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**THE ROLE OF GOWDA SARASWATH BRAHMIN  
COMMUNITY IN KERALA**

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**ABSTRACT**

*Gowda Saraswath Brahmins (Konkanis) are Aryans in origin that lived in the banks of the now extinct river Saraswati of the upper Punjab. The name of the river has been mentioned in Rig Vedas and Purnas. This river was supposed to be dried up about 4000 years ago and it does not exist now. Due to severe drought lasted for many years resulted in Konkanis leaving the place and migrating to various places in India. The existence of Swaraswati river has also been confirmed by recently traced satellite imagery and archaeological research with evidence of river bed sand and water quality, currently analyzed form deep underground water channel in both states of Hariyana and Rajasthan. Scientist has found out that due to tectonic shift in the earth layers, the river completely disappeared. Due to destruction and femine people migrated to different parts of the country. Since they lived to the north of the Vindhya they were distinguished by the appellation of Gowda' i.e. belongs to the northern sect of Brahmins. They lived in the gowda Desh, Bihar and Bengal. A prefix of Gowda became a part of their nomenclature and called as Gowda Saraswt Brahmins. The Brahmins were divided into two groups, those to the north of the vindhaya known as ' Pancha Gaudas' while to the south as ' Pancha Dravidas'*

**KEYWORDS:** Gowda, Pancha Gaudas, Saraswath Brahmins, Saraswat Muni

## INTRODUCTION

Kerala is the state situated on the south west part of India where people of different races and religion came and settled here centuries back. Kerala was having trade relations with the outside world through sea and land from time immemorial. Many studies have been carried out on these people who have settled here. This study focuses on one such group, Gowda Saraswath Brahmins (GSB). Gowda Saraswath Brahmins are a part of the Saraswath Brahmin community in India. They speak Konkani as their mother tongue. It is assumed that these communities have originated from the Brahmins who lived on the banks of now extinct river Saraswathy of Upper Punjab or Kashmir. Their name might have originated from the river Saraswati or from their spiritual leader sage Saraswat Muni who stayed on the banks of Saraswathy. They belonged to the Smarta traditions and primarily worshipped the deities Shiva, Vishnu, Devi, Surya and Ganesha. In course of time the Saraswat Brahmins have migrated to various locations, mainly in the western coast of India. Gowda (Gauda) Saraswath Brahmins also known as Konkani Brahmins, their community name is 'Gowda Saraswath Konkanastha.' The Konkani who are also known as kanarins, though a small community in Kerala, they are very influential. The konkan Brahmins belongs to the Aryan stock as mentioned in Kerala Saraswats' by N.purushothama Mallya. The word konkani is described both as a Language of the Indian sub continent and a group of people. According to the tradition Loard Parasurama brought ten families and settled them in Kushasthali in Goa. They flourished there under the Vijayanagar Rajas and during Portuguese rule, They did trade in European goods But due to the religious persecution they left this land and came south wards to Malabar and from there they have migrated to cochin and Travancore later and become one of the most flourishing communities at present.

In his book 'Kerala Saraswats' Sri N Purushotham Mallya has stated that the Konkan Brahmins belongs to the Swaraswat section of Gowda Brahmins as distinguished from the Dravida Brahmins who inhabited south India ethnically. The Konkan Brahmins may be classified as of Aryan stock. He has also stated that the Gowda Saraswath Brahmins ( Konkani) are Aryans in origin who lived on the banks of now extinct river saraswati. In the book ' A hand book of Kerala ' Sri T Madhava Menon has mentioned that traditionally the Brahmins are classified into Pancha Gouda and Pancha Dravida whether they were on the north or south of holy Narmada respectively. Saraswths belongs to the Pancha Gowda group. In the ' Rayasapatr' of Sri H.H Upendra Thirtha Swamy of KashiMath in 1657 AD it is mentioned that 12,000 Saraswat families fled from the salcette district of Goa as a result of the decree issued by King Jacob of Portuguese in 1559 AD , expelling non believers of Christianity. About 4000 went to north east and settled down at

