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Songs and Music

The Konkani songs of Goa touch every aspect of life. Goans have them in a wide fascinating variety from the most elemental, sung in primitive abandon to the most sophisticated sung in dance halls and on the stage. Though Goa has been under foreign domination for the longest period in India, Konkani songs fortunately did not disappear in the face of cultural upheavals. They have grown out of the loamy, red soil of Konkani in a colourful variety of ways, with an appeal that is unique.

When in 1953 the Director-General of UNESCO, Dr. Gordon Frazer visited some of the All India Radio stations in India to make a selection of folk-songs, he was thrilled to choose only Kashmiri, Bengali and Konkani folk-songs which UNESCO not only broadcast but sent in recordings to many foreign stations, as folk-songs representing India. In recent years the Bombay Madrigal Singers under the baton of Victor Paranjoti has performed with success Konkani songs collected and arranged by Prof. Lucio Rodrigues in some of the premier cities of Europe. It is also known that the Gramophone Co. of Calcutta selected recently for national and international market only Konkani songs out of all the stocks sent to them by All India Radio. It is equally not a secret that foreigners who come to the Taj-Mahal and other premier hotels in India, like to listen to Konkani tunes which bring them a mystique of an oriental melody.

About 20 years ago when the 'Goan Folk Song and Dance Society' under the direction of Prof. Antsher Lobo organized the big show of folk-songs and dances of Goa, Governor J. Colville, Sarojini Naidu, Gen. Cariappa and others, like the international writer Salvador Madariaga, expressed immense admiration at the wealth of Konkani songs. We must also bear in mind that a segment of Goans have been completely denationalized by the impact of the Portuguese dominance. This has led to their neglect of their own songs. I have heard some Goans from East Africa sing Swahili songs, but they themselves did not know that the tunes were nothing but Konkani. Two Goans also narrated to me the strange experience that they discovered the richness of Konkani songs only by listening to the *Daknni "Hanv Saiba Poltodde Vetam"* over the German Radio. 'Goan Centre' in Madrid is also popularizing Konkani songs by processing new records which find encouraging response from some of the world markets.

For a Goan, from the cradle to the grave life is but song. He hums before he lisps, sings before he cries! The cradle songs in Goa are called **Painno** or **Halio**. Though they are few, they are fine expressions of lilting tunes, the best being "*Painnem Halounk*" and "*Dol re baba dol*". Goans do not, in fact, possess something like the birth songs of Punjab, *Holar* or of Uttar Pradesh, *Sohar* which are sung by women in chorus to celebrate the birth of the newly-born son, nor do they possess the more advanced nursery rhymes of the West.

There cannot be birth without marriage in society. So marriage is the theme of many a folk-song in Konkani. Goans have songs on the different ceremonies connected with marriage. After the engagement Christians and Hindus as well follow more or less the same Konkani customs. These songs which accompany the different stages of marriage are called **Zotis**. Rice is symbolic of prosperity and fertility. It is sent with all the presents which go from the bride's home to the bridegroom's and vice-versa. Thus we have the interesting

Zoti "*Hea amcheam tandvank bensav dita*" (Thus our rice is blessed). Then there is the ceremony of the bathing the bride and the groom at their respective places with coconut milk. This is supposed to purify each of them from all the sins in their state of singleness. A song accompanies this act of bathing:

"Apu-apu rosu/Kadi ailo khateak,/ Ghansun, ghansun laia mateak,/ Nourea, nourea bab gai amcho". While referring to the bride: "*Loklokit gai motianchi,/ Okol bai go amchi*".

In Goa it is customary for a girl, before marriage, to buy and wear the best bangles from the usual village bangle-seller. This is called *chuddo*. The bangles are a symbol of married life. She breaks them only on the coffin of her husband. The ceremony of wearing a predominantly green set of bangles is also accompanied by typical songs.

