre' are common among the Gabits.

The settlements of this community are mostly found near sea-shores, creek-banks and inside or near the

coastal forts. The community being a sea-faring one and having been associated with Shivaji's Maratha Navy, it is most likely to have settled in or nearabout the coastal forts like Vijaydurg and Sindhudurg (Malwan) and shore installations like Deogad and Vengurla. Initially, they built their houses of thatched-roofs, packed-straw walls and double slanted roofs. Today, many of their houses are built of packed mud and coconut tree trunks and roofs made of woven coconut palm fronds that have to be changed every year. Those who are affluent enough to have their roofs made up of country tiles also have to get the tiles re-arranged every year just prior to the onset of monsoon. The mudwalls of the house are required to be covered with woven palm frond mattresses to prevent seepage of rainwater.

In the old days, every householder built his own house but these days, stone masons and carpenters are employed. Ventilation and light inside the house are ensured by providing adequate number of windows. The house is generally appointed to have a verandah and a backyard. The middle part of the house contains kitchen and a room (or atleast one wall-face) for family deities (Devagraha), where Ganpati is worshipped as the main deity. Rangoli drawing adorns the front entrance of the house and a 'Tulsi-Vrindavana' is found in front of every house. Many times, frontal and sidereal outer wall-faces are decorated with colourful lacquer and flour pictures of different deities. Images of snakes

are drawn and worshipped on the Nagapanchami Day. Two other standard fitments are a grinding wheel and a thrashing hole. Modernization has introduced the use of grinding mills for flour and electricity for light. Kerosene and vegetable oil lamps are also used at some places for light. The poor use earthen- and aluminium-ware for cooking pots and vessels while better-off people use cooking gas and metal utensils. Coconut trees, banana plants and flower-shrubbery are regularly planted in the vacant lots around the house.

Fishing gear, fish-nets, boat-lamps lie strewn all over the house as well as suspended from the hooks mounted in the walls. Sometimes, fish-nets are found to be suspended between coconut trees, mostly for drying.

The staple diet consists of boiled rice, fish and Jowar-bread. The day starts with an early morning cup of tea, breakfast is of a porridge of boiled rice and occasionally, of cooked comestible plant-roots and corn. On special family and religious days, cooked chicken and leavened rice-floor preparations (Wadas and Dosas) are served to the invitees and guests. Addiction to alcoholic beverages, usually cheap, local brew, is substantial, especially among those who spend long hours fishing on the sea.

Physically, the Gabits are strong and stout in build. They are neat and tidy in their deportment, contented in their surroundings and circumstances, hardworking, adventurous

and express their independent opinions. They possess a large sense of self-respect and succour is one of their crowning qualities. They are enormously proud of their caste and community. They are warm in their hospitality and respectful towards their guests and visitors. Gabit women are modest and highly value the virtue of chastity. They are fair- or dark-complexioned and stout in physique. They also are somewhat garrulous, devoutly religious and view the life around them with a fatalistic outlook. They share their menfolk's workload equally and are prominent in the communal activities. Some young women have achieved good academic records in recent times.

Men go around half-naked most of the time, clad only in a loincloth. A piece of cloth (towel) is kept hanging around the shoulders to cover the head from the beating sun. In public, men are attired in shirt, Dhoti and a cap. They anoint their heads with coconut oil. In recent times, some of them have accepted modern types of clothes like shirts, trousers, shoes. Women dress more formally in blouses and saris, and young ladies in jumpers, skirts, Salwar-Kurta, and wear their hair in a bun and also apply a Kumkum Bindi on the forehead. They like wearing flowers in their hair and adorn themselves with imitation jewellery like necklaces, earrings, bangles and nose-ornament (Nath). Better-off wear gold bangles, gold Mangal-sutra and silver rings on toes. Gabit women come out in all their finery on festival days.

