

# **Impact of Socio Economic Transformation and Altered Value System on Tribal Women of Goa since Independence : A Feminist Approach**

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## **Report of the study**

**Report of the work done under minor research project titled: “ Impact of Socio-economic Transformation and altered value system on Tribal women of Goa since Independence: A Feminist Perspective”.**

**The project is interdisciplinary in nature and as such a detailed study required more time. Also it is a comparative study of two types of tribal communities\_\_ one, women in matriarchal and the other, women under patriarchal tribes, who are said to belong to proto-Austroloid race. Being situated in Goa, researcher had to travel to north-eastern matriarchal tribes in Meghalaya to interact with Garo women and to study their socio-economic conditions. Two visits were paid to study their development up to May 2010. After these visits the required data was collected.**

**Residing in the Meghalaya state of the north east India, and a small number living in Assam and Bangladesh, the Khasi tribe people are thought to be related to the Mon-Khmer. Their alternative name is Ki Hyniew trep (which means “seven huts” in the Khasi language). According to the Khasi mythology, they are a part of the seven families, out of sixteen, which remained stuck on Earth. They speak an Austro-Asiatic language known as the Khasi language. They have traditional dresses but most of them have adapted to the new western form of apparels. They follow a number of religions, including tribal religion, and even Islam..**

**A detailed study of Goan tribal women and those from the matriarchal tribes is done with reference to their living conditions, socio-economic conditions, health care, their contribution in preservation of nature, food habits, emancipation of tribal women, occupational changes, exposure to mass media, kumeri cultivation, changes in marriage customs due to mass media, political awareness among tribal women and the effect of deforestation on tribal women.**

**Prior to 2011 census, only six types of scheduled tribes were included in the official list: Dhodia, Dubla (Halapti, Jalava), Naikda, Siddhi, Varli and unclassified tribes and their total population was 566 with 269 female population. Kunbi, Velip and Gawada**

were added in the list in the year 2004. . On account of addition of more communities to the ST list the share of the population has phenomenally increased to 10 percent of the total population and female population is around 51 percent of total ST population in 2011 census.

The Scheduled tribes Gawda, Kunbi and Velip are found in all the talukas of Goa with concentration in Quepem and Canacona taluka. Women and specially ST are very closely connected with nature. In Goa most of the ST women are engaged in agriculture and related activities. Many of them sell vegetables and other seasonal vegetable and fruits in the nearby district market as well as in the local market. Women prefer employment in informal sector because of the nature of work involved. Women can balance their family life as well as work life especially for the women with smaller kids. One needs to take into account their contribution to the economy.



*A picture Highlighting Kunbi Attire*

Some of the important and glaring discrepancies between Goan tribal women and those from North-East need to be briefly mentioned in this report:

- In matriarchal system the economy of the family is controlled by the female head of the family. However, there are slight changes taking place in these communities, due to the modernization process. Their traditional set up is undergoing a change, where men are also allowed to look after their economic activities, which were earlier purely controlled by women.
- Goan tribal women used to sell their farm products and occupied an important place irrespective of their illiteracy, continue to do so till today.

- **There are radical changes as far as their occupations are concerned. They have proved capable of performing variety of jobs and also have taken up training in technical services.**
- **In tribal communities, in the field of education, the percentage of literacy is more in girls and women than in men, as it is observed today. This also signifies the success of govt. efforts to provide education to people at the grass root level. This is true of both, the north east tribal women as well as Goan women. Due to education people have become aware of their rights and importance of their votes and most of the tribal people have voted during the recent elections.**
- **Health\_\_ the tribal women were originally healthy, however, due to the change in food habits, deforestation, pollution, mechanization and industry they have fallen a prey to various diseases. Some of them stay in very remote places, which makes it difficult for them to get or avail medical facilities, as is availed in a city. In Meghalaya, too the story is not different. The traditional use of millets, at least in Goa is given up by most of the literate tribal women, as most of them are also influenced by the western lifestyle. The original mantra of health, as they applied to their life seems to have been forgotten.**
- **Economic status of tribal women\_\_ The status of the tribal women usually depends on the economic roles they play. The tribal in the past were usually forest dwellers and their livelihood to a great extent depended on the food-gathering economy. More than the men, the women walked long distances to fetch wood and fodder. Besides, they also collected fruits, roots and tubers, lac, gums and leaves for self-consumption and sale. The men also complemented them by collecting timber and logs. They climbed the trees to shake down the fruits that were gathered on the ground by women. As there has been large scale deforestation, women have to slog harder to retain the gathering economy.**

