

**SHIFTING CULTIVATION IN GOA:
LIVELIHOOD & RIGHTS OF WOMEN OF THE
VELIP TRIBE**

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By

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CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

This concluding chapter of the doctoral project titled *Shifting Cultivation in Goa: Livelihood & Rights of Women of the Velip Tribe*, summarises the field realities studied through field narratives from an academic, critical and gendered lens, in an attempt to address the objectives of this study.

In this thesis, we have tried to understand the different processes and stages involved in *kumeri* cultivation and have documented the different practices associated with *kumeri* cultivation among the Velip community of Canacona which is unique to this region. I say it is unique because it involves local cyclical knowledge that has been handed down from generation to generation in the vernacular form which this study concludes bears some distinct features that are different from the shifting cultivation documented in secondary sources. The whole process is detailed in Chapter Four. Analysing the secondary literature we see that while there are some similarities in carrying out this occupation (which are discussed in Chapter Three and Four), yet there are some unique rituals and practices associated with the practice of *kumeri* cultivation.

The prime uniqueness about *kumeri* cultivation among the Velip community is the significance that it holds for the community and the symbiotic relationship between *kumeri* cultivation, and the rituals, beliefs and the life of the Velip community. This thesis brings out the reasons why *kumeri* cultivation is important in the lives of the Velip community and highlights the involvement of Velip women in the processes, stages, rituals, and practices associated with *kumeri* cultivation.

Also highlighted in this thesis are the impacts of State legislation on the traditional practice of *kumeri* cultivation and the livelihood patterns of the Velip community. This thesis has traced the trajectory of law and policies associated with *kumeri* cultivation and tried to understand both Government and customary laws. We have attempted to understand if the people of Velip community are aware of the laws and to access the impact of the law that has controlled or even banned the practice of *kumeri* cultivation on the lives of those who are dependent on this as a source of livelihood. Finally, we argue that this thesis fills the lacunae in knowledge about the Velip community, the significance of *kumeri* cultivation to the communities such as the Velip community, the inherent preservation of nature and the hurdles and struggles faced by the community that depends on the practice of *kumeri* cultivation for their livelihood.

In this concluding chapter we will focus on some of the factors impacting on the livelihood and rights of the Velip Community to make a case for the following:

1. Inclusion of communities engaged in *kumeri* cultivation in the framing of State law, particularly law about *kumeri* cultivation as it not only impacts the occupation of these communities but also their culture, identity and livelihood.
2. To dispel patronizing, biased and incorrect attitudes about communities such as the Velip community whose livelihood depends on *kumeri* cultivation such as ‘primitive’ or ‘backward’ as there is a rich knowledge system that exists within the community which has sustained the practice as well as the environment and ecology. There is among the community a strong value system and collective culture demonstrated through practices such as *voro*, protection of sacred groves, preservation of seeds, organic farming, health and medicinal plants to list just a few.

3. To inform readers that communities engaged in *kumeri* cultivation are not disrespectful of the environment but have everything to gain from its preservation. There are numerous myths existing related to tribes and the forest, particularly those relating tribal livelihood with climate change.
4. To fill the present lacunae in the knowledge about the Velip community, the agency of Velip women and *kumeri* cultivation. The position of tribal women is more misunderstood and their contribution is never recognized.
5. To launch ideas that would protect *kumeri* cultivation as it is an intrinsic aspect of the culture, identity, life and livelihood of this community.

Summarized below are some of the concerns around livelihood and rights of the Velip Community that have emerged from this thesis:

6.1. Hierarchization of knowledge

This thesis argues that most literature on shifting cultivation has been documented by scholars from outside the community not actually engaged in the shifting cultivation and that there is a problem with the location of the voice of critique. According to some post-modern scholars, the cultivation of knowledge or the expansion of knowledge as a result of the enlightenment is not delivering freedom or liberty or democratic development rather, it has increased social control and domination (Foucault and Gordon 1980). Foucault was critical of the hierarchization of knowledge and argued that knowledge was no longer about human freedom but the exercise of power (ibid 1980). This view holds true when one analyses secondary literature on shifting cultivation as well as State law and attitude towards the Scheduled Tribes. The present criteria followed for notification of tribal communities in India which are listed below, echoes this hierarchization:

1. Indications of primitive traits,

2. Distinctive culture,
3. Geographical isolation,
4. The shyness of contact with the community at large, and
5. Backwardness.

6.1.1 Non Inclusion and biases in Research on Goa

While there is considerable work on the history and sociology of Goa (Bhandari 1999; Bhat 2008; Correia 2006; Gaude 2009; Gomes 1996, 2004; Gune 1979; Khedekar 2004, 2013, 2016; Newman 2001, 2019; Padoshi 1991; Pereira 2017; Phal 1982; Satoskar 1979; Silva Gracias 1996; Sonak 2013; Xavier 1993; and many more books), very scarce in these texts is information about the Velip Community. Some merely mention the community name or detail the community as the original settlers of Goa. This has been discussed in Chapter Three. Therefore there exists very little research on the Velip community and even less where the Velip community were the focal point for the researcher. There also exists some contradictory views like while defining the Velip community in the literature available. For example, some writers in their work described the Velip community as a sub-division of the Kunbis and in some as a sub-division of the Gawda community (Correia L. 2006; Gune 1979; Khedekar 2004; Satoskar 1979). This community has been misrepresented in research (Velip 2010).

Similar contradictions exist in the literature on *kumeri* cultivation. Some scholars discuss *kumeri* cultivation as being hazardous to the environment and fail to acknowledge that it has been a source of livelihood that has sustained several generations of tribal communities. This detailed literature has been discussed in Chapter Three. Further scholars have failed to view shifting cultivation from a gendered lens. Through this research, we have highlighted that *kumeri* cultivation is not only women's occupation but her agency to sustain the community as well as its identity and culture. The involvement of the Velip women in carrying out

this occupation is detailed in Chapter Four. The symbiotic relationship between the community and the forest, the forest and the community's livelihood, women and nature, nature and the spiritual beliefs of the community and therefore the sacredness of the preservation of the forest to every member of the community who depends and have depended on the forest for their survival for generations.

