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Role of Konkani Woman in Fostering Financial Stability and Family Culture in GSB Community

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Abstract- Goud Saraswat Brahmins, (popularly called GSBs) a Hindu Brahmin community and a linguistic minority group, belongs to the Pancha Gauda Brahmana sector. They speak Konkani as their mother tongue but blend in the vernacular language of the place they reside in. Right from the time, Konkani's settled in various parts of Kerala, men have been the source of income for the big joint family. Whereas the women of the household were confined to her world of domesticity. Tending to an ever-growing joint family has been the primary responsibility of women. Despite these constraints, women have significantly contributed to attain the financial stability and preserving the culture of Konkani households. GSB families are deeply rooted in their culture and celebrations of religious functions all-round the year. Even in the modern era, the elder woman of the family has got a prominent position in the Konkani household. But going with the flow, the gradual change from joint family to nuclear family has set in Konkani households too.

The woman of a Konkani household has always been the crux of the familial household. An inspection of literature finds no many articles on Konkani community. Since the researcher belongs to the said community, she finds a growing necessity to preserve the culture and tradition and to spread the knowledge of the same in the upcoming generations.

Keywords:- GSB Community, Konkani Language.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Census 2011 reports that there are 22,56,502 Konkani speakers covering 0.19 percent of the total country's population. Nationwide, its concentration is – in Goa (42.73%), Karnataka (34.93%), Maharashtra (17.69%) and Kerala (3.08%) covering 98.44 per cent of the total Konkani speakers of the country. This share reveals a decrease in the number of Konkani speakers between 2001 to 2011. Konkani is one of 22 languages included in the Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution and holds the status of official language in Goa. Also, it ranks 19th among the Scheduled languages, based on the number of speakers. Konkani, a linguistic and ethnic minority community in Kerala, form a very small fraction of the state's population as speakers of the language. There are 69,449 speakers, constituting 0.2% share of Kerala state's population as per the Census Report, 2011.

In Kerala, approximately 3.6% of the Konkani speakers reside in the state, with more than half of them found in the Ernakulam district, lesser share in Kasaragod district and the rest spread throughout the state. Konkani speakers in Kerala are bilingual and conversant in both Konkani and Malayalam. As a minority community, Gaud Saraswath Brahmins (GSBs) have held a significant place in Kerala's history. Since immigrating to the state, they have consistently preserved their unique language, culture, and identity while introducing new business ideas and contributing to the development of the



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communities they reside in. As per 1981 Census report, Konkani had occupied third rank in the order of languages spoken in Kerala and second in the district of Ernakulam.

Kerala is the State where the last immigrants of the Konkani speaking people of Goa had their settlement. As per records conserved at the State Archives Department at its Regional office at Ernakulam it was in the year 1294 A. D., the first immigration of Konkani speaking people from Goa took place in Kerala (Diwan's Diary Vol. 47 letter No. 144/1858 dated 6 3 1858). But their mass migration to Cochin from Goa took place in the year 1560 A. D. when the Portuguese established their Inquisition at Goa.

Throughout various periods, numerous individuals contributed to the development of the Konkani language and literature, with Cochin serving as a key hub for these efforts and temples acting as centers for Konkani cultural advancement. This is supported by John Leyden's Plan for Investigating the Languages, Literatures, Antiquities, and History of the Dekkan (1807), documented in the British Museum (Addl. 26,566, pp. 69-70), which notes that Leyden (1775-1811), while traveling in Kerala after Tipu Sultan's defeat in 1799, encountered Konkani Brahmins engaged in these activities.

Right from the time, they have settled at Cochin, they have contributed significantly to promote the business in the area. Cochin, especially Mattanchery, was the commercial hub of Ernakulam district, which could be easily accessed by seaways. Konkani's, with their acute business acumen, introduced the concept of 'Kol Krishi' which was practiced at Goa, in Cochin.

Kol Krishi is the system of immersing rocks in seawater and refining it to utilise it for agricultural purposes. Likewise, Konkani, who settled in Cochin from Goa brought with their methods, culture, traditions to this place.

