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## Political life of 19th century Goa as reflected in its folksongs

—Pratima Kamat

"Folklore is the literature of the people",<sup>1</sup> albeit oral. It is "material about the hopes and yearnings of the people."<sup>2</sup> One of its most important constituents is the folksongs which serves as a documentary on the life and sentiments of the people of a land. "Here the past has something to say to the present and bookless world, to a world that likes to read about itself, concerning our basic oral and democratic culture as the root of arts and a sidelight on history."<sup>3</sup> It is not an exaggeration to say that one cannot intimately know and understand the lifestyle of the people without making a study of their folksongs. The folksong is a repertoire of information on the social organisation, customs, mores and taboos, religion and the quotidian life of the people, the flora and the fauna of the land, and the political events of the times. The Goan folksongs is no exception to this rule.

The Goans are well known for their musical tradition, which is as rich as it is lively. The Goan has often been represented as a man with a violin or a guitar in his hand and a serenade on his lips. The entire human scene, from the womb to the tomb, is captured in all its vivacity and languish, joy and sorrow, in the Goan folksong. This songfest includes pregnancy songs (*duvallo*), cradle songs (*palnnam*), children's songs, love songs (*mandde*), matrimonial songs (*pittam zoti*), mythological songs (*godde*), socio-religious songs (*dhalo*, *fugddeo*, *ovi*) and dirges (*banvarh*).<sup>4</sup> Besides the sacred or religious songs, the Goans also sing secular or profane songs which are kaleidoscopic, unfolding before our mind's eye the entire pageant of folk life, social, economic and political, with all its ups and downs.

The chief Christian profane folk songs are the *manddo*, *dulpad* and the *dekhni*. Each of these songs expresses one or more aspect of life and has a beauty of its own. The *manddo*, is essentially a love song. It is, in the words of Prof. Lucio

Rodrigues, "music plucked from the heart strings."<sup>5</sup> If the *manddo* is a biography of a Goan's heart, its tail, the animated *dulpad*, "the song of joy,"<sup>6</sup> is the tale of his life in all its prismatic aspects, and the *dekhni*, the presentation of the Hindu way of life as seen through the Christian eyes. The *dekhni* is a symbol of a poetry, dreamily evoking a distant past, while entangled in a wild fantasy of the odd and the sensual.<sup>7</sup> Although the *manddo* is essentially, a song or *utrike*, or yearning of the lovers for union, *ekvott*, or the union itself, and *villap* or the lament for lost love or happiness, it also serves as a narrative of local events i.e *fobro*.<sup>8</sup> (khobro).

The etymology of these words, *manddo*, *dulpad* and *dekhni* is shrouded in the obscurity of folk tradition. The widely accepted etymological root for *manddo* is the Konkani verb, *mandunk* i.e to arrange, since its dancers are arranged in rows.<sup>9</sup> *Manddo* which is the traditional Goan village performing square, is also identified as the root of *manddo*.<sup>10</sup> A sanskrit root is *madhyalayapada*, meaning songs of slow movements.<sup>11</sup> *Mando* means an order, or a command in the Portuguese language and since the *manddo* was made-to-order for social occasions, this has been considered as a source-word.<sup>12</sup> *Manddo* is also considered to be of African extraction.<sup>13</sup> The word *dulpod* is a corruption of *dhrupad*, meaning a lively, racy song.<sup>14</sup> Since the *dulpad* is sung to the beat of the *gumot* (a local type of drum), the *dhol* (drum) and *pod* (song) are considered to be the two components of this term.<sup>15</sup> *Dekhni*, literally means a beauty worth looking at and, hence, the folksong on *kalvants* (temple dancing girls) is called *dekhni*. *Dakhani*, i.e pertaining to the Deccan, and *Jakhinni*, (a type of Bharat Natyam song and dance sequence)<sup>16</sup> are two other etymological possibilities for this term. *Zakhinn*, meaning a sorceress could be according to me another source-word since the *dekhni* refers to the bewitching grace and beauty of the *kalvant* who were often labelled as *zakhinns* for the spell which they cast on the menfolk.

These folksongs both Hindu and Christian, enshrine exciting moments of history which stirred the imagination of the common man. According to Mr Agapito de Miranda, a collector and composer of Goan folksongs, the political folksongs almost touch

the three hundred mark. What I am presenting here today, is just a few nuggets from this rich mine in an attempt to substantiate my viewpoint that the Goan folksong is, indeed a chronicle of political events and sentiments of the times.