This researcher argues that due to the patriarchal nature of knowledge creation itself, the acknowledgement of this major role played by the Velip women in carrying out this occupation has never come into the limelight from the livelihood perspective.

6.1.2. Definition of Tribe

We have already discussed how the classification of tribes and the criteria and categorization of the community as Scheduled Tribe reveals a hierarchization. Further the different nomenclature used to speak of tribes such as: *Vanvasi*, *Jungli*, *Adivasi*, *Bhumiputra* (son of the soil), first settlers, early inhabitants, indigenous communities, tribes and the recent one that is, Scheduled Tribes are derogatory terms. Then the certificate that the State issues to identify a member of the community as belonging to 'Scheduled Tribes' is in fact a 'caste' certificate.

The debate initiated by Varrier Elwin and G S Ghurye (Guha 1999) wherein Elwin was in favour of isolation of tribes from the mainstream society whereas G S Ghurye 's supported assimilation to the mainstream society, discussed in Chapter One seems to continue to this day and seems to inform most discussions around tribal communities. The voice of the communities concerned has not been heard and the option of human agency and self-determination of community members has not even been seen as an option.

6.1.3. Orientalism in the views on tribe and shifting cultivation

There were many scholars who have defined shifting cultivation from academic as well as from critical perspectives. While defining this occupation, scholars fail to realize its impact on those who are dependent on it for centuries. Orientalism is a critique of Western texts that have represented the East as an exotic and inferior other and constructs the Orient by a set of recurring stereotypical images and clichés. Said's analysis of Orientalism shows the negative stereotypes or images of native women as well (Said 1995). While defining tribe and their traditional occupation like shifting cultivation academicians, environmentalists, botanists, and scholars have demonstrated an Orientalist perspective which has most often promoted inferior, exotic and even inferior and negative images about tribes may have led to strengthen ill-treatment and biases that have now put *kumeri* cultivation into crisis.

6.1.4. Tribal voices not included in State law formation

The Government of India laws and state-specific laws are initiated from time to time. The Forest Conservation Act, 1927, the Forest Conservation Act, 1980 and the New Forest Policy, 1988 were enacted to protect the forest as a state or national resource. At the same time, the Government has set up various committees to deal with tribal issues and concerns as there were clashes between the forest departments and the tribals or forest dwellers. There are legal or constitutional safeguards like the Provisions of Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996 (PESA 1996), the Tribal Sub-Plan (TSP), and The Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006 (FRA, 2006) and rules 2007 which were meant to address some of the prejudices that began during colonial as well as post-colonial period.

While there have been interventions as listed above, there have been no efforts to incorporate the voice of the community people in framing these laws that impact their life and livelihood. It is not surprising then that the community is ignorant of the laws.

Some changes are seen after the introduction of National as well as State level commissions for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes since 2011. Data from 2011 onward till December 2019 was sought from the Goa state Commission on the number of pending cases under ‘atrocities’ since its establishment. There have been 225 cases seeking their rights. As my particular interest was to understand the level of awareness of State interventions be it to control or empower the community and if forest-dwelling communities seek their rights through this mechanism. I was informed that since 2011 there were only five cases and out of these five cases, three were from Canacona against the Forest officials.

Since 2011 there has been an increased awareness of provisions in the law among the tribal communities. According to the information provided by the Directorate of Tribal Welfare, Government of Goa, Panaji, in Goa the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006 was implemented from the year 2011-2012. The total number of applicants since 2011 to 12 December 2019 (letter from the Directorate of Tribal Welfare) from the Scheduled Tribe community who have filed for their rights under this act was 6094 and the total number of beneficiaries was 104. Out of these 6094 cases, the total number of applicants from Canacona was 2555 and the total number of beneficiaries from Canacona was 17. The total number of applicants claimed under the ‘community rights’ since its implementation to December 2019 from Goa and specifically from Canacona was 105 and the total number of applicants claimed under the ‘individual rights’ since its implementation to December 2019 from Goa and specifically from Canacona was 2450. The total number of applications shows their concern about their rights.

The land has always been the most important asset in progressive human stages and there are mythological as well as factual stories associated with land and its people in most communities. Similar was the case in Canacona, Goa. As each village in Canacona is surrounded by dense forest and each ward ends up with a forest edge, the tribal communities in Canacona have been dependent on the forest and natural resources for their livelihood and survival. Within the Velip tribal community, they had their own local laws or self-governance. Each ward even today is headed by a *Budvant* or head with twelve *vangdis* (twelve members). They take decisions on *mand* (a sacred place to take community decisions and also to perform sacred rituals and practices). The customary laws and rights on land, forest, water, spring, trees, and animals are worshipped and therefore protected even before the existence of the Government laws.

6.2. Other concerns related to the implementation of State Law

As discussed above, there are cases seeking justice. Laws concerning safety and security are now introduced but there but no proper implementation which leads to an increase in clashes or crimes against the marginalised communities.

One of the prime aspects of the marginalization of the Velip community is the implementation of forest law and the non-implementation of the Forest Dwellers Act, 2006. There are individual rights and community rights over forest land but people are not aware of it. The power structure in society is that State Laws act as power and community practices and rituals are defined as a livelihood. Because of loopholes in the administrative system of the Government implementation is poor and that makes a mockery of the law. In fact, the tribal communities and more specifically women from the communities are the victims of the new developmental policies or laws or rights. The State promised that every

legislation on the panchayats in the fifth scheduled area shall be in conformity with the customary law, social and religious practices and traditional management practices of the community resources but is this implemented at the panchayat level?