Meanwhile relatives visit the two houses. There are women who are experts in the art of ex-temporization, and they engage themselves in singing the virtues of bride and

bridegroom. There is competition in song like the *Chhand* of the Punjabis, and one woman vies with another to pay tributes to the nearest relatives of the bride or the groom. Then follows a series of songs, sung while cooking, while receiving the blessing of parents, while going for the nuptials and finally while the bridal couple enters the reception hall, as the father and mother bless the couple at the doorstep with a gift of gold or money. There are songs sung by masked friends when they come the next day to wash the feet of the bridal couple who in turn tip them liberally. All the traditional ceremonies are accompanied by appropriate songs. In Konkani the undercurrent of strained relationship between the bride and her sister-in-law is not laid bare as in Tamil for instance, where the latter has a dig at the new housewife:

"She has in her so much / Spirit and restlessness / That she can without much / Strain sweep a whole city."

Western influence has wrought its havoc in the rural world. Most of these wedding songs are fast disappearing. The celebration of a Goan wedding today is accompanied by the latest jazz pieces or Indian classical recitals. The only redeeming feature is the **manddo**. This word derives from the Sanskrit *mandala*=circular movement. Indeed originally the Konkani dance *manddo* implied movement in circles. At present the circular patterns are resorted to when the dancers work themselves up to fever-pitch. Usually the dancing is in parallel lines moving gracefully like waves to and fro, the men displaying colourful handkerchiefs and the ladies their attractive fans. The *manddo* is essentially a song of love, with all its moods of dreams and disenchantments. It mirrors in a rhapsody of rhythm the pageant of the throbs and sobs, the pangs and disillusionings of the Goan lover. The *manddo* moves majestically in andante rhythm, with dignity and grace. The singing falls into a 'dormente' mood only when the singers get drowned in alcohol. The *manddo* grown out of folk-work in a process of sophistication and stylization is now a classical rather than a folk-song, like the classical melody provided by

the Punjab Hills, *Pahari*. In *manddo* the structural pattern remains Indian, in spite of being exposed to Western plain-song and harmony. Though it is often sung to the accompaniment of Western instrument like the piano or the violin, the *ghumot*, a local percussion instrument which is typical of Goa alone, is used to set the right beat which moves faster and faster to a crescendo. The best *manddos* are those that tell of saddest thought: "*Surya devon gelo*" (After the sunset,) "*Suria-Neketrachea porim porzolta*" (Like the sun and stars you shine, my angel), "*Sounsar Charuch re dissancho*" (This life is short), "*Sodanch Utton hanv Sokallim*" (Daily awaking early morning) etc. A similar song — *Mahiya*, hauntingly sweet, savouring of sadness, particularly at the separation of dear ones is found in the Punjab.

Though the *manddo* is indeed a song of love par excellence, not a few *manddos* have been written on themes of a political nature. Many *manddos* glorified or satirized political parties and opponents, mainly in 1887. Thus we have *manddos* on elections, municipal and parliamentary, on the Revolts of the Ranés or on Kustoba's daring, on the slaying of Captain Garcez at the Divar elections of 1854 etc. A widely known political *manddo* is "*Setembroche Ekvisaveri*", commemorating one of the political events in Goa. In it love and admiration for a popular leader Jose Inácio Loyola, is vividly brought out: "*Kitulo boro Loyola amcho! Porjechea mogacho! Nuim to pottache boricho*". The Luso - British Treaty of 1878 for the facilities of Marmagoa Harbour etc. was the target of people's resentment: "*Ilean sotya kabar zali! Porjechi man khalti podli*". The bitter animosity of the *Padroado* against the *Propaganda Fide* in 1886 and 1887 was the theme of many *manddos*. So also the elections in Curtorim and Calangute. Even the Portuguese governor L. Albuquerque was vehemently denounced in one of the *manddos* as "despiser of law and pagan".

If the *manddo* expresses the romantic side of the Goan, the *Dulpod* that follows typifies the realistic facet. As the haunting melody of the *manddo* moves on, it resolves itself

into this genre which is the direct descendant of the Hindustani music *Durpad*. The movement is agitating, allegretto symbolizing the quick, lively sprightliness of the hardy side of life. The staccato movement quickens in a syncopated rhythm. The *Dulpod* is in the form of a refrain, short, snappy snatches sung animatedly without any continuity of theme. The most popular are "*Kai borelo komblo mugelo*", "*Xo, xo Juana*", "*Modgovam tevyaguer, tevyaguer*" followed by the hackneyed "*Maya, maya-ya*".