The period selected is the 19th century, the period of constitutional monarchy, of elections and revolts. The second decade of the 19th century witnessed the stormy introduction of constitutional monarchy in Portugal and its empire. This period which continued till the proclamation of the Portuguese republic in 1910, saw in Goa, the introduction of election, modernisation in the field of transport and communication, the frenzied demolition of churches and monasteries, the recurrent outburst of the Rane revolts and the military mutinies, and the ever-present threat of British occupation.

The blessing of the introduction of elections was blighted by the continuous attempts on the part of the governments to browbeat the electorate into voting for the government backed candidate. This resulted in clashes in which blood was frequently spilled, more often than not, of innocent people. The year 1890 was a year the government backed candidate was, unfairly, declared elected and on 21 September, in a re-election drama, 23 people were shot dead in the church square by troops sent by the Governor, Vasco Guedes.<sup>17</sup> There have been at least four *manddes*, composed on these incidents-- *Abrilache Satra veri*; *Partidcho chefe mukar sorlo*; *Setembrache ekvisaveri Kamaranchem foddlem deru* and *Setembrache ekvisaveri/Dukh vignam aileam re Saxttiri*. "*Corneti vazun soldad re aile*", "*Povac marle faru*," "*Rogtanche zalle vallo*" "*Niti nam re Goeantum/Justis nam re Saxttintum*, *Inocentichea ragtanum/Vasco Guedin kelam eleisanvum*" are some of the very relevant lines of these compositions.

On the 20 November 1854, on the occasion of the municipal elections of Divar, Captain Joaquim Garces who had been sent there to rig the elections in favour of the government candidate, was beaten to death.<sup>18</sup> This political incident has been camouflaged in a tragic song, *Luizinha, mujea, Luizinha*. *Luizinha* implores the villagers to give her information on the whereabouts

of her husband who had left for Divar. The people's sympathy with the bereaved lady as symbolised by the line "roddun naka" repeated as it is several times in the song, has distinct touches of Mark Anthony's famous line in *Julius Caesar*: "for Brutus is an honourable man". It is obvious that the tears which they shed are crocodile tears because throughout the song they seem to have great satisfaction in informing the widow of the gory manner in which her husband had been done to death, ("fodle polle", *Kelim haddan*", "Keleai vantte").

*Kosli Bernard podvi tuji* and *Ponjethan saxticu vecheacu Panch horanchi vattu* are two other elections *manddes*. In the latter, the Government policy of ensuring a victory of their own candidates by the use of military force is explicit: "*Bountat soldadanchim rondam! Barbosak deputad Corcheaco.*"<sup>19</sup> *Undir majea mama*, a seeming 'fable' song, is a story of the victory, the rat. It is a dig at the Moddganvkars (who have been traditionally nicknamed the rats) for their ever frenzied election activities. Thus, the election, which raised the hopes of the Goans of having a say in the Government but dashed them very soon when the government used this medium to continue with its hold over the people, is the subject-matter of a dozen-odd *mandde*.

The inaugural year of the government of Caetano Alexandre Albuquerque witnessed the signing of a treaty between the Portuguese of Goa and the British, on 26 December 1878. This treaty defined the relations between the two countries on economic issues, such as customs currency and construction of railway tracks.<sup>20</sup> As a result of this treaty the means of transportation, linking Goa with British India, underwent considerable improvement and extension. But this was regarded as an attempt on the part of the British to extend their hold over Goa, not politically, as they had long since desired, but economically, by converting Goa into a dependency of theirs. This treaty resulted in the outflow of salt and other commodities from Goa into the British territories of India through the cancellation of the customs duties and the easy availability of transport in the form of railways. The railways were, thus, not unjustly, looked upon by the people of Goa as the arteries of British exploitation. *Tratad feringuean kelo/Ingles Goiant ailo; Soglea sounsarak khoborjsegredan kelem*

*mun, contratero and chintuleari caliz fafsota* express this feeling very lucidly in the following lines. “*Te aileai goinkarank khauchaco*” (they have come to eat the Goans) and “*Povak marlo chepunum*” (they have trampled the Goans to death). *Chintlem nam re konnem* discusses three separate events of the 19th century — the extinction of the army in 1871; the Anglo-Portuguese treaty of 1878 and the demolition of the churches and convents of Old Goa in the second and the third quarters of the 19th century. It is interesting to note that the reference to the framing of the Anglo-Portuguese treaty has been placed alongside mention of the destruction of the ecclesiastical buildings in the same *manddo*. Perhaps the song writer wanted to draw a parallel between these two incidents. The common factor binding these two is the element of destruction — in the first case, it is the razing of the long-standing vestiges of Christianity and in the second case, it is the destruction of the economy as implied by the treaty. By clubbing the treaty and the extinction of the army in one place, the writer is surely speaking of the uncaring attitude of the Portuguese rulers towards their subjects as shown by the extinction of the army and by the promotion of the seeming extinction of the economy.