Narayan Velip from Avli, Khotigai, Canacona was cultivating a *kumeri* plot for many years without knowing that it was no more his land as per land record. Suddenly the claimant of the land occupies Narayan's age-old asset. Modernization, technology and computerization of land settlement records are used to alienate the local tribal community who have never claimed for their rights over the common property resources. Legalization has stopped the community people from cultivation as now some land record contains someone's name on a paper. Even after registering for my PhD, the then newly enacted law such as the Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition and Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act 2013, questions were raised across the country with regard to the development in the field of land and rights.

A newspaper article (Tarun Bharat 6th May 2009) dated on 6th May 2009, reported that a delegation of the UTAA (United Tribal Associations Alliance) met the forest commissioner to stop harassment of the ST (Scheduled Tribe) people by the forest officials. There is the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Act, but is it being implemented? The ST community unaware of all these constitutional safeguards and legislation to protect their rights. On 25th May 2011 there was an agitation by the UTAA at Balli which turned violent and where two youth from the community, late Mr. Mangesh Gaonkar and Late Mr. Dilip Velip lost their lives. One of the demands was to implement the tribal forest Act which was enacted in 2006 and was not implemented the state of Goa till 2011 (Gaude 2014).

On 8th October 2013, the Times of India reported that '89 *kumeri* cultivators get *sanads*', and that the South Goa district administration handed over

sanads to 89 *kumeri* cultivators out of 3,000 applications made by the *kumeri* cultivators from Quepem taluka under the Forests Rights Act (FRA).

The *Goa Today*, a periodical reported that the observations of a team of eminent environmentalists participating in a seminar held in the territory of Goa reported ‘*Damage and plunder in the Forests of Goa*’ (Goa Today 1982:243), but that due to lack of awareness and implementation, the ST community have not been able to make use of Government policies and programmes and also reported exploitation, discrimination, marginalization of tribes and their rights.

The Forest Dwellers Act, 2006, which seems to be eco-friendly, human-friendly, nature-friendly and community-friendly, ensures that tribal communities have access to land to practice their traditional source of income activities which means tribal communities are free to practice *kumeri* cultivation, but in reality people of Canacona are not allowed to practice this particular occupation. The forest department keeps a controlling eye on people. Sometimes forest officials remove planted trees citing reasons such as: It is government property, one cannot have income source from it, and one can guard it but cannot use it. Tribal communities residing in the mountainous areas now have access to land which is controlled by the forest department which restricts the communities in practicing their age-old occupation. An elderly woman respondent from Khotigao lamented that ‘we work day and night and at the end, we are not getting enough profit’, she hopes of being able to have the freedom of choosing any land to grow food for livelihood.

Bina Agarwal shows how gender inequalities exist in Hindu inheritance law, Christian law and Islamic law and discusses the implementation of law particularly around agricultural land (Agarwal 2010).

Respondent Mrs. Dropadi Velip said that *aamcha paras forest chadd zada marta* (the forest department cuts more trees than us), *aami tar zada laita kamta marun* (we actually grow trees while practicing *kumeri* cultivation).

6.3. Eco-Velip Women and their Livelihood

The livelihood pattern of the tribal community has been the cause of much debate with little or no concern for the fact that the lives of the community members are interwoven with the forest and nature. They depend on the forest and the traditional occupation like *kumeri* cultivation for their necessities and survival which has made them protectors of nature and forest.

Kumeri cultivation is practiced usually on the hilly slopes in the forests of Canacona of South of Goa, which was abundant in natural resources such as water and fertile soil. Women's involvement in *kumeri* cultivation is core for sustaining family needs. They are the ones who are toiling without any rights and their unpaid work always undervalued (Krishna Raj 2009). Besides doing housework like cooking, cleaning, washing clothes, women also collect firewood, water, wild vegetables, fruits, flowers, tubers, and play an important role in *kumeri* cultivation.

Vandana Shiva in 'Staying Alive: Women, Ecology, and Survival in India' focuses on the development, ecology and the gender debate, talks about ecological struggles in opposing the domination and exploitation of nature (Shiva 2010). She further argues for harmony, sustainability, and diversity of nature and the role women in developing countries such as India play in this regard, arguing that there is a link between the degradation of women and the degradation of nature in society (ibid. 2010). Madhu Kishwar discusses how the Ho tribal women were denied land rights and the important role they played in sustaining family and community (Kishwar 1987).

Already we find changes in the process of practising *kumeri* cultivation when viewed from a then and now perspective. Therefore practising *kumeri* cultivation has become a problem at the same time it is a need of the family. And again searching for an alternative such as garden cultivation, is also seen as a task of women.

6.4. Seed Preservation – Women’s Agency

In the Velip community, it is the women who decide how much to cultivate, how much food will be required for the family as well as for the community rituals, how much produce can be sold for generating income. Storing of seeds is also a task carried out by women. It is done in an interesting way, needing expert or knowledge of how to store seeds for the next year. Different fruits and tubers need different storing techniques which have been discussed in Chapter Four. Sometimes the knowledge regarding seed preservation is handed down from mother to her daughter, sister to sister, neighbour to neighbour, and from one village to another. There is a lot of pride in the vegetables that are grown in Canacona, particularly when they are in demand from people from other talukas of Goa. These vegetables are called *kankonchi bhaji*. In all practices associated with *kumeri* cultivation, the Velip women had agency including in knowledge of storing and preserving different seeds.

In recent times however the Government through the agricultural department has introduced hybrid variety crops and the distribution of these hybrid seeds. This has affected and interfered with women’s knowledge and agency. The hybrid seeds have increased the yield productivity and therefore more and more people are opting for that. The seeds of the fruits and vegetables produced from this high-tech method cannot be stored or preserved or used for the next season, so every time the community members have to rely on the Government for seeds, making them dependent on the government.