Maharashtra and Indore and the others went to the south and settled down in Karwar and South Kanara. Sri.P. K Gopi, "Thripunnithurayum Hill Palassum" it is mentioned that the Raja of Cochin Kesha Rama Varma ( 1565-1601) was the most calibrated king of cochin in Portuguese period. He was having interest to allot shelter to the Brahmin refuges free of cost. But Raja allotted a place called cherlai at the cost of 3 ½ Kashu (equal to a small gold coin of at that period.) Like this so many writer gave details of the Gowda Saraswat Brahmins who have settled in different location in India, which helped a lot to study about their settlement. The history of Gowda Sraswath Brahimis help to learn about the history of Kerala also It also enable us to learn about the circumstances in which the Gowda Swarawath Brahmins were forced to migrate to south India especially to Karnataka and Kerala. Also help us to learn about the extinct river Saraswti and the community origin form that particular.

The spread of the cults of Mahavira and Gautam Budha in the sixth century BC and the terrible famine that prevailed in about 297 BC started the migration of Saraswats to other parts of India. The historians have recorded their migration to Trihotrapur, Tribute divisions of Bihar where they spread Aryan culture amongst the common people. They inhabited many parts of Punjab, Kashmir. Singh, Rajaputana and also Saurashtra. Their further migration from Bihar to Gomantak is recorded in the 'Salyadri Khand' of Skanda Purana. According to legend, Sri Parasurama brought the Gowda Saraswat Brahmins from Trihotrapur and settled them in a place called Kushasthali in Goa, a portion of land created by him. As per legend Konkan, Tuluva and Kerala are the creations of Loard Parasurama. The Saraswats settled themselves in two western provinces of Goa. 66 settlements of 10 Gothras ( sarasti) and 30 settlement ' tiswadi' Later they were known as Shannavikars or settlers of 96 villages and become Shannavaits and ultimately in Maharashtra they are still called as Shenysis. In course of time the ten gothras multiplied and with the passage of time they took to trade and commerce besides officiating as priests. In Goa they have flourished well. Over centuries they had their share of trvails of history. During Alauddhin's conquest of the Decan in 1294 AD temples and houses were pillaged and plundered. A brave hearted Saraswat Brahmin Madhave Mantri joined hands with the Vijaya nagar ruler Sri Hari Hara II and ousted the Mulsims from Goa.

The presiding duty of Vijayanagar kingdom was Sri Venkateswar. This worship is still followed by Saraswats of Kerala and South Kanara. Saraswats built hundreds of shrines and temples. Gomatak (Goa) became a golden land for them for a long time and was the most prosperous period of their times. The Muslim rulers of Bijapur invaded Goa in 1406 A.D. With the intention of spreading their religion started to convert Hindus to Muslims forcefully and destroyed a lot of temples with the plundering and

destruction of Goa in 1470 A by Mohammed Shah III and during Portuguese rule in Goa later called upon the Saraswat Brahmins to embrace Christianity. Under the Portuguese rule in Goa, the Saraswats suffered a lot. The Portuguese king Joao I ordered to discover all the idols and demolish and destroy them proclaiming severe punishment against anyone who shall dare to work, cast make sculptures engrave or paint etc. According to Dr. TR De' Souza,' form 1540 AD, onwards all the Hindu idols, disappeared due to destruction of temples and the sites are utilized to erect Christian churches and chapels Due to the atrocities of the Portuguese, the saraswat families fled from the salcelte district of Goa. Some of them went to Maharashtra and Indore and others settled down in the south in Karwar and South Kanara and from there to Kerala.

The Konkani speaking people of Kerala are immigrants from Goa whose ancestors came and settled down in Kerala around 1560 A.D. to escape the religious persecution at the hands of the Portuguese's in Goa. As per records preserved at the state archives Department of Kerala at it Regional office at Ernakulum, the first immigration to Kerala by this community took place in the year 1299 A.D during the attack of Goa by Alauddhin khiji. As per the records Gowdas Sara swath Brahmin community in Kerala are very pious, God fearing and at the same time enterprise in wordless pursuits Gowda Saraswats known as Konkani have made an indelible mark in the history of Kerala . Though they are self made, the benevolent and tolerant rulers of Kerala have provided necessary climate for the free development of this community. Cochin was their strong hold. At first they had the idea to settle down in Calicut but the Zamorin had no interest in them. So the Konkannies were forced to move out and settle down at Cochin and Travancore around 1560 AD. Kesh Rama Varma, the Raja of Cochin during that time was benevolent king of Cochin in Portuguese period. The king has allotted to them a place called cherlai ( a place filled with mind) at the cost of 3 ½ kashu per feet . It was the same period the dynasty has allowed the jews who are foreigners to settle down and build synagogue for them. As per the records (history of Cochin) the Konkannies did not get position and considered as second class, had no right to enter the temple which shows the Portuguese influence in the Cochin state.