The loss of revenue resulting from this treaty led to the reform of the tax system on 1 September 1881. This revision introduced increases in several levies, amongst them, the excise on toddy tapping and the linked activity of distillation of liquor. This move, but naturally, invited protests from the people, especially the toddy tappers, several of whom boycotted the payment of the raised levy. Such a defiance earned for them imprisonment. These happenings formed a background of a song which describes the pleadings to the Governor, by a woman, for the release of her husband who had been imprisoned, for refusing to pay the new excise duty. Thus, the treaty of 1878 is denounced vehemently by folk of Goa in their songs as an attempt on the part of both the European powers, the British and the Portuguese to fleece them, the former, by draining the commodities from Goa and the latter, by increasing the taxes so as to compensate for the loss of revenue incurred by the Government on account of the British drain.

The Rane revolts constitute a colourful chapter in the history of

Goa. From 1755 to 1822, the Ranés clashed with the Portuguese on 14 occasions. The post-1822 period witnessed, amongst others, the revolt of Dipaji Rane in 1852, the Custoba's revolt of 1869, the Dada Rane's revolt of 1895, and that of Morio and Jil Sawant in 1912. The suppression of the last named uprising brought down the curtain on the bellicose activities of the Ranés. *Farar far*, concisely and precisely, dramatises the saga of the Portuguese-Rané conflict. "It is a miracle of brevity and it sums up, once and for all, the spirit of revolt against foreign domination that lies at the heart of the Goan people".<sup>21</sup> This 'epic' lyric, "which rings with heroism" is an obvious indicator of the direction in which the public admiration lay. The Nanuz fort, on more than one occasion, served as the scene of this political tug-of-war between the Ranés and the Portuguese. Their exchange of shots has been vividly captured in the *Dulpad Nanuz Kotantum*.

Custoba, framed for murder by a *bhatt* (priest) who had dishonoured a widow of his family, was sentenced to forced labour at the arsenal. He soon broke his fetters and escaped from prison to take to the road of vengeful pillage, determined to repay to the Portuguese Government the full price of their cruel injustice. This Goan Robin Hood, is the protagonist of several folksongs which either praise him as a hero or fear him as a dacoit. The *dekhni*, *kustoba Mirasi Indiecho*, eulogises this historical figure in glowing terms such as the "heir to India" ("*Mirasi Indiecho*"), terror of Goa ("*terroru Goincho*"), "spirit of resistance of the people" ("*Conflit povacho*"). *Mia re Custoba* spews the anger of Custoba against the *bhatt* and the Portuguese justice. "*Goencheo re niti/zaito vancddeo/Bhattachebudin/Juizachea sentensan/ Paianc ghaleo sanklleo*". The song *Dariant marun uddi*, *Kushtoba gelo re paltaddi* serves as a testimony of his valour and at the same time, speaks of his pillaging activities, although with a certain element of doubt; "*Konn sangata saiba/ Kushtoba eata mhunn chorunk/ Kushtoba chorunk eata, chorunk eata,/muzg vazounu*". In the early hours of the 14 September 1895, the Maratha sepoy mutiny broke out in the Panjim police headquarters (*quartel*). Several hundred Maratha sepoy's deserted en masse and entrenched themselves at the fort of Nanuz where they were soon joined by the Ranés and the two proceeded to stomp the path of a violent revolt. *Eka Setembrache rati/ Ponjent zali re bobatti, Setembrache Choudave rati and soglea sonvsarant khobor/pakleam geuni etai*

*mhunn vapor* narrate the outbreak and the progress of the mutiny (“*Sogle sepay ekttain zaunum, Bardezant guele marchar zaunum*” the alliance of the mutineers under the leadership of Dada Rane Advaikar (“*Soldad Rannem ekttaim zaunum...*” “*Dada Ranneank Mandun guelo chefu*” the inability of the Governor-General, Viscount of Villa Nova d’Ourem to crush the revolt (“*Bogum, bogum tea baddeache/Visconde de Ourem governadoranchem*” and the arrival of Prince Dom Afonso Henriques from Portugal (“*apoun addlo dom Afonsaku*”). The swan song of the Rane uprising was sung in 1912 when Jil and Morio Sawant, unfurled the banner of revolt against the Portuguese. They were actively supported by a Christian toddy tapper, Kistulo, whose killing by the Portuguese soldier serves as a subject matter for yet another folksong on the Ranes.