Green lights on. Hushed silence in the audience. Tchiii! Tchiii! The anklets tinkle setting pace to the quick rhythm of a *Dakuni*. This term in Sanskrit means "devil of a female". Curtain up, an Indian danseuse voluptuously swings around in countless, significant gestures and gyrations from head to toes, and the audience goes into raptures. One would say she is a temple sculpture come to life. She is followed by other nymphs. Other voices sing *Age Nari*, and the siren voices of these temptresses proclaim themselves in "*Kolvontam Nachtat munnun, / Soglo loku zannam*". Then they ask the boatman to ferry them across for they have to perform at Damu's wedding in Sirigaon, promising to give him anklets, bracelets, bangles and nose-ringlets. A similar interlude with a ferryman is evoked in another *Dakuni* "*Are Tandullea*". In the half-lights of the twilight, the solitary man stands with his boat, casting a forlorn look. Suddenly he is stirred into romantic fancy by the sight of a bevy of beautiful dancers. A sensuous environment envelops the interlude that follows. The girls, attired in their most gorgeous costumes, engage in entreaties with the boatman to take them across. He pretends to be reluctant. At long last he yields! As the boat glides on silvery waters, in the conversation that ensues he proves to be a philanderer without a peer. Another lilting traditional song "*Ami Gonvllim duvaluim/ devon aileaun Ganttavelim*" evokes the natural prosperity of this land Goparashtra (Goa) of the pre-Portuguese days. It was then glorious to be alive. This tract full of pastures new was much sought after by the milk maids from

beyond the Ghats where often drought struck the land. This song is sung alternately by two choruses, one of boys and another of girls. This pastoral poetry in its thematic content is different from bucolism from outside eclogues.

When the missionaries first began their work of evangelization, they made use of the existing Konkani metres, the main being the **Ovi**. A handful of people gathered around a fire or a cross and sang *ovis* which used biblical themes and other religious motifs. "*Poili Santa Kursachi Kuru, Christaon-achi mullu*" is an illustration in point. Though elemental, it contains the Gregorian simplicity of a plainsong. The Hindus too have *ovis* sung while applying the coconut milk to the bride and groom at each one's place, preparing the condiments for wedding dinners etc. The most popular is the one pertaining to the spirit of fertility of 'increase and multiply': "*Ek pani ordulli ghe*". Women's songs sung while grinding on the hand-mill are called **Dantear ovio**. These are like "*Jant Ke Geet*" of Utar Pradesh. As these women grind, they crush their worries and sorrows, by singing with devotion and sentiment. They evoke the Hindu Gods Vishnu, Rama... with pleasure. The best *ovis* are found in Savoi-Verem, Bhom and Zambaulim villages.

An enchanting variety of Goan folk-song is the one known as *Kunbi geet*. With the syncopated rhythm of the tabla and the drum and the clang of the cymbal, the hardy labourers, *Kunbis* burst into a song of joy. It is delightful to hear vibrant songs full of hope, in spite of the hard labour, from the full-throated *Kunbis*, this robust, sturdy and jovial segment of Goans bubbling over with hearty life. It is not rare to find a duet among these untouched songs as for example a boy taunting a girl:

“*Avoi bapui kallo chedvua, / Koxi tuji ghor kat?*”
(Parents dark, lassie, How are you so fair?) Bang comes the retort from the girl: “*Hanv zalolim, dadlea, Chandneache rati*”. (Man, I was born on a moonlit night). The recurrent theme, however, is bitter resentment against the landlords, *bhatkaras* who the *Kunbi* folk think have usurped their lands and are exploiting them. Yet for this virile people work is worship, and their songs savour of the fresh earthiness of the red soil.

These *kunbis* and other labourers as well sing songs during the different stages of cultivation such as *Noddni* (Weeding), *Mollni* (Threshing), *Luvnni* (Harvesting): there is yet another stage, *winnowing*, but this does not seem to have found expression in songs. When the first corn is blessed by the local religious head, Goans have a colourful festival known as *Adav*, wherein groups of boys and girls dance with sticks, like the *Gindad* of East Rajasthan.