After words Konkannies have flourished in business and the dynasty began to give them position. The Cochin Raja Kesava Rama Varma gave Gowda swaraswath Brahmins a rent free site in Mattanchery to builds the famous Thirumala Devasom temple in 1599. King Vira Kerala Varma (1624-1637) gave them certain rights and privileges to be enjoyed by them , The Raja of cochin began to give them full support and particular places for their identity which led the Portuguese to have clash with the Raja of Cochin. In 1662 they have attacked Cochin Royal place and the Thirumala Temple. The

business centers in Cochin were also attacked. This incident affected the whole community.

By the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century Konkannies became an important community. After their settlement in Cochin, the Saraswath became supreme in trade and commerce. But the year 1791 was marked by the terrible persecution of the Konkannies at the hand of Raja Ramavarma also known as Saktan Thampuram. The Raja arrested number of Konkani merchants on refusal to give jiggery and ordered them to pay customs to the king violating the agreement made with Dutch in the year 1772 though the Dutch has warned the consequences, in October 1791, the leading merchants of the Konkani community were massacred and killed three overseers of Tirumala devasom temple , and also plundered the shops and carried away the merchant's property. Seeing the atrocities the Dutch attacked the King's place, at Mattancherry but were repulsed. This forced the Konkannies to flee south wards to Thurovoor and Alleppey in the state of Travancore. They were allowed to settle at Alleppey and install the idol in a settle at the Alleppey canal with an assurance bring about their return to Cochin when better atmosphere prevailed. Alleppey prospered as a business center during the stay of the Konkannies there and the prosperity was attributed to the power of Lord Venkateswara installed there.

The successor of Saktan Thampuram took keen interest to get back the idol of Lord Venkateswara to Cochin. The Konkannies planned to bring back the idol to Cochin by hook or crook and ultimately the idol was smuggled out and brought to Cochin. It was found that the king of Cochin too was involved in this crime. Fierce legal battle followed for decades between the Rajas of Cochin and Travancore. At the end Gowda Saraswath Brahmin community of Cochin won the case. The idol of the lord was consecrated for the third time at the renovated temple in the year 1881 once again the duty was brought from Cochin and place in the old Themale's northern Agrasala. Gowda Saraswath Brahmins dominated in trade. Purakkadu and Kochi had equal importance in trade. Due to the disturbances in the ocean at purakkadu the port was destroyed and they moved to nearby towns like Alappuzha, Kayamkulam, Thiruvalla, Kozhencherry, Kottayam and Changanassery and settled there. Gowda saraswat communities are having differnt surnames. The name of shenoy is associated with the saraswats of kushasthali and kelosi who were mostly Accountants' teachers or Govt, employees. Kamaths were agricultural land holders, Kaudavas grain collectors, Nayaks Military officers, Bhandary, guardian of treasury, Keni or Kini a person in charge of treasury, mahale or Mallya a person in charge of a mahal or sub taluk, prabhu the chieftain of a village. Bhats were priests. But while declaring their names in religious rites, ablutions etc. saraswat Brahmins were sharmas.

## CONCLUSION

From the above studies we can see that the Gowda Saraswati Brahmins are a well knit community who has survived the natural calamities like famine, drought etc. and the onslaught of religious persecutions by the invaders. They were forced to flee from place to place in south India. They were having their own customs, rites and rituals. In Kerala they became progressive being good traders and business men. They have constructed their own temples and Educational Institutions. While looking at the history of Gowda Swaraswat Brahmins one can see that like other castes. They too have their own myths associated with their migration and settlement. These myths have helped these communities to claim a superior social status along with the Brahmins of Kerala. They maintain their own temples. Temples are functioning as a hub of socio- cultural and economic activities among the Konkanyies.

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