The fear which the plundering activities of the Bhonsales evoked in the hearts of the people of Goa, is aptly summed up in the following lines. “*Bhonsulo chorunc etai/Corneti funcunum/Avaz ho aicunum guele gharan sandun, thodde dhaun guele rananum/thodde padle tea tankianim/ganttar gantto marunc lagle sogleam Igarzanim.*” A variant of the song has Custoba, instead of the Bhonsale, in the role of the plunderer.

There are quite a few *mandde* on the political personalities of the day. It is *Catao, Aristides ani Brutus*. Constancio Roque de Costa, a leading lawyer of Margão and one of the first three deputies of Goa, sent to the Portuguese parliament who, features prominently. *Quitulo boro Loyola amcho* is a tribute to José Inacio Loyola, for his selfless service to the people. In *Aij Sontos re Indieko*, it is a Portuguese Governor-General Mariano Martins, who is praised thus: “*Governador Zaun Goencho, simpati doverli povako.*”

*Bardezant justis osli* is a critique on the “non-justice” of the judges of Bardez who are termed as *Juiz, Judev, jangli*”. In *Sogle Prebetico khobor*, the government is criticized for constructing a municipality building on which half of the treasury has been emptied (“*Ardo quelo tisouri cabar*”). *Emphenhu doutoranchi* is also written in a similar vein beseeching the authorities not to spend the money of the *Confraria* but to bear the expenses out of their own pockets, “*dieai tumglea zoddiche.*”

The establishment of the Republic on October 1910, was a joyous occasion which raised the aspirations of the Goans for a better, more autonomous future. These high hopes are voiced in the song: *Sontos bogta re jivaklaikun novidade aichea disak* especially in the line "*expulsaru korunum aplea patxeakoliberdade dili re povaku.*" *Rajak zalem mhunnum Republic* also speaks about the same event.

The First World War does not escape the attention of the people. *Modganv zata musta kabar barabori eun pesta ani guerr* is a lament on the tragic effects of these calamities. The line, *hospicio tum ecttain core ozaru*, is full of pathos.

The *mandde* by themselves are devoid of most of the attributes of a folksong. This is evidenced, amongst the things, by the over-generous sprinkling of Portuguese word and also by their sound knowledge of the political happenings in the Goan and Lisbon scenarios.

The Hindu folksongs of Goa are replete with religious and mythological themes, although a *powada* (ballad) here and a *lalit* (a Konkani song used as an interpolation to provide comic relief during Marathi plays) there, does speak of a revolt, a victory or a warrior hero. There are quite a few of these songs which display the 'distance charm' of ancient India and the Maratha heroes. *Nahire Devala Daia* is one such idyll narrating the exploits of Shivaji as a boy, "as small as a locust."<sup>22</sup> The dramatis personae of the *powada Manila Namann Surati* include Shivaji, Appaji Sahab, Rahmankhan Patshah, and the gods of Tuljapur. Maratha forts like Pratapgarh, and cities like Satara have also found a mention in this *powada*.<sup>23</sup> *Telang Deshamedhan re/Bir Gauda dhangar* is yet another ballad, popular amongst the shepherds of Goa's northern borders. It sings of the valiant victory of their ancestor, Bir Gaude over the King of Malwa, King Bhoja.<sup>24</sup> The *Musall* of the Christians of Chandor is yet another example of a past historical event which has been immortalised by folk tradition. With its martial dress, its resounding beats, and its songs like, *Amche musall kelia gabe, khell kheyttann Hariharache ho and Ho simha! Ho veera! vas re ghara sathsheen gana Hariharache*, the war dance celebrates the victory of Harihar I

over the Chola King.

Coming to the Goan situation, there are folksongs available on the exploits of the Ranes, the Bhonsales, the Sondekars and the Desais of Surla. Songs on the latter two are sung by the people of Canacona and other Southern places. *Reddi kotak padlo re veddo! Bhonsuleacho lok re thoddo*— this couplet refers to the Portuguese attack on the Reddi fort of the Bhonsles in November 1746. Gondaji Naik, a *shahir* of yore, has in his ballad *Satrojiche Rajya mothe bhari* spoken, in glowing terms, about Dipaji Rane, the loyalty he commanded, and at the same time mourns the Portuguese sway over such a hero: "*Pari aslya Rannyavayri Parki rajya kari yhya jhulame ho Sattari rade dinaratri.*"<sup>25</sup> *Parakrami bhori bharizale Ranne Sankalle nagari* is yet another folksong glorifying the Ranes of Satari.<sup>26</sup>

*Sath Satter Gavamadhen, kon veer balli?* describes how with just 360 muskets Dipu Rane, "the man of might and prowess in the sixty-seventy villages," put the Portuguese soldiers to flight.<sup>27</sup>

Thus, it is apparent that the Hindu folksongs though basically socio-religious in nature, do contain a sprinkling of political elements, though not as liberal a sprinkling as is to be found in their Christian counterparts. The Hindus seem to have been under the spell of the 'ancient past' charm and the 'distance charm' of the Maratha heroes, across the border. But whenever the local Hindu chieftains unfurled the banner of revolt against the Portuguese, the event did not fail to be balladized into a song.