Marriages are uncomplicated affairs with the Gabits. Some families prohibit Sagotra marriages. Marriages are also not arranged in the same lineage as well as between the families with similar sounding surnames. A marriage can be arranged with the maternal uncle's daughter and a marriage with a widowed sister-in-law is also permissible. Two blood brothers may marry two blood sisters. Infant and child marriages are not known. Dowry is not practiced, but some support the system. Brahmin is the wedding priest and the auspicious time for celebrating the marriage is in the afternoon or in the evening. The custom of Muhurat-Medh (invocation to deity) in the Gabit marriage pendal is similar to the custom followed by the Marathas elsewhere in Maharashtra.

A husband can divorce the wife on the grounds of infidelity, subject to the consent of the community elders. The practice of seeking elders' consent is now becoming extinct and today, most of the divorce cases are fought out before the law courts. The divorcee suffers social boycott.

The Gabits adhere to the joint family tradition and after marriage, the bride goes to the groom's house. In recent years, nuclear families are on the rise, but parents' and other family elders' opinions are respected. Teachers and elderly relatives are held in high esteem. Widows and widowers are treated sympathetically. Children are also much valued. The family planning, however, is not acceptable to the Gabits.

The Gabits are practising Hindus. Some belong to Warkari Sect and make a pilgrimage to Pandharpur every year. Some others owe allegiance to Ramdasi Sect.

Many Gabits firmly believe in evil spirits, ghosts, etc., and are superstitious. Epidemics are accepted as curse of Goddess; and in order to appease her, offerings of fowl, goat, coconut and flowers are made. Black magic is also practised occasionally but it is fast diminishing due to advent of modern education.

Gabits originally belong to the Maratha caste, but through the assimilation of different cultural milieu over the centuries, their cultural heritage is vari-coloured. They have their own folklore and folksongs, which play an important part in their cultural values. In fact, the nature of their art is entirely community-oriented. These cultural activities orient the total behaviour of the people.

Gabits are totally dependent on the sea and the Nature for their existence. Hence, there is a practice of worshipping the sea and the boat. They also regularly worship family deity, village deities and the community deities. The main deities of Hindus like Rama, Krishna, Hanuman, Rawalnath, Shankara also find equal importance with the Gabits. They celebrate annual festivals for these Gods. They accept the existence of Seven-Spirited Goddess, the deity of water. They also worship certain holy trees like Peepul, Tulsi and

and Banyan. The Gabits are very enthusiastic about religious activities as they are very religious. In order to preserve their cultural heritage, they have accorded spiritual consideration to their cultural activities. Preserving their cultural heritage is the desire of every Gabit.

Some of the festivals observed by the Gabits are 'Gudipadava' (Hindu New Year), Ashadha Ekadeshi, Narali Poornima, Nagapanchami. Ganesh Chaturthi is the festival having a special significance. For this festival, they repaint the house and decorate it and buy new ornamental things. Ganesh idol is established in the house and worshipped by singing songs and chanting of Mantras. The stay of Ganesh idol varies from 1½ days to 8 days, depending on the money available. The Gabits also celebrate Dasra and Diwali, but not on as large scale as Ganesh Chaturthi.

In general, the socio-cultural life of the Gabits is smooth and peaceful. The Gabits are religious by nature. The community leadership is not able to bring about a political awakening among the Gabits. Though economically backward, this community does not create any social problems for the society at large and criminal tendency among them is much less. It can be said that this community has the following problems:

1. Traditionalism,
2. Economic backwardness,
3. Political passiveness.

4.8 CONCLUSIONS:

In conclusion, the picture that emerges from the above observations is that Gabit is a community of liberal-minded, reasonably-talented and resilient people that has survived for a long time through their adaptability to changing circumstances and fortunes. Over the centuries, because they were looked down socially for their choice of fishing as a means for survival and livelihood, they have become close-knit and protective about their traditional ethos. The economic pressures, however, have made them vulnerable to the onslaught of changing times, and with a comparatively higher level of formal education among them, there is a likelihood that a whole generation of educated young men and women would march off into the oblivion of urban life, forsaking their past and their heritage. In such an event, the community, for its namesake, would continue to survive but will have lost its true identity. In order to prevent such extinction, the community will have to be guided properly into moulding its future in its traditional occupation of fishing itself, through educating them into the modern commercialities of the age-old, adventurous, and in present times, lucrative, economic activity of fishing.