Claude Alvares in an article ‘*Old-seeds- for-new? A word of caution!*’ makes an appeal for the preservation of Goa’s traditional rice varieties (Goa Today 1984:12). Research on gender and green governance has focused on women's absence from forestry institutions (Agarwal 2010).

When the British colonized India, they first colonized her forests. Ignorant of their wealth and of the wealth of knowledge of local people to sustainably manage the forests, they displaced local rights, local needs, and local knowledge and reduced this primary source of life into a timber mine. Women's subsistence economy based on the forest was replaced by the commercial economy of British colonialism (Shiva 2010: 61).

Further,

Seeds are the first link of the food chain. For five thousand years, peasants have produced their own seeds, selecting, storing and replanting, and letting nature take its course in the food chain. The feminine principle has been conserved through the conservation of seeds by women in their working food and grain storage. With the preservation of genetic diversity and self-renewability of food, crops have been associated the control by women and third world peasants on germ plasm, the source of all plant wealth. All this changed with green revolution. At its heart lies new varieties of miracle seeds which have totally transformed the nature of food production and control over food systems (Shiva 2010: 120).

In *'Biopiracy: The Plunder of Nature and Knowledge'*, Vandana Shiva discusses the issue of patents and corporate control of the natural world, calling it the colonisation of seeds (Shiva 2012). Shiva (2012: 49) claims that,

Processes like hybridization are the technological means that stop seeds from reproducing itself. This provides capital with an eminently effective way of circumventing natural constraints on the commodification of the seed. Hybrid varieties do not produce true to type seed, and farmers must return to the breeder each year for new seed stock.

The commodified seed is ecologically incomplete and ruptured at two levels. First, it does not reproduce itself, while by definition, seed is a regenerative resource. Genetic resources are thus, through technology, transformed from a

renewable into a nonrenewable resource. Second, it does not produce by itself, it needs the help of other purchased units. And, as the seed and chemical companies merge, the dependence of inputs will increase. Whether a chemical is added externally or internally, it remains an external input in the ecological cycle of the reproduction of seed. It is this shift from ecological processes of production through regeneration to technological processes of non-regenerative production that underlies the dispossession of farmers and the drastic reduction of biological diversity in agriculture. It is the root of the creation of poverty and of non-sustainability in agriculture. Where technological means fail to prevent farmers from reproducing their own seed, legal regulations in the forms of intellectual properties rights and patents are brought in. Patents are central to the colonization of plant regeneration, and like land titles, are based on the assumption of ownership and property (Shiva 2012: 50-51).

6.5. Inseparable relationship between *Kumeri* and Velip

The Velip community is dependent on forest resources for their livelihood and to sustain family needs. According to the secondary literature it is known as the oldest method of cultivation and survival. My preliminary data on the percentage of families from Bhupar, Gaodongri Canacona involved in *kumeri* cultivation revealed that out of 120 families, 109 are practicing *kumeri* either fully or partially. Only 11 families are not involved as their parent house is practicing *kumeri* cultivation and they are getting *kumeri* produce from them. The importance of shifting cultivation as a source of traditional knowledge, livelihood, and belongingness as it is their ancestral occupation cannot be over-estimated among the Velip community. Many generations have survived and continued this as their way of life. It has become an essential part of their lives as it is associated with their socio-cultural practices.

The Velip community is considered as a marginalised community in comparison with other communities and *kumeri* cultivation is an important aspect of sustaining the lives of the community through this occupation. In my own ward (Bhupar, Gaondongri) there were hardly any Government servants. My father was the first one who had done his Matriculation Examination (at that time 11th Standard) from the Poiguinim school in the year 1974 from this ward. My uncles and aunts could not even get a primary school education.

A respondent from Satorlim- Gaodongri said that involvement in this occupation gave him a sense of belongingness as most of the community members from his ward were practising it. Involving in this age old occupation gives rights of self-assertion. The same respondent feared that these are vanishing traditional cultural practices.

Although *kumeri* is seen as a traditional, age-old occupation which is debated all the time by the environmentalists, botanists, and academicians, for the Velip community, it has become part of their culture, their rituals and ceremonies. It has become rooted in their daily activities directly or indirectly.

During a wedding ceremony, both the bride and bridegroom are supposed to take part in many rituals. One such ritual is the *haldi* ceremony. On this day both the bride and groom at their respective houses are supposed to start the day's rituals by placing *toori* in a *kail*. On the day of the *haldi* ceremony, a special sweet dish of *tori* is prepared. *Ovla* flowers are also important for marriage purpose. However much gold is used to adorn the bride, without an *ovla* flower garland, the marriage rituals are incomplete. The same way, without *jino* sticks, mango leaves, *patt* of different flowers, baskets from the Mahar community, *rumda* tree sticks, etc. a marriage ceremony is incomplete.

For daily use items made up of wild creepers such as bowl and containers, fulfils the need to store food items. During annual *zatra* of Mallikarjun *oski* flower is offered to God and therefore *oski* tree and flowers is sacred to the Velip community. The community's life, directly or indirectly is associated with this

occupation. Forest or nature is not just required by the Velip community in their daily lives, it is a way of living. They are happy to remain connected to the *mother forest their whole life and perform an annual pooja and pray to nature and the forest through their life cycle rituals.*

There are certain community beliefs associated with *kumeri* cultivation and one such is once *kumeri* produce is ready for consumption one cannot pluck and eat fruits or vegetables inside the plot. It is believed that if one eats inside the plot than other people are free to take and eat. It is also believed that eating in the plot increases the chances of attracting wild insect, birds and animals. One is however free to eat outside the fencing of the plot. Then, those who grow chilies in the *kumeri* plot are not supposed to use *katti* (coconut shells) for combustion. It is believed that with the use *katti* the chilies get *mutte* (suffer from a plant disease which harms their productivity). It is also believed that one has to offer first fruit to the God or the protector. It is also believed that certain fruits like cucumber should be eaten only after a ritual called *ooshatann*. *Kumeri* cultivation features in several songs within the community as it is rooted in the daily life of the community, particularly the women. There are many unnamed practices among the community that are connected with *kumeri* cultivation. Once the job of *palo galun zalo* (putting dead tree leaves to the crops as manure) is done there is a celebration at home. Women make pole (*dosa*) with *kaju chunnh* which is eaten when work is done. Most of the rituals and practices of the Velip community are eco-friendly as discussed in Chapter Five.