Denied a political forum, the common man resorted to the folksong as a medium to give vent to his discontentment, frustrations and fear. The Kunbi song usually sizzles with the anger of the discontented Kunbi people. Their hard work and their exploitation by the *bhatcars* (landlords), which is the fount of their frustrations and unhappiness, is hauntingly portrayed in the song, *Kunbi saiba amilxettan vavuruppi.*<sup>28</sup>

There are quite a few songs which are tirades against the libidinous activities of the landlord's son and the white soldiers. Protected by his father's position, the *bhatcar's* young son takes liberties with the *mundcar's* (tenant's) daughter. The white soldier

(*pacló*) also finds himself on the receiving end of heavy censure by the common folk. In the songs, *Modgavam Toiyager* and *Santanichea dongrar*, the Portuguese soldier is clearly depicted as a womaniser on a table, and in the latter makes a play for the women who pass by the hill (“*etea vatea bailank dolle modditai*”). *Ede ratiche pakle bountail/Khaddache* is a warning to the young girls not to walk about alone at night for fear of the *pakles*. *Moti moti solle mukharu te baylek kadunchyak bairu* is yet another verdict delivered on the moral digressions of the Europeans. This time it is a judge who receives the brunt of the attack — for he was living with a Goan lady who had run away from home to be with him. The landlord’s son and the Portuguese soldier are thus, *personae* very much *non grata*. These two, protected by the regime, indulge in their lustful ways, at will. The people are powerless against them. All that they can do is to level criticism against them and issue warning about their nefarious activities. The government, it seemed sheltered the sinners rather than those who were sinned against. The fact that the people disturbed their rulers is aptly summed up in the following proverb, *Sorop mhunncho nhaye dhaklofirangi mhunncho nhaye aaplo*. (Never call a snake small, never call a Portuguese your own). The folksongs are thus vivid pen pictures of the discontent of the Kunbis and other villagers with the rulers’ inability to protect them against the economic and sexual harassment to which they are subjected at the hands of the landlords and the white soldier.

*Aum saiba paltodi voitam*, the most popular of the Goan folksongs, appears to be deeply symbolic. The desperation to cross the river, to get to the other side, the Hindu side, symbolizes the latent desire of the Christian to return to his roots. Centuries of Portuguese rule have de-Hinduised the Christians to such an extent that they do not know how to return to the Hindu fold: “*maka saiba vattu dakoi/maka saiba vattu kollonam*”. This *dekhni*, in which the protagonist wants to cross the river to attend a Hindu wedding, could also be a reference to those times when Hindu ceremonies were prohibited in the Portuguese territories of Goa, forcing the Hindus to cross the river to perform them. Again, the *dekhnis*, *Yamuna paltaddi Amche ghor nadi kadde*, *Altaddi Ganga*, *paltaddi Yamuna* and *Jamuna porobaju* are studded with nostalgic reference to the Hindu holy places in North

India. They speak of owning a house on the banks of the Yamuna, at one place, and at another, it is the sun at Gokul which is mentioned. Could this yearning for the Hindu way of life be a direct outcome of dissatisfaction with and resentment towards the alien rule? The desire to live in North India, the association of the sun with Gokul seems to suggest that the desire to cross the river is not just religious, in significance (i.e, going back to Hinduism), but something more — it is the wish to go from the Portuguese control, back to India, back to its place in the Indian sun. There are quite a few of such references to India in the Christian folksongs. Custoba is not the heir to Goa, but to India, the election of Mariano Martins is not a happy occasion to the Goan, to whose welfare he was inclined towards as Goa's Governor-General, but to India. The reference to India is not to a neighbouring country but to one's own Goa. The concept of India as one's own motherland seems to have been very much inherent in the Goan spirit, as can be gauged in the folksongs.

Thus, the Goan folksong is a chronicle not only of political events, but also of the sentiments of the ruled.

In the words of John Henry Newsman, "we have a vast inheritance but no inventory of our treasures. All is given to us in profusion; it remains for us to catalogue, sort, distribute, select, harmonise, and complete,"<sup>26</sup>

In this paper, I have taken but a small first step in this direction. The work of examining the political content of Goan folksongs must go on !!

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