The GSB families are extremely deep rooted in their familial and traditional values. The stringent following of the culture, rituals and traditions have been engraved in all families till now. The Konkani men were temple priests, employees of colonial people, businessmen. Based on the type of their employment, various surnames were accorded to them – as Bhat's, Kamath's, Nayak's, Shenoy's etc. It was the duty of the men folk to fetch for the family. Even though, the men used to be the breadwinners, at the same time, the ladies of the family had a tough situation. They were facing the universal problem of feeding too many, from a few limited sources. She was the lynch pin of the family who had to tend to children of all ages, relatives, house help (belonging to lower caste, called Kudumbis) and take care of all day to day running of a extra large household. The cases where she had to act as source of income were not rare. Being uneducated and having no opportunity to go out for jobs, she was confined to her kingdom of her household. Hence, the many uncommon ways of making money as well as saving money were invented. In the contemporary era, we call it as self help groups, where they make pappadams, food savories, growing flowers and selling the flower buds, making garlands, breeding cattle, were the most common ways, even now in Konkani community. Simultaneously, controlling the expenses on food along with providing for so many people of the household, different ways of using all sorts of plants, herbs, fruits and vegetables grown in gardens as a



common practice. Making use of each part of a vegetable to best of waste slogan was apt for this community.

GSB community is very much rooted in culture and devotion, with ladies spearheading the looking after of big joint families. They belong to Konkani speaking group, which rigorously follows the customs and rituals followed in Thirumala Thirupathi Temple. Their contribution towards development of society and particularly the business scene of Mattancherry is commendable.

Any comments or articles on business and cultural scenario of Fort Kochi and Mattancherry is incomplete without mention of Konkani's. The population of Konkani's in Kerala is a mere 3.08% of the whole Konkani speaking population. And from these, the maximum number of Konkani families reside in or around Cochin.

From the talks with Cochin Thirumala Devaswom Temple authorities, it is revealed that there are around 1500 - 1700 families having permanent residence and males from these families are included in the voter's list of CTD Temple, women not having any voting rights in the Temple. Compared to their numbers, contribution of Konkani's in all fields cannot be ignored. Also, there are no studies undertaken to study the contribution of females in the households. The ladies are the ones who uphold the traditions, rituals and culture in a family. The role of a Konkani male is limited within Temple premises whereas in reality, it is the woman of the family who sees to it that all these traditions and practices are observed by the members of the family follow it and all these, within the budget. This area cannot be unseen as it is usually done. With meagre resources, achieving all these is not

an easy feat. Also, with the new Gen Z and Alphas emerging, it is a challenge from all perspectives.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Women in any family holds a very key position. They are the ones who take the initiate to uphold the traditions and support silently in the financial stability of the household. In olden days, the gender role was clearly defined, and it was the conventional one where men were to go out for income generation and women were confined to their houses. But remaining inside the houses and performing their traditional role of head of the household, women, very beautifully have always, contributed to financial stability of the family. At this juncture, it is to be noted that family meant a joint family were there were minimum of ten people. To feed this many was no easy feat. There arose a need for the women to support her husband, in case his earnings were not meeting the expenses, which was the situation in most of the cases.

The challenging part was to earn income without stepping out of her boundaries. They devised their own ways of earning income like – by making savories, pappadams, growing and selling flowers. Over the years, the scope of business area widened to include catering, pickles, providing house maid services etc.

GSB community is a tight knit community who has followed the strict codes of conduct of Temple rituals. This community follows the rituals performed at Thirumala Thirupathi Devasthanam. Guna Bhat, having from the most revered Thantri family, under the guidance of Sri Kashi Matthipathi Shrimat Bhuvanendra Theertha Swanji, had prepared the rituals to followed during the most auspicious Temple festival days.



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GSB community has set the rituals in the lines of TTD temples. It can be safely said that GSBs are very much deep rooted in traditions and rituals.

As the world shifted from joint family system to nuclear family, the role of a woman also witnessed a drastic change. For a modern woman, difficulty was to maintain the two contrast phases of her life – a modern working woman and simultaneously the traditional one following the customs and rituals of the family.