In Konkani repertoire Goans do not possess, however, the rich pattern of seasonal songs as sung in the rest of India. But there are abundant Konkani songs pertaining to rain. Even on the 24th. June there is a water-festival, when the folks burst out in joy over the abundance of rain and jump into wells going from house to house. This festival of *San Juaon* is also celebrated with *Sangodd* or a folk-drama enacted on the stage fixed on to boats, the most famous being that of *Baga*, near Calangute. There are typical songs on the occasion. The Goan fishermen too have their own folk-songs. Other occupational songs are *Mita-geet* of salt-pan singers, *Ghanno*

(grinding) at the mill, and many others. The workers have another type of song sung at random at siesta or at recreation time, accompanied with *gumott* and *kansallim*. It is known as **Tandni**. Etymologically the word derives from *tan* thirst, inasmuch as it provides relief from their hard work, like the comic element in Shakespearean tragedies. Such songs spring from the crude soil, having the aroma and freshness of the good earth. The toddy-tapper's songs, **Rendrachim geetam** are equally full of native verve.

The most favourite Konkani folk-songs of Goan Hindus are **Dhalos** and **Fugddis**. The *Dhalos* are sung in the Hindu month of *Paush* corresponding to February more or less. Although men are also invited to participate, the singing is usually a women's affair. They have a common meeting place in the village called *mandd* where they meet for 5, 7, or 9 continuous nights. The place becomes sanctified with these performances. Groups of 10 to 20 women dance in rows going to and fro and then in circles, exactly like the *manddos* of the Christians. The *Dhalos* are sung throughout the night till the dawn. It is the last night that is most interesting when many of these women, in the height of fervour and excitement fall down in a trance. Then the others sing that the spirit of a goddess has entered those entranced women: "Tancher Rambha aili". As dawn approaches, the eldest in the village is requested to plead for their common welfare. The symbolic coconut is broken and distributed along with other home-made sweets to those present. The most pleasing of *Dhalos* is "*Dive Konkannant*". Though the *Dhalos* and *Fugddis* are similar in character, yet the Konkani expressions used for both are different. Goans say *Dhalo khellunk* (to play) and *Fugddio ghalunk* (to put).

Every Sunday in the month of Shraavan, corresponding to August in many Hindu houses there is the propitiating ceremony called *Puja*. On such occasions it is almost obligatory for married ladies to sing. In their songs they vow to remain pure, *vrot korunk*. It is these *fugddis* that kept alive to date the ballads of romance and heroism embedded

in the great epics Mahabharata and Ramayana. The most popular *fugddis* are "*Vittuhea ballpanchi Sangatin*" in which it is revealed that God Vithoba's inseparable companion in childhood was Jeni, and "*Sat Samudram bhair ghe*".

The rainy season over, the folk take out in a procession an image of Lord Krishna, going from house to house, reciting the **Dhenlo** in which they rejoice over the end of the rains. Before the outbreak of the monsoon also if the rains are long a-coming, they go in procession praying for rain.

There is yet another folk-song called **Lavnni**, the only Konkani song in Goa which owes its direct descent to the Marathi song of the same name, though the Goan version has its subtle peculiarities. Marathi and Sanskrit devotionals are heard in the Hindu temples, but the real temple songs are in Konkani, being known as **Penne**. So also at the close of every ceremony there is a community request sung in Konkani—**Gharannem**. It corresponds more or less to "Amen".

As in other parts of India, there are typical Konkani songs sung during *Zagor* which is not exactly a farce, but a play on a lower level. The word derives from *Zag*=awake. And so the staging of *Zagor* occupies most of the night. Likewise some people go about singing during *Xigmo*, a Konkani version of *Holi* of the other states of India. It is the *Carnival* of the Hindus in which the other communities also participate. During *Xigmo* in Goa, groups of people move about with a symbolic staff from house to house. This singing fetches them some money. A popular **shigmo geet** is "*Oxi avoi—bapaichea monant, / Choli diunchi Konnanak*".

The same happens with the Christians who celebrate the Western Carnival in Goa for three rapturous days. Konkani songs are composed for the occasion in abundance. These **Intruzachim Kantaram** are embedded in the strolling folk-operettas called *Khell* but the theme of *Intruz*=carnival finds equal expression in many a song.