**Women among some of the tribes of the North-East are very proficient in doing business. It is mainly the Khasi women who run shops in the markets of Shillong and Nongpoh in Meghalaya. Many women in Mizoram too manage big shops and large business. Lalhriatpuii (ibid.) observes that the women workforce in the State of Mizoram is concentrated more in the primary sector and many of them are turning to become agricultural laborers. She further observes: “Many women run small family businesses, called micro enterprises, which require very little initial capital and often involve the marketing of food articles and handicrafts produced under the domestic system. No doubt women’s limited access to capital leads to higher rates of return on their tiny investments. But the unbelievably low capital-labour ratios confine women to low productivity undertakings.”**

**In Goa 65 percent tribal women were found to be selling seasonal fruits and vegetables throughout the year having great demand in the local market. Some of the fruits and vegetables are cultivated by them and in the off season they purchase vegetables from other vendors and sell it. Remaining 35 percent of the women respondents were found to be selling fruits and vegetables only during the festivals like Shravan Month (Holy month for Hindus where nature is worshipped coincides with rainy season), Janamshatmai, Ganesh Chataturthi and Diwali. They were also found selling pickles, papad etc .**

**Women are usually paid less than the men, as the social practice. They were unorganized sector before Goa liberation, whereas today we do observe NGOs, associations and other governmental agencies working together to organize them as far as their participation in economic activities are concerned.**

- **There is a change in the economy of these communities, in the light of which one may perceive a change in their morality. The impact of social media has forced them to change their culture\_\_ the dressing style, eating style, language and the original morality, at least in the new generation learners, as compared to the old generation people. The old generation is less exposed to the social media. They too, find it difficult to adjust with the new norms and situations.**
- **Political status of tribal women:**

**Women in both communities are responding to govt. schemes and to the efforts put in by various NGO'S. The ex- service women, the post master was seen taking keen interest in the progress and empowerment of Garo tribal women in Meghalaya. The tribal women in India have virtually no role to play in the social and political spheres. Even in the past though for many tribes in central India and in the North-East there were bachelor's dormitories, there was hardly anything for the girls. The girls used to fag around for the boys residing in the dormitories. The tribal women had no place in the village councils. The women were never represented in the traditional panchayats. It is only now, due to the mandatory provisions of the state, that some women are getting elected in the panchayats. But even in such cases, usually the women are dictated by husbands or relatives who already wielded enough power in the locality. Even then there is hardly any tribal woman MLA or MP in the country. In the case of Agatha Sangma, the Union Minister of Social Welfare, she is an exception; her father Purno Sangma happened to be a prominent politician of the country and also served as the Speaker of the Lok Sabha in Parliament for one term.**

- As far as Goan tribal women are concerned, their life has improved drastically due to the freedom and openness in general, Whereas Garo women's progress is thwarted due to lack of education and exposure. However, Christianity has brought about a significant emancipation of the tribal women. While earlier the women were restricted from attending schools, it is the missionaries who opened schools and encouraged the girls to attend them. They also opened up church forums where women could participate and also take the lead. The Protestant Church took a lead over the Catholic Church in these matters. The Roman Catholic Fathers offered lesser space to the tribal women in the parishes. No wonder that the Protestants became much more acceptable in the matrilineal tribes like the Khasi and Garo. They gave trainings to the girls to be not just good home-makers but to become teachers, doctors and nurses. But it is observed that, the women in Mizo society are excluded in all decision-making bodies in both social organizations and church life. They get no representation in the church administration in spite of playing a crucial role in the evangelical work. To conclude, it may be stated once again that though the women in the tribal society in India enjoy a greater freedom to mix and move around, their social organizations and institutions are still discriminatory particularly with regard to the customary laws that guide the ownership of property and inheritance or also with regard to exercising authority both in the domestic and public spheres.



*A picture showcasing the Khasi Tribe*

- The investigator has interacted with tribal women in Goa from Rivona, Mallkarne, some places in Sattari and Gaondongri in Cancona taluka.

**Recommendations:**

The tribal women in villages need infrastructure improvements that would facilitate their access to the internet and thus to information that is available with regards to every aspect of our life\_\_ whether planning of health information, Govt. schemes or employment opportunities. Human resources needed to deal with such infrastructure should be provided with intensive training through adaptive, flexible and creative training models.

Empowerment of women those in North-east or Goa must include moral and psychological transformation in order to bring about a right kind of social change. This will help them to overcome many barriers to empower themselves. Many of the barriers to women's empowerment and equality are ingrained in cultural norms. Many women feel these pressures while some are accustomed to being treated as inferior to men. Even though their male counterparts and legislators are aware of benefits of women empowerment, many are scared of disrupting the status quo and continue to let the societal norms get in the way of development.