6.6. Interconnected Relationship between Velip and Nature

The close relationship between tribal communities and forests have been much written about in the works of (Bose 1971; Burman 1978; Chaudhuri et.al. 2004; Cohen 1975; Hecht, Morrison, and Padoch 2014; Mahāśvetā Debī, Sengupta, and Sengupta 2002; Malik 2004; Narayan Parker 2000; Patil 2019; Paty, Tata College (Chaibasa, India), and India 2007; Reddy 2018; Seeland et al.

2000; Verma et al. 2002; and in the collection of stories ‘The Adivasi Will Not Dance’, by Shekhar who portrays life in Jharkhand. (Shekhar 2017). In Canacona there are several families living inside the forest areas wherein the community is cut off from modern technology. Community rights have been neglected over the forest rights. Till date, people have no better access to road, water, electricity and other technologies. This has created a distinctive relationship between the tribal community and the forests. The current laws, policies, and rights do not favour people’s rights, rather it has created a sort of conflict between the community members and the forest officials. Around 300 families from Gaodongrim living in the forest areas are claiming back their forest rights. The rest of the families have not been able to make use of the Government provision due to not meeting the mandatory conditions for the implementation of the act.

Tribal communities living in the forest areas are dependent on the forest for their livelihood at the same time they also have ways of conserving forests for their future use. However, tribal communities have been accused of being destroyers of forests and nature. The forest dwelling tribal communities such as the Velip community, worship and protect nature through their local customary laws like *pannh*, *khuti*, *nasazar*, and many other practices. Despite this, there continue to be several myths associated with their traditional pattern of livelihood, namely shifting cultivation which has been for generations linked to indigenous traditional knowledge, food habits, rituals, cultures, language, region, dress and pattern of the lifecycle and demonstrated in this thesis. In fact, many rituals and practices exist without any title or name given to the ritual. Naming the ritual was not considered important as it is part of their lives and it was never required for an anthropologist, sociologist or researcher.

Once on the field in Gaodongri, Canacona I noticed coconut shells scattered around the house so I asked why can’t you use to put fire then the women who were sitting there said that those who grow chilies don’t put it into the fire as it is believed that if you put it in the fire then chilies from the *kumeri*

plot will be rotten. I was wondering about the connection between these two growing chilies and putting fire on coconut shells.

The work *Sacred Ecology* examines bodies of knowledge held by indigenous and other rural peoples around the world and asks how we can learn from this knowledge and ways of knowing (Berkes and Routledge 2018). Berkes explores the importance of local and indigenous knowledge as a complement to scientific ecology and its cultural and political significance for indigenous groups themselves (ibid. 2018). Kimmerer (2013) an indigenous woman scientist argues that plants and animals are our oldest teachers and therefore should be worshipped as a sacred entity and understand the generosity of the earth and learn to protect it.

In earlier times, people from the Velip community were content with a life connected with nature and the forest and were not materialistic. They would hardly travel outside the community to buy things. Only once or twice in a year, they would go for shopping to Sadhavshiv Gad, a border area of Canacona and Karwar in Karnataka, for few items like *churo* (tobacco) and clothing. For wedding related clothing they would go to Babu's shop in Mazali, Karwar where the owner would provide utensils for the community members to cook for all those who took part in *zavli* (shopping for a wedding).

The community link or connection with nature can be seen through the simple way of living. Even in terms of entertainment, the Velip community had their own way of spending time or playing traditional games without spending money on costly toys and gadgets. For example in earlier times, people used to play games like *logoyo*, *khutyani*, *veerani*, *fatrani*, *sipyani/gudani*, *langdi*, *talyat-malyat*, *barani/guli danda*, *lipchani*, *doleh dapun*, *mehdini*, *mitani*, *tablani*, *kabaddi*, *kho-kho*, *chor-pulis*, etc. wherein there was no need to buy things to play. These games were related to the environment where they use to live.

Linking the term ecology and gender in defining the tribal community was a difficult task. Nevertheless, all these terms have some common understanding. The problem becomes more complex when one is evaluated over the other.

Knowing the indigenous knowledge means protecting the ecosystem. Destruction of indigenous knowledge means the destruction of the ecosystem and traditional occupation too. Tribal communities seem to be closer to nature because of geographical settlement and therefore they are highly dependent on nature as a means of livelihood. At the same time awareness of this makes the people be the protector of nature too.

6.7. Velip Community, Women, and Knowledge of Medicine

The Velip Tribal community had their own way of treating diseases. Community members were more dependent on the forest to cure health issues. They had knowledge about the medicinal usage of the forest produce. They preserved knowledge about the medicinal plants through sacredness, which is already discussed in Chapter Five as part of *kadu parab*. For some this traditional knowledge was a source of income. People from the interior of Canacona collect medicinal herbs and shrubs and sell it to earn some money. There are different ways of treating diseases. The knowledge about 1) when to take medicine, 2) how to take the medicine and 3) in what dosage, is not in a written form. This knowledge is in oral form and largely women's domain. There are studies done by (Gomes 1993; Desouza 2000).