With Gen Z questioning each tradition, to convince them to observe our rituals and customs is the mostly a challenge which cannot be done unseen. Looking into these problems, the question of how the role of a woman in GSB community have evolved over years, is an area which is not muck looked into.

The researcher herself, hailing from the same community, living in the immediate vicinity of CTD temple, belonging to a joint family even now, is one among the GSB women, facing these problems.

The first printed survey on Konkani language was conducted in 1971, Census of India, Series I Language Monograph (1961 Series) under the heading Survey of Konkani in Kerala. (J Rajathi, 1971). On publication of the language report, 1961 census, Ms Rajathi initiated a study in the Kerala region in the south. Kerala was selected for the study of Konkani precisely because very little literature on it existed so far. The survey of Konkani was subsequently extended to Karnataka. The study provided a detailed description of GSB dialect of Cochin.

Sardesai (2004) in his article which revolves around the dialect of Konkani confirms that dialects are based on caste, religion and social impacts. Gian Konkani is different from the other speakers of the same language.

The study suggested more than geographical barriers, it is the social barrier that has distanced speakers of Konkani.

Richard Rego in his book identified thirty- two Konkani mother tongue communities. (Rego , 2007) In Kerala, Konkani occupies the third rank in the order of languages spoken there and is the second important language in Ernakulam district. Purushothama Mallya (2004& 2017) in his writings has always stressed on the relevance of Konkani language, the origin and history of GSB community. Konkani, a language that is spoken widely in four States of the Country viz. Kerala, Karnataka, Maharashtra and Goa has an important role in the emotional and cultural integration of its people, spread throughout the west coast of India. Konkani is now included in the 8th schedule of the of Constitution of India. Government of Kerala introduced Konkani as an additional language for the benefit of Konkani speaking pupils in the primary schools run by Konkani linguistic minority in Cochin. The Syndicate of the University of Calicut adopted a resolution to set up a Chair for Konkani in the University.

Sahitya Academy, New Delhi recognized Konkani as an independent literary language of India and has been giving Awards, as well as publishing books. (Sukrathindra Oriental Research Institute, 2012)

Jephry (2017) attempted to identify the linguistic existence of Konkani within multiple language Indian families and brought out the richness of it.

III. RESEARCH GAP

Meagre literature available on Konkani culture is completely concentrated on the history and origin of Cochin Thirumala Devaswom, the dialects followed by the residents of Cochin, the struggle to be followed to get



Konkani included in Part VII of Constitution of India. It can be safely said that there are no studies conducted on the topic related to familial culture followed by GSB families.

There are as such no studies have been undertaken on this linguistic minority community hailing from Cochin from the perspective of standing of a woman in household. Also, literature review could not find any studies from the commerce background. The studies which have been published are from the arts and linguistics field. GSBs are a community which have been involved in trade and commerce since they settled in Cochin. They have played a very prominent role in the development of commerce in Mattancherry, a small coastal village in Ernakulam district. For years, Mattancherry was considered the trade haven for businessmen, agents, dalals, workers, coolies etc. Its recently, around the late 2000s, that the place started losing its prominence in trade. GSB community have been an inevitable factor in the development of culture, trade and societal development in and around Cochin. But sadly no one has been interested in exploring these areas. Women play an active role in the overall upliftment of society by upholding, observing and handing over the traditions and rituals of any community. It is found that with the advent of gender equality and discrimination, the communities are facing a deterioration in the observance of traditions and culture. The Konkani women have come a long way from playing a second fiddle to her spouse as bread winner of the family, now taking up the front seat in maintaining the financial stability of her family.

IV. CONCLUSION

Records testify that Konkans, since their arrival in the state in 1562 AD, have established themselves with spice trade, struggling hard to keep themselves apart as pardeshis, drawing their protection rights.

GSB community has a Mathadhipathi who is considered as a disciple of Veda Vyasa. The current Kashi Mathadhipadi, His Holiness Shrimat Samyamindra Theertha Swamiji is the 21st Pontiff of GSB community. Under his instructions, the Konkani's, especially in Kerala have been very active, guided by Grama Sabhas. Regularly, the Kashi Mathadhipathi holds Grama Sabha meetings to discuss the innovative methods by which younger generation could be molded in more ritualistic ways.

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