The histrionic talent of the Goan is well known and it is brought to bear on the stage and radio performances with

a great measure of success. On the stage it is the Hindu community which set high standards in dramatic writing and production and in individual acting as well, whereas the Christian stage songs like the plays themselves leave much to be desired. The fault lies with Christian Goans themselves who in the past, have taken to Portuguese and English drama. It is only in the treatment of a theme on a lower level, like the play "Kuubi Jaki", that they have come off with splendid success. Yet some of the **Konkani operas** like "Seventh Nose", "Farar Far" and "Rajkumvorichi Soirik" by Prof. Lucio Rodrigues and produced by a gigantic cast of the "Bombay Madrigal Singers", which included Parsees, Hindus and Anglo-Indians, have been of a very high standard. A tremendous fillip to dramatic writing has been given by All India Radio. In the vast repertoire of Konkani lyrical drama created through this mass medium, there are operas some of which are the best among Indian operas, like "Sanjeevani" by the celebrated poet B. B. Borkar, with music by Jitendra Abhisheki. Konkani songs have been broadcast by many **radio stations in the world**, apart from All India Radio stations, such as UNESCO, B. B. C., West Germany, Lisbon, Ceylon, Kenya, Uganda, Tanganyika, Mozambique etc. In **filmland** a recent release was the film in Konkani, *Amchem Noxib* which projected many a notable song. One of them "*Mollbavoi-lo Dov*" denotes a high lyrical quality. Besides a few Konkani films, Goan musicians employed in the Indian screen, have enriched Indian music by introducing Konkani tunes. Others, true to type, are embedded in the Indian films, chiefly in "Jall", "Baazi" and "Faraar". The latter has even Konkani songs. Frank Fernand, Chic Chocolate, Jitendra Abhisheki and others have done a good deal in this field, especially in Bombay and Calcutta films and hotels.

It is not only in the domain of the profane that the Goan has made a mark. The religious zeal burning within with consecrated fervour has expressed itself in many hymns, psalms, chants and other devotional music. Even slanting references have crept in the profane songs, such as "*Dogi-Teg*

Beatinnim". The singer does not mind having a dig at the priest: "*Padrilea uxea ponda bokul gottela*" (There is a cat under the priest's pillow). Though a few pre-Portuguese tunes survive in their primitive style, the oldest that is popular is the 17th. century hymn "*St. Francisco Xaviera*" which in its sonorous rendering is very impressive, carrying with it all the faded glory and gloom of 'Golden Goa'. The poet sets the right note of renunciation with these words: "*Sindrecho Kelo Lobu*" (You made soutane out of a mat). If the devotional songs such as "*Diptivont Saibinnim*", "*Ha Dixtti Sobit*" etc. arranged by the Pillar Seminary are deeply rooted in the soil, beautiful Gregorian chants by the Rachol Seminary Choir and the religious songs by Rev. Baptista Viegas show a marked influence of Western polyphonic music. The Italian impact on another Goan composer Micael Martins is so profound that even his *manddos* can be sung in churches! Some of the Konkani religious operettas like the "Passion of Christ" by Saligão-Pilerne Seminary, are also in the same class. Many Goan composers have not only produced original Konkani music, but also suitably adapted Motets and Christmas Carols.

This floating mass of teeming myths, legends, ballads, folk-songs etc. call for a concerted effort to preserve the Goan ethos lest the Goans should turn cultural gypsies, not only denationalized but also deregionalized. In particular Konkani folk-songs are fraught with tremendous potentialities lending themselves easily to choreography and ballet representation. Konkani music of Goans has much to contribute to India, just as that of the Negroes in America have done by way of Progressive Jazz and Spirituals. The poetry of earth may not be dead. Yet, if Goans do not cultivate their folk-songs, these may meet with the same fate as the sea-shanties in Europe or find a place only as successful numbers in some choirs, or even as a subject for sociological research only.

The whole edifice of Goan songs rises from the fabric of their folk pattern, being a veritable documentary of their life, a documentary that reflects the strangeness and restlessness of Goa, this land of strange beauties and restless contrasts.