While many criticize tribal medicine, narratives such as the experiences of Gary Holz, an award-winning physicist, documented in Holz and Holz (2013) is an eye opener. In 1983 Holz was diagnosed with chronic progressive multiple sclerosis and by 1988 he was a quadriplegic. In 1994 he was told he had two years to live, so in his desperate state, he decided to live with a remote Aboriginal tribe in Australia and lived to tell the tale of the value of the aboriginal healing processes.

6.8. Social Change, Development and the Community

Kamat marap woh aamcha porvazacho dhandho (kumeri cultivation is our ancestral occupation) (Senior respondent from the field)

As there is a growing demand for *kumeri* produce, today while some families are involved in self-sustaining *kumeri* cultivation, others are marketing their produce so that they can earn some money. In *kumeri* cultivation, however, people still do not use modern mechanical tools or chemical fertilizers. Collecting wild roots, tuber, honey, firewood, and other produce from forest boosts their earning capacity while practicing *kumeri*.

Today, it is observed and found that many community people have developed their backyard areas to grow medicinal plants, fruit bearing trees, vegetable plants which they were directly accessing from the forest.

From my childhood till date, I have witnessed the extinction of many things such as the wild flowers *kavaso*, the regular collection of *ovla* flowers fallen from the tree and making garlands to wear. The knowledge of making surge garland, *medhe* (wild flower) or going to *maddhy* to collect it, eating *pitkoli* fruits and even wearing wild flowers as earrings and necklaces. Makeup tips: using paste of *chandan*, or *aboli* leaves paste on our face, eating *chapera* and *nidduka* and later on playing with its seeds. Eating *chara* and keeping seeds for drying and then the next day, eating seeds by breaking the shells of it. Not asking questions on the relevance of *pann* and simply following what elders say. During the Christmas break going to hunting for *kanera*, *chivra*, *chaphera*, *dhade*, then in April for *kasma* and *jambhla* (*jambhul*).

Making of *dayeee* does not exist as there is no domestication of cattle and therefore celebration of *gorva padvo* is just for namesake. *Kumache* and *kevniche vayeh* replaced by nylon rope. *Bidna sola* (*Cocum*) and *aathamba sola* replaced by tomatoes or *aamtanh* (tamarind) or *aamchur*. *Chaye* or wild tubers have been

replaced by potatoes. Local games are replaced by digital technology like mobile phones and laptops. Local food is replaced by fast food and local festivals are holidays for those who are working in the *kumeri* plot.

Dominant state laws about *kumeri* cultivation have contributed to the further marginalization of the Velip community while some policies and programmes such as reservation for the Scheduled Tribes have aided community members to get Government paid jobs and this has changed the social status of those in service. Those however who are working at the bottom of the pay scale are not able to cope with today's high cost of living in Goa. Due to jobs, many people cannot stay in the interiors regions of Goa such as Canacona, therefore, one has to settle down in the city for which one's whole salary is spent. People from the tribal community have realized that jobs are not as attractive and that being in service has made them dependent when they were earlier self-reliant. Many people from areas such as Canacona are now choosing to invest in their traditional occupations like *kumeri* cultivation than to be in paid employment.

For centuries nature was the source of security, livelihood, knowledge, devotion, identity, tradition and customary law within tribal communities such as the Velip Community. In the generation of my grand-parents, community people lived in the villages located in the forest and were dependant on nature. Communities moved about freely in the forest in search of medicinal plants and at the same time cultivated crops for their own survival wherever the community had settled. At that time, ownership of land was not a concern. Even during my father's generation people from my particular ward as well as those from Gaodongri and Khotigao used to stay at *Dhanno* (at the top of the forested hill) which today people only go to for religious purposes. Due social change and need for access to better facilities like roads, schools, health care and modern medicine, as well as for markets, and other facilities for the monetary advancement, people chose to move from *Dhanno* to the bottom of the hills where they are mostly staying at present. This journey from *Dhanno* to the present settlement brought

about changes in the *kumeri* cultivation. The changes include a market oriented approach to the traditional livelihood and the emergence of settled agricultural activities on the plains and vegetable garden cultivation in their new settlement areas. *Kumeri* cultivation has now moved from being a self-sustaining source of livelihood to being an income generating occupation.

Kumeri produce is today famous all over Goa, particularly the *Kamta mirsang* or *Khola* chilli or Canacona chilly, which is now highly in demand due to its taste. It is also because people use less fertilizer and more of organic manure of composted leaves which is detailed in Chapter Three. Most of the families try to cultivate chillies at least for their own consumption due to lesser availability of land for cultivation. Due to lack of availability of land, some families are cultivating or investing in their neighbours or relatives place. Different vegetables and chillies are grown in *porus* (winter season) and these chillies are called as *porsa mirsang* or winter chillies and for vegetables, it is called as *porsa mirsang* or *porsa bhaji*. *Porus* is done usually in the paddy fields after the paddy has been harvested, that is usually in the month of November with few similar procedures like *kumeri* cultivation where there is the availability of water. As Khedekar (2013: 23) stated.

Chilli is a Goan product, which may be assumed from the fact that the Kulmi community traditionally grows and markets it in considerable quantities. This is a major source of their cash income. The area where chilli is grown is known as Kamtam- a plot of a specific area is marked for the purpose. The number of Kamtams measures the socio-economic status of a Kulmi family, where the chilli is grown, planted and plucked. A few varieties of chilli are planted in an area adjacent to their homes for domestic uses.

The sale price of *kumeri* produce was based on quality, quantity, demand, availability, nutritional values, and also market place or distance from the *kumeri* plot. The below mention is place/distance wise sale price. Detailed below are the prices of melon and chillies compared:

Table No 6.1: Location-wise prices of Melon and Chillies

Market Location	Price of (Moge/ Muskmelon) Rs	Price of (Dongri mirrchi/ Canacona chillies) Rs
Canacona	50	500
Margao	80	700
Panaji	100	800

Prices as on December 2019

Tribal communities are known for their socio-cultural livelihood which is surrounded by natural vegetation, springs and mountains, and the forest was the prime source of livelihood for them. They followed earlier a sustainability pattern of livelihood. With education and modern technology in tribal belts, the community has started imitating cultural practices of ‘others’. Balancing the traditional and modern is sometimes a difficult task for the community people and it is often seen as women’s role to preserve custom and identity.

The livelihood pattern amongst the Velip community today is changing from traditional to modern with the emergence of new ST elite within the community which has widened the gap of marginality. The exploitation or destruction of traditional systems has led to the destruction of traditional knowledge systems as it is not in a written form. The knowledge about the locally available forest produce is also not documented in a written form. Modernization has impacted the traditional pattern of livelihood, particularly among the present young generation. Therefore the forest which was considered as the community’s treasure is losing its significance.

Once I was walking on the Goa University campus in the month of August and noticed saw *shirgaal* (small mushrooms) growing on the wet mud. I stopped two women who were working in the administrative block and asked them if they eat such small mushrooms and they said ‘no’. If this was in the interior villages,

people would have taken them home to prepare a dish. Many times when we travel from one place to another we come across different vegetables, plants, seeds, and because of lack of knowledge we are not been able to use it. The present generation, as well as future generation, will face this type of problem as there is no such bonding with nature as the connection between the community and the nature getting severed.

6.9. Threats to this Livelihood

We have seen in the earlier subsection how education and seeking a higher standard of living has impacted *kumeri* cultivation. There are several other threats and struggles faced which include:

Environment and climate: *Kumeri* cultivation is dependent on environmental conditions. Sometimes, due to bad weather, there are chances of crops getting spoiled or destroyed. Some time due to heavy rain or no rain for five days can destroy crops.

Rodents and other pests: Sometimes, when women store seeds for next cultivation, unfortunately, gets destroyed or eaten away by rats or insects. Sometimes, when the crop is ready to harvest wild animals or birds destroys it

No guarantee of safe or healthy work environment: In the forest, there are often chances of getting infected by some wild insect, encounter a snake bite, or wild animals which may harm or destroy human lives. There have been instances wherein people have died in the forest due to lightening, snake bite while collecting mushrooms, people injured while hunting, or catching crabs and fresh water fish. Some people from the community have even died falling from the top of the tree while cutting trees.

Community people joining paid employment even as temporary labor has transformed *kumeri* cultivators to daily wage labourers.

Today during vacation break from school the children go for summer camps, workshops, training courses, or for coaching classes but most of the Velip community children used to earlier accompany their parents in their work, help in house chore activities, and even collect water, firewood, and help watch over the *kumeri* plot.

Today people are using forest produce not only to sustain families but also as an income generation source. Huge trees are used for making furniture and also for import and export purposes.

Laws have also resulted in extensive land alienation in the scheduled areas of the country. The taking over forests by the Government has led to fights between the traditional cultivators of the *kumeri* plots. In several places, tribal's have even lost access to their traditional or ancestral lands

Community rights over the forest have been neglected which has led to conflict between the community members and the forest officials. Till date, people living in the forest areas have no access to road, water, electricity, or other technologies for a better quality of life. This has created a peculiar relationship between the tribal community and forests. According to the press around 300 families from Gaodongrim living in the forest areas going to get back forest rights however this is yet to be materialized.

According to the Forest Dwellers Act, 2006, tribal communities have access to land to practice their traditional source of income activities which means tribal communities are free to practice *kumeri* cultivation but people of Canacona are not allowed to practice this particular occupation. There is a Forest department which keeps eyes on people. Sometimes Forest officials remove planted trees saying that it is government property and one cannot have an income source from it, and one can guard it but cannot use it.

Practicing *kumeri* cultivation, while it is a need for those family residing near or in the forest, it has become a problem and people are searching for alternatives such as garden cultivation that is also the task of women. The age-old

way of coping with life by being self-sufficient has become a problem affecting women in particular.

Earlier the community used to grow different crops in different plots. For example, there was a separate plot for *nachne*, separate plot for chilies, separate plot for tubers, separate plot for *torand* and separate plot for *vori thandul*. Today access to land has been denied and this is under threat.

Government subsidies for high yielding seeds and Self Help Groups (SHG) are also a threat to traditional knowledge systems and self-reliance of the community. By introducing a high variety of hybrid seeds and plantation crops, while short term profit has resulted, the State agricultural department holds power and control over the cultivation. It has made farmers more dependent. Our traditional way of storing and preserving seeds for the future is declining which results in a decline in traditional practices and traditional knowledge too. *Kumeri* cultivation as a livelihood is under threat.

Laws and policies have resulted in more challenges to the community and greater vulnerability or marginalization from their source of livelihood. Therefore there is a need to give freedom to the community to protect their forest or nature which they have been doing for generations through their customary laws.

6.9.1. Power, money, and threats to the system of *voro*

For centuries the tribal communities especially were never a part of the globalised economy as they had their own traditional practices, the culture bound by a collective consciousness. The practice of *Voro* is one such example of sharing each one's expertise, which gave respect to the division of labor and occupational specialization among different communities. In one way the existing system among the tribal community gave the community cohesive power. The system of *Voro* created a peaceful co-existence and harmonious co-relations between the communities. The exchange of goods for goods shared productivity.

Exchange of goods for services shared each one's dependability. And the exchange of services for services formed a laissez-faire economy.

The system of *Voro* is dying or struggling in these contemporary times and the existing village pattern of inter-dependence is going to vanish completely.

According to Karl Marx (Marx 1974:189) in his theory of alienation as a critique of capitalism, 'Money is the alienated essence of man's labor and life and this alien essence dominates him as he worships it. The same can be said of some of the changes within the Velip community, particularly to the practice of *voro*. Marx believed that capitalism was the cause for the division of labour in society, and thus was in favour of its abolition and wanted to replace it with a system of common ownership of the means of production (Fowkes and Fernbach 1981).

While the capitalist system thus promotes more efficient use of resources is also continually encourages higher levels of material, energy and informational resources. Private enterprise thrives on ever-greater consumption of the goods and services it produces. In all capitalist societies, people are sucked into a rat race, consuming more and more of the resources of the earth (Gadgil and Guha 1995: 121).

Goa has been for the last five decades, a popular tourist destination that has resulted in a high per capita income in this state. It has been ahead of most states in this country even in terms of the laws that govern the area. There have been many women and child friendly laws such as the Portuguese Uniform Civil Code, Comunidade Code, Goa Children Act 2003. The state perspective on tribal communities though has been problematic. There is a need for better facilities for tribal communities of Goa. The literacy percentage of the Scheduled Tribes in Goa is 79.1% in comparison with the state average of 88.7%, therefore, there is a gap of 9.6% (Census 2011). Indigenous or local knowledge of forest, land, water, flora, and fauna should be preserved or protected. Tribal philosophy

and knowledge need to be assimilated into the formal knowledge system so that people can make use of it in their day to day life.

6.10. Making a case for preservation of *Kumeri* Cultivation

The value of *kumeri* cultivation is yet to be realized both by people from within the Velip community and those outside. During the final phase of my PhD work, in the month of August 2019, the life of the people of Goa was disrupted due to heavy rains. During that time the transportation of goods from neighbouring states was completely stopped due to landslides that happened at Choral and Anmod Ghats. It greatly inconvenienced people residing in cities like Panaji, Margao, Mapusa, and Vasco who faced a lot of hardships due to the shortage of food. The people residing in rural places like Canacona, Sanguem, and Quepem, engaged in *kumeri* cultivation were comparatively well off as they were able to meet their basic needs like milk, vegetables, and other food items. They had their own store of rice, chillies, dried fish, pulses, turmeric, tamarind, *cocum*, coconut and salt in bulk quantities to survive the food shortage in the market. Community people have spent their whole life doing all these things without recognizing their contribution to this sustainable village pattern.

Mere romanticizing existing tribal society is no solution to preserving their livelihood and in this contemporary period, we need to address the debates raised by the environmentalists, botanist or academicians against *kumeri* cultivation. The voice needs to be heard therefore of those whose livelihood had depended on this occupation. *Kumeri* cultivation was a source of their livelihood and therefore a source of knowledge too. There is a need to rethink the current patterns of development and give space for the experiences and knowledge of women of this community in the field of political, economic, and social spheres to bring changes and to encourage equality and sustainability. *Harvesting Feminist Knowledge for*

Public Policy argues for an inclusive approach (Jain and Elson 2011) and in the same way, the Velip eco-knowledge should be part of policy formation.

The astonishing aspect of the system of agriculture was that it actually benefitted the forest: witness the best forests were invariably in those areas where *kumeri* was practiced. (Goa Foundation 2002:125).

The Government of Goa has started an initiative with regards to legalizing the *kumeri* plots and giving land entitlement rights. The preservation of *kumeri* should be mandated as well.

6.11. Challenges faced and future areas of study

There were difficulties faced while carrying out this research as this has never been researched before. Further, the community members would often use terms which are hardly known by youth today so there was some difficulty in understanding the terms even though I belong to the Velip community. The same confusion was initially faced in understanding the measurement of *kumeri* plots and therefore had to be physically measured by this researcher. Then while referring to the processes, community members had their own, local, oral calendar and this researcher had to match it with the calendar that larger society understands.

Terms of measurement used includes *Ek aanahte, ek aateh, ek shher, ek manneh, ek pailee, ek kudo, ek khannh, ek kumh*, etc. For example, *donn aanahte* means *ek aateh*, *donn aateh* means *ek shher*, *donn shher* means *ek manneh*, *donn manneh* means *ek pailee*, *donn pailee* means *ek kudo*, *vis kudoh* means *ek khannh*, *vis khannh* means *ek kumh*. It is the way of measurement within the community. Also, other ways of measurements like *eeleshe, ek chemtibhar, ek muttbhar, ek konohli, ek haatashirbhar, ek padbhar, ek soop, ek vaarbhar or ek haatbhar, ek mudy, ek vaatoh, ek vaje, ek bani*, has no proper measurement but used by the community members.

Whenever I had a conversation about my topic in my own ward, I used to easily understand as the places which they were referring to were known to me. But when I had gone to other places like Khotigao, Khola Agonda and Polem, it was difficult for me to understand the name of the places which are very confined to that specific ward and which are not even listed in the Panchayat data or anywhere for that matter.

Field visits were occasional as it is not possible to go regularly so I could not visit each and every plot of *kumeri* for my study as people choose mountainous areas for the cultivation which were very difficult even for me to reach there.

While doing this research it has strengthened my ideas about community life and livelihood and unlocked many new areas of interests. This project has opened new doors for further research on the topic in the future. Each aspect of the Velip community can be researched independently, therefore, there is scope for further future research and creation of new knowledge. The project of studying one's own tribal community was an enriching as well as a challenging experience. Due to time constraints and also to be in the framework I have set focus on the limited aspects of the community life pattern. Daily activities of the community should be detailed. Therefore each aspect of the community life opens up for research independently. For example, the system of *Voro* can be studied independently to understand its roots and relevance, so also sacred groves, preservation of seeds, traditional medicine and so on.

Being an insider and researching on one's own community as stated by Srinivas (Srinivas 2008) will bring unheard voices of the tribal people to the mainstream. Scholars like Dr. Surya Gaude, Mr. Vijay Gawas, Mr. Devidas Gaonkar, Mr. Datta Velip, Mr. Sanjay Tawadkar, Adv. Joao Fernandes, and many young researchers including myself who are on the way to recognition of our contribution as tribal scholars.